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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: Ideal length between 1000 and 1200 words.

KEY ISSUE: A short 100-word statement of your conclusions about the issue or news event on which the article focuses.

BACKGROUND: 300-400 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: 300-400 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. 700-800 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: scornell@jhu.edu and suggest some topics on which you would like to write.

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WARLORDS STAY ON IN AFGHANISTAN

Rahimullah Yusufzai

The euphoria generated by President Hamid Karzai's decision to keep a few warlords out of his new cabinet was short-lived. Within days, two of those warlords were back in power, this time in rather more powerful positions as governors of important provinces. It was a timely reminder that the Afghan government, and more importantly the U.S.-led military coalition, was still unwilling and unable to take decisive steps to curtail the abusive authority of some of the warlords. As a result, Afghanistan's efforts to deal with past crimes and misdeeds and move on in the building of the new state suffer.

BACKGROUND: Afghanistan's warlords prospered when the Taliban lost power and were rewarded with positions of authority in the interim government led by President Hamid Karzai. President Karzai has since been trying to gradually sideline the warlords, but this has proved difficult in view of the U.S. compulsion to keep them on its side in the unfinished battle against al-Qaeda and the Taliban. After his landslide victory in the presidential election last October, Mr. Karzai had promised to take only professionally sound and competent people in his cabinet. There was going to be no place for warlords in the new government. He earned applause both from his foreign supporters and much of the Afghan population when he dropped two prominent warlords, Gul Agha Sherzoi and Sayed Hussain Anwari, from his cabinet. The Western media hailed this as a great step forward to cut the warlords down to size. Commentators largely ignored the fact that some warlords including Ismail Khan, former Governor of Herat, and ex-Governor of Nimruz province, Karim Khan Brahwi, were inducted in the cabinet even though they were neither professionals nor fit for their new jobs. Ismail Khan, who had been removed as Governor of his native Herat earlier to weaken his power, was made minister of energy, a portfolio very different from his life-long experience as a former soldier and mujahideen commander. Brahwi, on the other hand, was given the job of minister of tribes and frontiers. As an ethnic Baloch, his was

entrusted with a task that was traditionally handled by someone from the majority Pashtun community.

Pashtun warlord Sherzoi was dropped from the cabinet not because he was deemed unacceptable as minister, but because he lacked the university degree required under Afghanistan's new constitution for the job. The same principle led to the removal of former Agriculture Minister and ethnic Hazara Shia warlord Anwari. As compensation, Sherzoi was reappointed Governor of his native Kandahar. Anwari was given charge of the gubernatorial office of his home province of Kabul. In fact, both appointments also violated the principle mostly followed by President Karzai during his three-year rule not to appoint natives as governors of their home provinces.

Sherzoi had served as Governor of Kandahar for almost two years before his removal and appointment as Minister of Public Works in Karzai's interim cabinet. His removal was hailed as a step in the right direction because of his reputation as a ruthless warlord who placed his own supporters in powerful positions and allowed them to indulge in corruption and human rights abuses. His successor Mohammad Yousaf Pashtun, who wasn't really a man of the masses, was generally seen as unfit for the demanding job of Governor in the former Taliban stronghold of Kandahar. Now the two men have simply switched places.

Kabul's new Governor Anwari never really ceased to be a warlord. He was a known mujahideen commander in the war against the Soviet occupation troops and operated in areas west of Kabul. Later, he enjoyed power in the disastrous mujahideen government in which in-fighting among warlords destroyed much of Kabul. Anwari was part of the Northern Alliance that joined hands with the U.S.-led coalition to topple the Taliban regime. His reward was a place in the transitional government even though he, like most other warlord ministers, lacked administrative experience and technical expertise to run a ministry. As an important Shi'a warlord, he had to be accommodated in the government after becoming disqualified for the cabinet slot due to the constitutional requirement. The Governor's job in Kabul was just right for him, or so the Karzai government thought, because ethnic Hazara Shiites constitute a productive and sizeable portion of the population in Kabul and its surroundings.

IMPLICATIONS: Most of the governors in Afghanistan's 34 provinces are former warlords. The number of non-warlords who have been appointed governors has definitely increased but they too are largely dependent in their provinces on police and security chiefs who happen to be former commanders/warlords. Important provinces in the south, east, west and north of Afghanistan are still run by warlords. These include Ustad Atta Mohammad in Balkh, Juma Khan Hamdard in Baghlan, Haji Din Mohammad in Nangarhar, Bashir Baghlani in Farah, Dr. Ibrahim in Ghor, Asadullah Ghalib in Ghazni, Jan Mohammad Khan in Urozgan, Sher Mohammad Akhundzada in Helmand. Ironically, three warlords formerly part of mujahideen leader Gulbaddin Hekmatyar's Hezb-i-Islami were lured to join the Karzai government by gubernatorial appointments. These include Hamdard and Baghlani and the Governor of Kunduz province, Munshi Abdul Majeed. Hekmatyar, it may be added, has been dubbed a "terrorist" by the U.S. and is on its most wanted list.

The failure of President Karzai, and by implication that of the U.S. government, to weed out the warlords and remove them from positions of authority, has sent the wrong message to all those who have always thrived on

the power of the gun. The warlords, and their lesser subordinates, have come to believe that they are indispensable. They know their support is crucial in America's war on terror. In fact, it is a quid pro quo with the U.S. not only tolerating but also strengthening the warlords in return for their support to destroy the remnants of al-Qaeda and the Taliban.

The term warlord and their role in post-Taliban Afghanistan has also generated a heated debate between President Karzai's supporters and some of his opponents such as Uzbek warlord and defeated presidential candidate General Abdul Rasheed Dostum. Mamoor Hasan, a leader of Dostum's Uzbek-based Junbush-i-Islami Afghanistan party, spoke for much of non-Pashtun ethnic minorities recently when he said that those who fought the Soviet occupation forces, al-Qaeda and Taliban were being blamed as warlords. He was critical of President Karzai for announcing amnesty for Taliban and termed it a betrayal of the Afghan people. In fact, the same views have been expressed by many other former mujahideen commanders/warlords, particularly non-Pashtuns, who believe President Karzai being a Pashtun was wooing the Pashtun Taliban to build up his support and reduce dependence on Tajiks, Uzbeks, Hazaras, Turkmen and others who initially backed his fragile government. The former mujahideen warlords, who were mostly affiliated with fundamentalist Islamic groups during the Afghan jihad, are also worried over the growing influence of the pro-West liberals, royalists and secularists in the Karzai government at the expense of the Islamists. Thus the tussle over the definition and role of the warlords is a divisive issue threatening the uneasy and unnatural alliance between these two camps.

CONCLUSIONS: Twenty-seven years of war and instability has nurtured warlords into a familiar political entity in war-ravaged Afghanistan. They are feared and hated by most Afghans but others hail them as saviors who resisted the Soviet occupation and offered sacrifices for the glory of Islam and Afghanistan. Curtailing their power was never going to be easy, more so in a situation when the U.S. needed their services to fight the resilient al-Qaeda and Taliban. Therefore, a selective approach was adopted

while dealing with warlords. Ismail Khan, being pro-Iran and non-cooperative with the Karzai government, had to go. Moves were also made to dilute Dostum's power due to his opposition to Karzai, his strong links with Russia, and his ruthless and unsavory past. But the more useful, pro-U.S. warlords were not touched. Cosmetic changes apart, the recent appointments have decreased hopes of a decisive move to reduce the power of the warlords or make them accountable for their past misdeeds.

Most warlords are likely to remain relevant in one way or the other as long as the U.S.-led foreign forces stay in Afghanistan and the Taliban resistance is not crushed. The forthcoming parliamentary elections could even institutionalize the power of the warlords

and their armed factions and give them a strong representation in the elected bodies. In due course of time we might see the usage of terms like good and bad warlords, just like good (moderate) or bad (extremist) Taliban. There is also the possibility of growing polarization between the former mujahideen warlords grouped under the banner of Northern Alliance and the pro-West politicians led by President Karzai.

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ADDRESSING CENTRAL ASIA'S WATER PROBLEM

Iskandar Abdullaev

The limited water resources of Central Asia are under extreme pressure marked not only by growing intersectoral and interstate competition but also by severe damage to aquatic ecosystems. Increased shortages and competition for water places forms high pressure on agriculture, and despite national and international efforts, water resource management in the Syr Darya basin remains complicated. However, recent efforts have identified and selected innovative local land and water conservation methods practiced by individual farmers and agricultural enterprises. These cost-effective and simple techniques were local innovations, adapted by farmers and water managers for better agricultural performance. Farmers have developed exemplary practices that could provide models for water use throughout the basin.

BACKGROUND: It is believed that by 2025, 70 percent of the world's population will live in areas with physical or economic water scarcity. Nowhere is this more evident than in Central Asia, specifically in the Syr Darya River basin. The tremendous irrigation development of the 1960s and 1970s led to a decline of environmental flows. The disappearance of the Aral Sea and the degradation of the surrounding natural ecosystems and irrigated

lands can be listed as the direct results of unbalanced water resource management in the past.

The Syr Darya basin is one of two major river systems in Central Asia. It covers an area of 444,000 km, and is inhabited by about 18 million people. The Syr-Darya rises in the Tien Shan Mountains, running through Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Kazakhstan and finally discharges into the Aral Sea. Four ex-Soviet states have their

shares in the territory of the Syr Darya basin: Kyrgyz Republic (35%), Uzbekistan (19%), Tajikistan (3%) and Kazakhstan (43%). The dominant type of land use in the basin is pasture, with 55% of the land used for this purpose. Land cultivation is next to it in importance, 8% of the land in the basin is used for this purpose. Due to its arid climate, almost 90% of the cropland is irrigated. Agriculture, consuming approximately 90% of the water, is the principal water user in the basin, with Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan in the middle and low reaches of the basin, having the largest shares in irrigated land, 54% and 26% correspondingly. The water infrastructure of the Syr Darya basin is one of the most impressive in the world. It consists of an immense network of irrigation and drainage canals, numerous barrages, pumping stations, and water reservoirs, several of which are equipped with hydropower generating plants.

IMPLICATIONS: The basin is already highly water stressed. Annual water resources amount to 51.1 km³ in the 5% flow probability and 23.6 km³ in the 95% flow probability. The water demand in the basin equals to 28.0-30 km³ annually, indicating alarmingly close gap between available water and demand for it. The increasing water requirements of the basin have resulted in declined flows to the Aral Sea, although this trend has been slowed down in the last 5-6 years. Increased salinity and water-logging in the irrigated areas are aggravating conditions in the irrigated agriculture of the basin. The area of medium to high salinization has increased from 342,000 ha in 1990 to 608,000 ha in 1999, i.e. from 10% to 18% of the cropland in the basin. The agricultural land affected by water-logging (groundwater level less than 2 m from the surface) has increased from 548,000 ha in 1990 to 905,000 ha in 1999, i.e. from 17% to 27% of the cropland. The most severely affected irrigated lands are located in Fergana valley as well as in Kazakhstan, in the tail reach of Syr Darya river basin. Losses of soil productivity lead to losses in crop yields and eventually force farmers to abandon the most severely affected fields. Better use of water in the irrigated agriculture and increasing its current

productivity are major challenges of water resources management in the Syr Darya river basin.

Despite national efforts and international support for reforms, water resource management in the Syr Darya basin remains complicated due to increasing scarcity and competition for water. During 1990-2000, inter-regional and inter-sectoral competition for water between power generation and irrigated agriculture increased dramatically due to differences in economic strategies among the newly established states located in the basin. As a result, conflicting water demand from the sectors and regions led to conflicts over seasonal allocation, causing deficits in the water available for irrigation in the downstream countries during summer. Although larger water storage capacities in downstream areas can balance the inter-sectoral and intra-seasonal water allocation, they are likely to reduce the flow into Aral sea, especially as all water is allocated to human and environmental uses.

The Scientific Information Center of Interstate Coordination Water Commission (SIC ICWC) and the International Water Management Institute (IWMI) are studying "best" water conservation practices" for water users in an attempt to reverse the negative impacts of bad resource management and bring about a reform. The "Best Practices Project" identified and selected innovative land and water conservation methods practiced by individual farmers, agricultural enterprises (cooperatives, collective farms and private enterprises), as well as water management units. These cost-effective and simple techniques were local innovations, adapted by farmers and water managers for better agricultural performance.

Research results clearly demonstrate that farmers have developed exemplary practices that could provide models for water use throughout the basin. There were a number of practices found and documented at the field, farm and irrigation system level that resulted in higher values of water productivity. These practices included alternate dry furrows, shorter furrows, re-use of drainage water, soil leveling, night irrigation, and partial rehabilitation of irrigation-drainage infrastructure.

Water users at field and farm level and local water management organizations developed indigenous technologies and methods, which can help overcome water shortages, soil salinity and water pollution. This shows that communities in the region are capable of devising their own practical solutions to handle the water crisis.

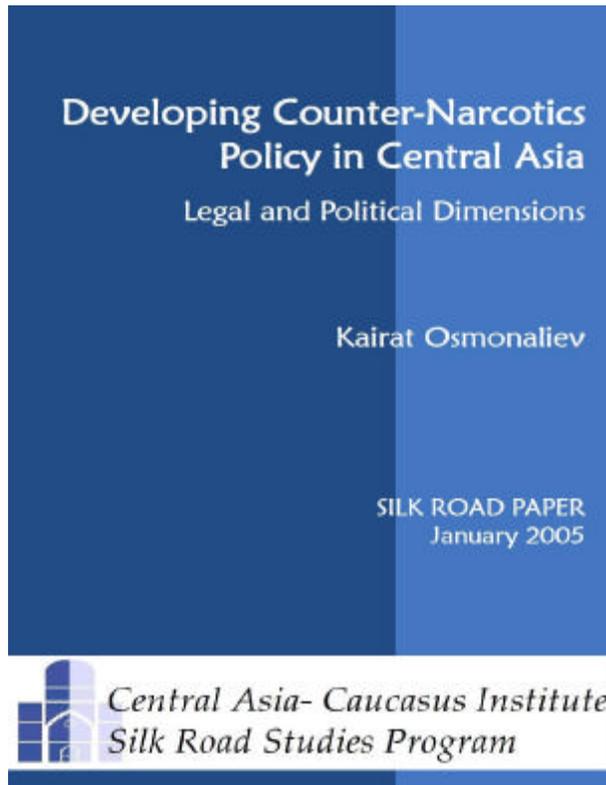
Such water conservation practices have several potential benefits at field, farm and system levels, including increasing yields and income, decreasing volumetric fees, increasing control over water, and reduction of water logging and salinity. In the project areas, water productivity increased by 10-20% from 2001 to 2003.

CONCLUSIONS: External factors shape and determine incentives for water conservation in the Syr Darya river basin. These factors are financial, moral and administrative. According to the survey the highest percentage of water users showed moral or religious incentives as the major reason for water conservation (30%). Financial incentives, such as the introduction of water delivery service fees were indicated as an incentive by 20% of water users. Administrative and technical incentives, such as

discipline and strict control of water were also listed by 30% of the water users.

While storage, inter-state cooperation, and other technical solutions are important, there is also a need for a long-term strategy for promoting efficient and productive uses of water at the field and farm level. Such strategies are important not only to proactively manage water scarcity but also to directly address the income and livelihood needs of the population. In this respect, the policy of promoting efficient and productive use of water, especially through user-driven and locally relevant water conservation practices assume particular importance. The improvement of water management and interstate cooperation are not only economic but also important political problems.

AUTHOR'S BIO: Dr. Iskandar Abdullaev is a Water Management Specialist with the International Water Management Institute.



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THE CHANGING DYNAMICS OF PAKISTAN'S RELATIONS WITH CENTRAL ASIA

Asma Shakir Khwaja

During the Taliban era the bilateral relations between Pakistan and Central Asian states were at their lowest ebb due to Pakistan's support for Taliban, which was considered a chief destabilizing factor in Central Asia. After Pakistan joined the War Against Terrorism as a frontline state and its President presented the philosophy of 'Enlightened Moderation', their bilateral relations are being revisited. During the past year, frequent visits by Central Asian and Pakistani officials to each other's states reflect the ongoing changes in the nature of their bilateral relations.

BACKGROUND: The relations between Pakistan and Central Asia are an intricate blend of economic interdependence and mistrust. They share a common history and culture, and in contemporary politics face common threat perceptions and economic problems. A common strategy to deal with these problems would be significant for the economic wellbeing of the entire region. This gives Central Asia a place of prominence in Pakistan's foreign policy, something that the local states have amply realized, as is evident in the high level exchanges taking place lately.

Pakistan is an ideal route for Central Asia's international trade. However, this route remained disrupted for long because of turmoil in Afghanistan. Pakistan's Gwadar and Karachi seaports can provide ideal port and transit facilities for the Central Asian republics to establish their trade links with the outer world for the benefit of entire region. The Central Asian states, in particular Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, also have an immense potential for the production of hydroelectric power, which is badly needed in Pakistan.

So far, Pakistan has established Joint Economic Commissions (JECs) with all the Central Asian

States. The JECs take important decisions to promote cooperation in the economic and commercial spheres and other avenues of cooperation. Under a Special Technical Assistance Program (STAP) initiated in 1992-93, Pakistan provides fully funded training facilities to Central Asian states. The program includes courses ranging from English language, banking and accounting to diplomacy. In the energy sector, Turkmenistan, Afghanistan and Pakistan signed an agreement in December 2002 for a gas pipeline from Turkmenistan via Afghanistan to Pakistan, whose estimated cost is US\$2 billion. The Asian Development Bank is the lead coordinating partner. It has, in addition to financial and technical assistance, played an important role in integrating efforts to realize the project.

Tajikistan has a potential to be a substantial producer of hydroelectric power. Being the closest geographically to Pakistan of the Central Asian Republics, Pakistan stands to benefit from Tajikistan's hydroelectric potential. An intergovernmental agreement to that effect has already been signed. Pakistan has also signed an agreement to import electricity from Kyrgyzstan through Tajikistan and Afghanistan. Terrain and

weather conditions are a clear impediment for this project, yet both states appear determined to pursue it.

The Economic Cooperation Organization comprising Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, Iran, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Turkey, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan provides another common platform to generate economic activity in the region. As Pakistan's Prime Minister Shaukat Aziz has recently emphasized, the organization needs to be used in result-oriented policies instead of mere lip service. ECO can be an effective organization if the ECO Trade Agreement, Transit Transport Agreement and the Trade and Development Bank are operationalized swiftly.

IMPLICATIONS: Pakistan and Kyrgyzstan have a long history of ties, being linked by the historic Silk Road. On January 17, 2005, Kyrgyzstan's President Askar Akaev visited Pakistan on the invitation of President General Pervez Musharraf. It was his third visit, the earlier being in 1994 and 1995, a decade ago. Kyrgyzstan and Pakistan are signatories to the Quadrilateral Agreement along with China and Kazakhstan, effective since May 2004, which aims at promoting regional trade through Pakistan's Karakoram Highway and onward road links through China to Kazakhstan. Both countries are keen to increase trade and economic relations, a fact that President Akaev stressed during the visit.

Cooperation in the fields of education and culture is an important aspect of Pakistan-Kyrgyz relations. Kyrgyz students have been pursuing studies in Pakistani educational institutions in various fields such as engineering, business administration, information technology and the English language. Kyrgyz civil servants also attend training programs in Pakistan. Conversely, over 350 Pakistani students are currently pursuing studies, mainly in medical colleges, in the Kyrgyz Republic. The expansion of bilateral ties are set to further increase with the reopening of the historic Silk Road, allowing transportation between Kyrgyzstan and Pakistan via China.

Pakistan's relations with the Central Asian Republics have progressed in the past few years, inspiring hope for brighter prospects ahead. The completion of the Gwadar Port is a milestone in this context. When it comes online alongside Karachi shortly, it will provide the shortest access to the Sea for large parts of Central Asia. Pakistan is also giving priority to road and rail links and related facilities for more effective and mutually beneficial access to Central Asia. Air services to Tashkent and Almaty have already been resumed. Similar services to other parts of the region are under active consideration. This process of closer ties is set to receive a significant boost from the ongoing improvement of the political and economic situation in Afghanistan.

The laying of railway tracks from Turkmenistan to Pakistan via Afghanistan is an important part of this program. Pakistan's Ministry of Railways has completed a feasibility study for a Chaman-Kandahar rail project. Its report will be discussed at the next meeting of the Pakistan-Afghanistan Joint Economic Commission, which will be held in Islamabad shortly.

The quadrilateral agreement is also gradually being implemented, with a first caravan from Pakistan using this route last year. The completion of Murghab-Kulma road from Tajikistan to China linking to the Karakoram highway to Pakistan is also a significant development. Once operationalized, it will boost the transit trade between Pakistan and the Central Asia.

Pakistan has no gas needs of its own at this moment although this may become a future issue, but it can facilitate the export of Central Asian oil and gas to South Asia, Southeast Asia and beyond. The oil and gas pipeline from Turkmenistan to Pakistan and onward to India would indeed be a sound investment in the future of the region.

CONCLUSIONS: The exchange of high-level visits has been an important aspect of relations between Pakistan and the Central Asian Republics. These have contributed to better understanding and closer cooperation, and the momentum in these

visits is continuously growing. In the meantime, peace and stability in Afghanistan remains a sine qua non for the developing relations. Pakistan can contribute, albeit modestly, in construction and rehabilitation of Afghanistan, especially in housing, trade, transportation and infrastructure sectors. Radical Islam has destabilized the societies of both Pakistan and Central Asia, and further mutual cooperation is required in dealing with this problem. But beyond security concerns, mutual economic

stakes are likely to play a more pivotal role in mutually beneficial relations in the future. Economic interests have always been and will continue to be the foundation for the relations between Pakistan and Central Asian states.

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UPCOMING ELECTIONS IN KYRGYZSTAN: BREAKTHROUGH OR SHEER RITUAL?

Erica Marat

In its fourteen years of independence, Kyrgyzstan has held two referenda, three parliamentary, two presidential and one local elections. While defining elections as an indispensable element of the country's democratization process, the government continues to impose hurdles to opposition leaders ahead of the parliamentary elections on February 27th. With only days left, it is yet unclear whether the elections will bring meaningful changes to the ruling power élite or result in a mere shuffle of political actors and the continuation of the established regime.

BACKGROUND: During his years as President, Askar Akaev has generated both loyal supporters to his regime and uncompromising opposition leaders. One of the sources of the regime's stability has a combination of political pluralism maintained in the country and the government's pervasive engagement in the private sector. Situations of semi-democracy such as the one in Kyrgyzstan are, as Thomas Carothers has noted, not necessarily an intermediary stage to the greater liberation of politics and society. Accordingly, states with a dominant ruling elite and a weak opposition attain a "dysfunctional equilibrium" where some degree of political pluralism allows the entire system to be perpetuated on collectively accepted rules of functioning. With low popular support, but a strong

class of neo-businessmen and a political elite allied with similar powers abroad, the political system continues to exist without risking to be overthrown in elections.

The pre-election tilts in Kyrgyzstan between government and the opposition candidates attracted a higher attention of international observers than either Tajikistan's or Moldova's elections, which are scheduled the same day. After the recent elections in Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan has the highest likelihood to become the first Central Asian state since independence in 1991 to resolve the political succession problem peacefully. Yet the Kyrgyz government and local NGO experts view the possibility of change with different degrees of

skepticism, both accusing each other of acting with the help of foreign financial sponsorship. After mass gatherings of opposition members in the center of Bishkek in late January, president Akaev accused its leaders of attempting to instigate intrastate tensions similar to the civil war in Tajikistan in the early 1990s. In response to this criticism, former Foreign Minister and leader of "Ata-Jurt" movement Roza Otunbaeva pointed at the enormous external debt accumulated during the years of Akaev's presidency as one of the sources of his political power.

IMPLICATIONS: In an interview with the opposition newspaper "ResPublica", ex-speaker and former presidential candidate Medetkan Sherimkulov said that irrespective of the outcome of the elections, the Kyrgyz government will seek to benefit from the results. In case of mass mobilization in the aftermath of unfair elections, the government would accuse opposition forces of destabilizing the country's security. Likewise, if the elections do not entail any significant movements among civil forces, the government will acclaim itself of being capable to sustain peace in the country. Sheremkulov also thinks that an alleged north-south tension in Kyrgyzstan should be interpreted as the results of the regime's cadre politics and not as a conflict between the Kyrgyz ethnic majority and the Uzbek minority.

In spite of protests on the streets of Bishkek against the decisions of the current parliament on discriminating election laws and although some international observers have stated that the mass mobilizations are attaining a regular character, there is little sign of attempts among top businessmen with close ties with the government to secure accumulated capital due to possible reconfigurations of the political system. "It will not be easy to entirely eliminate the influence of the regime on the country's main businesses" says a leading business woman as she confirms that the parliamentary elections are unlikely to bring significant changes to the settings of established informal business networks.

In the public sector, the most underfinanced institutions of health and education have been experiencing increased attention from the government as well as parliamentary candidates. The Kyrgyz National University is one of the examples where students and faculty members were offered enhanced living and working conditions during the past few months. The newly-formed coalition of four pro-governmental parties "Alga, Kyrgyzstan!" led by the president's daughter Bermet Akaeva gained 20% of seats in the elections to local governments held in October 2004. The President's 28-year old son Aidar Akaev and 32-year old Bermet Akaeva, two relatives of the first lady Mairam Akaeva and the son of the Prime Minister Nikolai Tanaev have all registered to run in the elections.

The "University" electoral district where Bermet Akaeva is balloting has been a staging place for a number of intrigues between the opposition and governmental forces. Roza Otunbaeva and the editor of "Obshchestvennyi Reytig" newspaper Bolotbek Maripov were both denied registration at the district due to a residence qualification law adopted by the parliament. After repeated concerns in the local and foreign mass media, the law was called off and Maripov was allowed to enroll though the registration period ended. But Otunbaeva was charged for organizing unsanctioned demonstrations and had to testify before the city court. The son of well-known opposition member Kunai Sheremkulov also registered at the "University" electoral district.

The Kyrgyz opposition, considerably more active within constitutionally established frames in comparison with Uzbekistan, is experiencing problems of lack of cohesion, insufficient membership and problems to find a unifying political ideology. It is rather a fragmented group of politicians, mostly with an academic background, formed around individual leaders as opposed to ideas. Some seek to advocate the interests of agrarians, the largest segment of the working society in Kyrgyzstan, but the movements are often organized top-down. Pro-governmental candidates

are equipped with considerably better financial support from the government compared to the opposition forces.

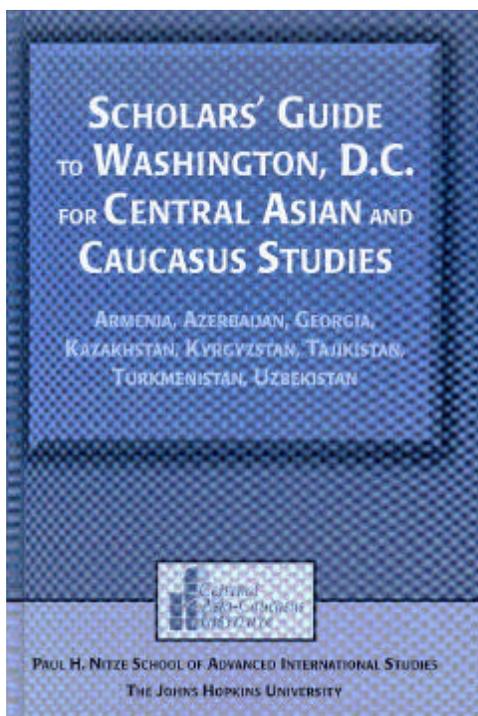
CONCLUSIONS: There is a record of domestic mass mobilization in Kyrgyzstan. Previous revolts in the country were stirred at several occasions, including after the imprisonment of opposition leader Feliks Kulov, when dozens of people went on hunger strikes. The imprisonment of a member of parliament from the southern region, Azimbek Beknazarov, resulted in six civilian deaths in 2002. A recent anti-governmental protest against the decision of the Central Electoral Committee to deny Roza Otunbaeva registration to run in the elections also provoked demonstrations.

The capacity of Akaev's government to bring political change with minimal costs to society might be lesser than in Kazakhstan, a country with a similar extent of political openness. But the state apparatus, in order to adapt in the new domestic and international environment, has also showed a great ability to shield itself from unstable situations by introducing quick institutional changes. The parliament's structure has been changed twice, two referendums amended the constitution by broadening the president's powers, and civil unrest

that was violently interrupted by law enforcement structures in Aksy in 2002 showed the state's flexibility to halt the rise of anti-regime forces by various means. Although domestically and abroad the perception of political competitiveness in Kyrgyzstan remains, in extreme situations such as civil protests against the government, the opposition forces tended to perform generally weaker than the government.

Recent developments in Kyrgyzstan suggest that the next unicameral parliament will be overweighed by pro-governmental candidates and, moreover, include direct family members of the current regime holders. Unlike in Uzbekistan, some opposition leaders who succeeded in the country's earlier political life have been allowed to take part in the elections by gaining genuine support among the population. But figures such as Otunbaeva who were able to raise larger civil activity in the country were thrown out from the process long before the election date.

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FIELD REPORTS

IN SPITE OF CRITICISM, GEORGIAN MILITARY REFORMS PROVE SUCCESSFUL

Kakha Jibladze

On February 16, the Georgian NGO Justice and Liberty released its findings after having observed military reforms from January 25, 2004 to January 25, 2005. In an 18-page report, they questioned the amount of money spent and how important these reforms really are for Georgia and its people. While the report raises important questions about the amount and manner of spending, it overlooks the major accomplishments that have been made in the daily lives of soldiers and the important role a strong army plays in the development of a strong nation.

The amount of money – and how it was spent during 2004-2005 – was an important issue addressed in the report. Its authors were disturbed by the fact that so much is spent on the minister and his administration. But people in positions of power normally receive good salaries. During President Shevardnadze's terms of office, official salaries were low and corruption was rampant. President Saakashvili is trying to root out corruption in all levels of government, including the military. By providing a real wage, which corresponds to the real cost of living, he is helping the struggle against corruption. Saakashvili has already proved through separate reforms in law enforcement that when management is earning a good wage, they think about how to do their jobs better – not how else to milk the system. By his actions, the president has already shown that those who engage in corruption when they are already well-paid are arrested.

In the report, Justice and Liberty mentions that of the 201 changes President Saakashvili has made to the defense ministry, 120 involved either changes to the personnel or to their duties. Over the past twelve months, three different civilians have served as ministers of defense: Gela Bezhuashvili, Giorgi Baramizde, and Irakli Okruashvili. On February 16, Georgian media reported that the heads of the army's general staff all resigned at Okruashvili's request. There has been no official announcement about the mass resignations, but according to Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, they were part of the ongoing reforms. Military expert and chair of Justice and Liberty, Irakli Sesiashvili, was quoted as saying that these constant changes only hinder reform. "In 2004, more than 800 people – civilians and non-civilians – were dismissed from the Defense Ministry alone. During that period, 600 people were hired and none of them was selected from among those who had been dismissed. This is [already] an indicator of instability. On top of that, some of these newly hired people were fired after just three months, before they could even get acquainted with their new job", Sesiashvili said.

But Sesiashvili fails to take into consideration the fact that Georgians are expecting to see results quickly. President Saakashvili is searching for the right combination to reform the military as fast as possible, because the state of the country's defense is closely related to the other problems Georgia is facing, including border disputes. During his recent

address to the Parliament, he spoke about the need for a strong country in order to achieve peace in the nation. "For a country to regain peace it is very important to be strong. The army is integral to this."

The authors of the report pose a valid question: "Why does Georgia need these reforms?" During his address to parliament, President Saakashvili described the state of the armed forces when he came into office in 2004 as follows: "[Georgia was] a country that had no defense capabilities, not a single working tank or enough ammunition to last just an hour in battle. The army had been starving for months." The reforms have concrete goals, which are important to provide Georgia with the security it needs and the stability it has lacked. Reform of the armed forces is necessary in order for Georgia to become part of NATO and to operate as an equal among its allies. This year, Georgia sent peacekeepers to Iraq. That would never have been possible without the current push on reforms. But apart from simple political gains, the reforms serve to boost Georgian national pride. Even if the reservist program is a PR program for the army, as stated in the report, it has already proved to be a success. Prior to this administration, families paid

huge sums of money so their sons could avoid the mandatory two year service in the army. Now Georgians, including women, are signing up to become reservists. Tents have been constructed in large cities to promote enlistment. A sense of pride has been returned that was lacking over the past decade.

Although critics state that there is little to show for the amount of money spent and the degree of support the president has placed behind reforms, soldiers serving in Poti interviewed for this article would disagree. Many in fact wanted to continue serving after their mandatory two years. One, Vakhtangi Gurjabidze, served under both the Shevardnadze and Saakashvili administrations. According to his parents, during the first year in service, before the Rose Revolution, he wanted to come home. Now he doesn't want to leave. Gurjabidze said the army is now good because they feed him well, he has a new uniform and most importantly, there is order where before there was none. As he concluded, "perhaps everything has not been reformed yet and maybe there is still work to do, but now there is hope that the Georgian army will soon at least resemble the army of a developed nation."

NEW UZBEK GOVERNMENT TO KICKSTART REFORMS

Atabek Rizayev

Since the new bicameral Parliament started its work in Uzbekistan, several important events have taken place. A new government has been formed and announced its priorities in the realization of economic and social reforms; a new structure of the Cabinet of Ministers has been implemented, and the first stage of administrative reforms is being realized.

Uzbekistan's President Islam Karimov for the first time spoke at the opening of the newly elected

bicameral Parliament on January 28. Prior to this, Mr. Karimov had signed a Decree on the formation of a new cabinet.

He also signed a decree on the structure and administrative staff of the new government. This decree was the beginning of a new administrative reform. Earlier reform had mainly touched the system of local administration, but this was the first reform of the highest echelon central power.

On February 3, Rustam Azimov was appointed first deputy prime minister and minister of economy. Previously, he held the position of Minister of Macrostatistics, an old name for the Ministry of Economy. Azimov's responsibility now include the important task of controlling internal trade, light industry and food industry, sectors previously headed by deputy Prime Minister Mirabrор Usmanov. Usmanov's competence had been the subject of criticism for a considerable time. A decree signed by President Karimov's in October 2004 reformed the governmental and joint-stock companies under Usmanov's control (special organs of managerial administration corresponding to the former Soviet branches of Ministries) into simple joint-stock companies. The decree also reformed the managerial duties and addressed issues of administrative interference. With the new government, the decree can be said to have been fully realized.

Usmanov was not included in the new Cabinet of Ministers, and the structure of his former administration was reformed and transferred to the Ministry of Economy. At the same time, Tursunkhon Khudayberganov, Advisor to the President tasked with the implementation of administrative reforms, was removed from his position but received a position in the Senate. The authority of the curator of administrative reforms is likely to be transferred to the Prime Minister's office.

These reforms can be explained by the President's apparent intention to give the new Prime Minister the opportunity to form a single team and reduce the parallel power structures between the Cabinet and the Presidential Office. This streamlining of government is very important on the threshold of difficult market reforms in the social sphere. The next important event was President Karimov's announcement on new priorities in economic policy. These priorities are:

- 1) Liberalization of the entire system of sanctions slammed at business violations. This is in order to lower their size of penalties for unintentional and minor violations, and introducing the possibility of not applying penalties in cases where a businessman voluntarily compensates the damage.
- 2) Taking measures in market liberalization to make a wider variety and volume of goods available; improving stock exchanges and auctions, and preventing a return to the system of centralized distribution.
- 3) Supporting entrepreneurial activities. This support was suggested to be carried out through a modern and developed banking system, allotting loans at low interests for enterprises, widening the system of micro-credits, including the assistance of international financial institutions, such as the International Financial Corporation, the World Bank, and the Asian Development Bank.

The third item is necessary to accomplish the aim of widening the role of small business and farming. The aim is for the share of small business to increase by no less than 45% until 2007. Several privileges are suggested for small business: First, additional privileges and preferences in the system of taxation, implementing clear and simple ways of paying taxes. Secondly, cutting down and facilitating the number of procedures for registration of small businesses. Third, stimulating the creation of new small enterprises and private home workshops. Fourth, creating supply structures, rendering services and logistic support for the sale of the products of small enterprises or citizens working from their homes, especially in rural areas.

As far as agriculture is concerned, the government also plans to implement the recently adopted program of re-organization of unprofitable farms, which are to be reorganized by 2005-2010, including 406 farms scheduled for 2005.

INFLUENCE OF RELIGIOUS HARDLINERS REMAINS IN AFGHANISTAN

Daan van der Schriek

The liberation of Afghanistan from the Taliban in 2001 did not mean that Afghanistan became a liberal country overnight. Far from it. Religious hardliners still have considerable influence that they are prepared to use to pursue their aims – with mixed results so far. But their power might be growing.

In January, Afghan president Hamid Karzai reappointed eight of the nine judges of the country's Supreme Court, although they have the reputation of being fundamentalist and most of them apparently fall short of the minimum education standards set down for Supreme Court judges in the constitution that was approved in January. The court's deputy head Fazal Ahmad Manawi was the only member to be replaced, by Ayatollah Mohammad Hashim Salehi – the first Shia to be appointed to the court in predominantly Sunni Afghanistan.

Members of the court are prohibited from being involved in politics. But most of its current judges, including Chief Justice Fazal Hadi Shinwari, are close to the leader of the conservative Ittehad-e-Islami party of the former mujahedin Abdul Rasul Sayyaf, who holds Wahhabist views. It is believed that Sayyaf was promised continuing influence over the court in a political deal before the October presidential election. Manawi, the dismissed judge, recently stated that appointments to the Supreme Court are based on politics and tribal interests rather than merit. "There is no real judicial system [in Afghanistan] because it serves the government and powerful figures rather than the people," he said. Apart from Sayyaf, there are other fundamentalist former mujahedin – such as ex-president Burhanuddin Rabbani and Ismail Khan – that now support Karzai and who ultimately have to get something in return for their continued support.

The Supreme Court has made several controversial decisions in the past bearing witness of its orthodox views that should have appealed to the fundamentalists in Karzai's camp: it recommended death sentences for two journalists that would have insulted Islamic principles by criticizing mujahedin; it tried to bar a candidate from running for president after questioning polygamy; it wanted to bar women singers from television; it condemned a "Miss Afghanistan" for appearing in a beauty contest in bikini.

However, the court's ruling was ignored in all these cases. But it has had more success with other attempts. A first ban on cable television – that conservatives believe is exposing Afghans to Western obscenities – imposed in January 2003 was revoked the following April. But on November 12th 2004, on the heels of Karzai's election as president, the ban was reinstated. This showed the continuing influence of conservatives also with the new administration. Although the ban on cable television was subsequently eased, the available amount of channels went from some 60 before November to 20 now.

In the last week of January, police started raiding bars and restaurants (as well as illegal brothels) in Kabul, closing down the brothels and establishments selling alcohol without valid licenses. This, although perfectly legal, is interpreted by observers in Kabul as another move to "sweeten" hardliners as the bars are mainly frequented by foreigners (Afghan nationals are prohibited from consuming alcohol) and don't seem to constitute the country's biggest problem.

But fighting against alcohol and cable television appeals to all conservatives and gives them a common cause. It should also appeal to religious conservatives currently outside the government,

more of whom seem steadily to be won over for Kabul. On January 16th a group of 81 Taliban was released from U.S. custody in Afghanistan. Chief Justice Fazal Hadi Shinwari said at the occasion that the U.S. had agreed to release the remaining 400 Taliban prisoners in Afghanistan also – and that the Afghan government would give those Taliban willing to “come back” the opportunity to do so. Subsequently, on February 20th, four ex-Taliban officials led by their former envoy to the UN, Abdul Hakim Mujahid, claimed they had reached

reconciliation with Kabul. It is possible that another fundamentalist warlord still battling the Karzai government, Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, might soon turn “wholly political” as well, according to the Peshawar bureau chief of the Pakistani daily *The News*, Behroz Khan. It is unlikely that these defections from the insurgents will end guerrilla attacks in Afghanistan. But it will add to the strength of fundamentalists with the authorities in Kabul.

KYRGYZ OPPOSITION NEWSPAPER ENGULFED IN LAWSUITS

Nazgul Baktybekova

Independent and opposition-affiliated media in Kyrgyzstan appears to come under increasing pressure on the threshold of the parliamentary elections scheduled for 27 February. Filing lawsuits, the most popular method of silencing critical media, is this time to be used on a presidential level. In a nationally televised address on 17 February, the Kyrgyz President Askar Akaev announced that he intends to bring a lawsuit against the leading opposition media, the MSN newspaper.

A week ago the MSN newspaper, formerly known as *Moya Stolitsa Novosti*, published an article presenting a list of several strategic companies and enterprises for the country, which belong to and are controlled by the President and his family. President Akaev said that by publishing libel articles one after another, the MSN newspaper smears him and his family. “The newspaper began a purposeful campaign of discrediting me and pursues far-reaching aims”, said the Kyrgyz President in his appeal to the people through Kyrgyz National Television. At the same time, President Akaev implied that he would withdraw from the lawsuit if the paper publishes a proper denial. The Chief Editor of MSN newspaper Aleksandr Kim, in an

interview to *Deutsche Welle*, said that the paper is not going to publish any denial, as it has sufficient facts, which confirm the truth of the presented materials.

The same day, heads of three large-scale enterprises – “Kyrgyztelekom”, “Kyrgyzgaz” and “Elektricheskie stansii” – held a joint press conference and unanimously stated that the recent article published in MSN newspaper is contrary to fact. They announced that they also intend to file a lawsuit against MSN newspaper and demand compensation for undermining their professional reputation and creating a negative image in the eyes of the public.

MSN already faces a libel suit by the *Vechernii Bishkek* newspaper, which is demanding 120,000 euros for alleging that the paper is controlled by Adil Toigonbaev, Akaev’s son-in-law. In the latter half of 2004, MSN also faced a complaint filed by private and pro-government newspapers along with the anti-monopoly agency of the government for undercutting competition by charging too little cost. The anti-monopoly agency ordered the paper to

raise its prices and recommended that a criminal case be opened against it.

In the meantime, a public meeting was held in Bishkek on 19 February involving around 200 people. The event was organized by the political bloc For Fair Elections, and representatives of such opposition political groups as the People's Movement of Kyrgyzstan, Atajurt and Kel-Kel youth forum participated in the meeting. The Coalition for Democracy and Civil Society and other NGOs were also represented at the meeting. One of the main issues raised was the situation surrounding the MSN newspaper. At the end of the meeting, participants made a statement, which stated that the recent announcement of the President with regard to bringing a lawsuit against MSN constitutes one of the repressive measures planned for election season in Kyrgyzstan. It also states that in the light of these events, the constitutional rights of Kyrgyz citizens for

independent and objective information have come under serious threat.

The situation with mass media has troubled not only local activists but the international community as well. The international organization Reporters without Borders has recently made a statement condemning the Kyrgyz government for persecution of independent media, including the case of the MSN newspaper. Human Rights Watch, another international organization, has also expressed growing concerns about the recent political developments in Kyrgyzstan. "The election will be an important test of the government's commitment to democracy and respect for basic human rights... The government appears to be employing heavy-handed lawsuits and new tactics to silence critical print media", states Human Rights Watch in a 14 February open letter to President Askar Akaev.



NEWS DIGEST

KAZAKH FOREIGN MINISTRY OBJECTS TO REMARKS BY SCO ANTITERROR HEAD

9 February

Kazakhstan's Foreign Ministry has issued a statement disputing recent claims by Vyacheslav Kasymov, director of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization's (SCO) Regional Antiterrorism Structure, that Kazakhstan harbors terrorist organizations. In a 7 February interview with "Nezavisimaya gazeta," Kasymov said that in Kazakhstan "there are even lands bought up by firms that belong to the 'bin Ladens.'" Noting that Kazakhstan is a party to the 12 UN antiterrorism conventions, the statement dubbed Kasymov's claims "inappropriate." It continued, "[T]hey contradict the spirit and the provisions of documents signed by the leaders of SCO member states. Such statements are absolutely incompatible with the status of director of a structure in this international organization, and they cast a pall on the SCO's international authority and stature." (Kazinform)

KYRGYZ CONSTITUTIONAL COURT UPHOLDS OPPOSITION LEADER'S EXCLUSION FROM ELECTIONS

10 February

Nurlan Sadykov, a lawyer representing former Foreign Minister Roza Otunbaeva, told RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service on 9 February that the country's Constitutional Court has confirmed that his client cannot take part in the 27 February parliamentary elections. Otunbaeva, co-chairwoman of the Ota-Jurt opposition movement, was earlier denied registration for failing to meet the five-year in-country residency requirement, which she argues should not apply to former diplomats. Having exhausted legal appeals in Kyrgyzstan, Otunbaeva now plans to appeal to international bodies. (RFE/RL)

KAZAKH PROSECUTOR WANTS CHARGES AGAINST ZHIRINOVSKII

10 February

Kazakh Prosecutor-General Rashid Tusupbekov has asked his Russian counterpart Vladimir Ustinov to consider charges against Russian State Duma Deputy Vladimir Zhirinovskii for disparaging comments the latter made about Kazakhstan in a 17 January

interview with Ekho Moskvyy. In the interview, Zhirinovskii denied the existence of a Kazakh language and cast doubts on the validity of Kazakh statehood. Tusupbekov noted that such comments are actionable under Article 282 of Russia's Criminal Code, which covers the incitement of interethnic, racial, and religious animosity. But Saulbek Zhamkenuly, an official at the Kazakh Prosecutor-General's Office, told RFE/RL's Kazakh Service that prosecution is unlikely. "It is hard to foresee the future course of this issue, since...members of parliament enjoy immunity and it is the Russian Duma that is supposed to decide," Zhamkenuly said. For his part, Zhirinovskii was unapologetic, telling RIA-Novosti on 9 February, "There's no need to take offense. The state of Kazakhstan never existed; you can find that in any textbook." (RFE/RL)

TAJIKISTAN, UZBEKISTAN SIGN ACCORDS

11 February

Tajik Prime Minister Oqil Oqilov met with Shavkat Mirziyoev, his Uzbek counterpart, in Tashkent on 10 February. They signed two agreements, one on settling accounts for cargo transport and Tajikistan's sovereign debt in 2005, and another on cooperation in the use of water and energy resources. The talks focused on trade, with the participants noting that trade volume between the two countries registered a 27 percent year-on-year increase in 2004. RFE/RL's Uzbek Service reported that, according to unofficial sources, the two sides also discussed easing travel between and through the two countries in the Ferghana Valley region, where in some cases the shortest route between Uzbek cities runs through Tajik territory. (RFE/RL)

GOVT: 239,600 DEMONSTRATE IN RUSSIA OVER WELFARE REFORMS

12 February

The Interior Ministry said 239,600 people took part in mass actions across Russia on Saturday to state their attitude to current social welfare reforms. The ministry told Interfax that 238 cities, town and villages spreading over 62 regions had served as venues for the events. "No breaches of the peace have been committed in the course of the mass actions," the ministry press service said. It said 21,600 police and

3,700 Interior Forces troops had been deployed to maintain law and order. (Interfax)

KYRGYZSTAN SAYS 'NO' TO U.S. AWACS

15 February

Foreign Minister Askar Aitmatov told a news conference in Bishkek on 14 February that Kyrgyzstan has rejected a U.S. request to station AWACS aircraft at the U.S. air base in Manas, RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service reported. Aitmatov said that the decision was based on consultations with fellow member states in the Collective Security Treaty Organization (Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, and Tajikistan) and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (Russia, China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan). Aitmatov said that reconnaissance aircraft are not compatible with the declared mission of the U.S. base in Kyrgyzstan, which was set up to support operations in Afghanistan. Russia's "Kommersant-Daily" reported on 12 February, however, that the decision to keep U.S. AWACS out of Kyrgyzstan was one of the conditions Russia's Foreign Ministry set for Aitmatov when the latter asked Moscow to support the regime of Kyrgyz President Askar Akaev in the 27 February parliamentary elections. (RFE/RL)

TURKISH BUSINESSMAN PROPOSES DIALOGUE WITH ARMENIAN COALITION PARTY

15 February

Kaan Soyak, a Turkish businessman who co-chairs the Turkish-Armenian Business Council, invited the Armenian Revolutionary Federation--Dashnaksutiun (HHD) on 14 February to visit Turkey to embark on a dialogue aimed at overcoming the HHD's negative image in that country, RFE/RL's Armenian Service reported. The HHD, one of the two junior partners in the three-party coalition government, has in the past pegged a normalization of relations with Ankara to official recognition by the Turkish government of the 1915 genocide; it also opposes opening the Armenian-Turkish border. Soyak said on 14 February that bilateral trade has increased to \$120 million and could treble if the border were opened, Noyan Tapan reported. (RFE/RL)

IRAN REACTS POSITIVELY TO PROPOSED RAIL LINK WITH ARMENIA

15 February

Iranian President Mohammad Khatami and Expediency Council Chairman Ali Akbar Hashemi-Rafsanjani reacted "positively" to a proposal made last

week by visiting Armenian Defense Minister Serzh Sarkisian to build a direct rail link between the two countries, RFE/RL's Armenian Service reported on 14 February, citing Deputy Foreign Minister Gegham Garibdjianian, who recently concluded a six-year stint as Armenia's ambassador to Tehran. Khatami has ordered a feasibility study for the proposed link, which is likely to prove expensive and logistically challenging given the mountainous terrain it would traverse. (RFE/RL)

AZERBAIJANI AUTHORITIES RELEASE FORMER PREMIER'S ADVISER

15 February

Apparently as a result of pressure from the Czech government, Saday Nazarov, a close associate of disgraced former Prime Minister Suret Huseinov, has been released from detention but forbidden to leave Azerbaijan, CTK reported on 14 February, citing Czech Foreign Ministry spokesman Vit Kolar. Nazarov, who left Azerbaijan 10 years ago and was granted political asylum in the Czech Republic, was detained last month shortly after he arrived in Azerbaijan to visit his elderly father. (RFE/RL)

EU OFFICIAL SAYS WORLD COMMUNITY TO GIVE \$20 MILLION TO SHORE UP TAJIK-AFGHAN BORDER

16 February

Alan Waddams, European Union ambassador to Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan, told a news conference in Dushanbe on 16 February that the international community will provide \$20 million over the next two years to strengthen the border between Tajikistan and Afghanistan as Russian forces complete their handover of the frontier to Tajik control. "Total aid from the European Union will amount to 6.5 million euros [\$8.5 million] plus 2 million euros from Britain," he said. U.S. Ambassador to Tajikistan Richard Hoagland said that the United States will contribute \$9.5 million. Russia has already handed over an 881-kilometer section of the border, and will transfer the Panj and Moscow sections of the Tajik-Afghan border by the end of 2005. (ITAR-TASS)

GEORGIAN MONITORING GROUP ISSUES REPORT CRITICIZING DEFENSE POLICIES

16 February

A report released on 16 February by a Georgian nongovernmental organization sharply criticized the Georgian government for serious shortcomings in its defense policy. The report was compiled by the Justice and Liberty group and stems from a one-year

assessment of the state of military reform and defense policies. The report specifically cited the government's failure to implement an effective plan to reorganize the Georgian armed forces, noted a widespread misuse of defense funds, and criticized the frequent staff changes in the Defense Ministry and in the General Staff of the armed forces, which, it said, impeded military reform. Assessing the 3.6 million Lari (\$1.9 million) training program for reserve forces, the report criticized the lack of an "effective command structure" for the reserves. Most notably, the report also documented a pattern of fraud and corruption, including the misuse of defense funds for the purchase of luxury cars and for the reconstruction of offices for senior Defense Ministry officials in 2004. (Civil Georgia)

BAGAPSH WANTS RUSSIAN PEACEKEEPERS TO STAY

16 February

Sergei Bagapsh, president of the breakaway province of Abkhazia, said he wants Russian servicemen to continue their peacekeeping mission in the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict zone. "Statements about the need to replace Russia's peacekeeping forces in the conflict zone can be heard today. But our opinion is that the Russian peacekeepers bore a heavy burden in sustaining peace during the most difficult period. And it is they who should continue to perform the peacekeeping duties in the area," Bagapsh told a news conference after talks with UN Undersecretary General for Peacekeeping Jean-Marie Guehenno in Sukhumi on Wednesday. (Interfax)

COURT ORDER SUSPENDS KAZAKH OPPOSITION PAPER

17 February

Sharip Kurakbaev, editor in chief of the Kazakh opposition newspaper "Soz," told a news conference in Almaty on 17 February that a court order has suspended publication of the newspaper. Kurakbaev said that the newspaper's accounts and property have been frozen. Lawyer Sergei Utkin, who is representing "Soz," told journalists that that order, which comes after the National Security Committee won a 5-million-tenge (\$38,500) libel judgment against "Soz," proves that the purpose of the suit was to shut down the newspaper. He said that the newspaper has minimal assets and can only raise money by continuing to publish. Tamara Kaleeva, head of the free-speech NGO Adil Soz, stressed that because Kazakh law does not limit damages in defamation

lawsuits, it creates a convenient mechanism for silencing gadfly media. (Interfax-Kazakhstan)

KYRGYZ PRESIDENT TO SUE OPPOSITION NEWSPAPER

17 February

In a nationally televised address on 17 February, Kyrgyz President Askar Akaev said that he intends to file a defamation suit against the opposition newspaper "MSN," RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service reported. The president called the newspaper's recent publication of materials about property belonging to him and his family inaccurate and defamatory; he stressed that "the lawsuit will be withdrawn only if the newspaper publishes a proper denial of the allegations smearing me and my family," Kyrgyz Television 1 reported. Compounding the newspaper's problems, the heads of state-owned telecom, gas, and power companies held a press conference on 17 February to announce that they also intend to file suit against "MSN" for articles claiming that the companies are controlled by members of the president's family, RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service reported. The embattled newspaper already faces a defamation suit filed by rival newspaper "Vechernii Bishkek." (RFE/RL)

MAN CONVICTED IN AZERBAIJAN'S POSTELECTION PROTESTS FOUND DEAD IN PRISON

17 FEBRUARY

A 20-year-old demonstrator jailed for his participation in Azerbaijan's postelection protests in October 2003 was found dead in his cell on 17 February. The demonstrator, serving a three-year prison term, was among over 100 sentenced for their involvement in protesting the election of President Ilham Aliyev. Although the official cause of death was initially reportedly as "suffocation," a thorough investigation is under way. (Turan)

New Georgian govt approved

17 February

The Georgian parliament held a vote at a special session on Thursday to approve the country's new government led by Prime Minister Zurab Nogaideli, as well as its action program. New appointments include Justice Minister Konstantin Kemularia and Finance Minister Valery Chechelashvili. All other ministers retained their posts in the new Cabinet. (Interfax)

ARMS CACHE FOUND NEAR RAILROAD TRACK IN DAGESTAN

17 February

An arms cache was found near the railroad track in the Khasavyurt district of Dagestan, a source in the Khasavyurt station's police department told Interfax on Thursday. The police found a shoulder-held grenade launcher, ammunition, gunpowder and bomb components, the source said. OMON special task forces are confiscating videocassettes and CDs with terrorist act recordings at Chechen marketplaces. Hundreds of such videocassettes and CDs were confiscated at the central marketplace of Grozny over the past day alone, commander of the Chechen Interior Ministry's OMON special task unit Artur Akhmadov told Interfax. (Interfax)

GEORGIA INSISTS ON WITHDRAWAL OF RUSSIAN BASES**18 February**

The attitude of Georgia to Russian military bases remains unchanged and amounts to demanding their speedy withdrawal from Georgia, parliament speaker Nino Burjanadze told reporters on Friday after meeting with Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov. "Georgia continues to insist on the speedy withdrawal of bases and will not agree to the timeframe suggested by the Russian side, namely 6-7 years," she said. She said they had also discussed joint control over Roki tunnel connecting the Russian internal republic of North Ossetia and Georgia's breakaway territory of South Ossetia but she "did not see the Russian side's readiness for it." (Interfax)

PRO-MOSCOW CHECHEN LEADER CONDEMNS ABDUCTIONS**18 February**

Pro-Moscow Chechen administration head Alu Alkhanov on 18 February confirmed that eight relatives of Chechen resistance leader Aslan Maskhadov were abducted in December and that a criminal investigation into the matter has been launched. Alkhanov said that he is personally categorically opposed to such abductions in any circumstances. He also charged that Maskhadov and radical Chechen field commander Shamil Basaev have been involved in abductions in the republic and he called on resistance fighters to "return to a normal, peaceful life." Alkhanov also said the conflict in Chechnya has been provoked by "those forces that were involved in the collapse of the Soviet Union" and condemned Arab mercenaries who are aiding the Chechen resistance. He said that federal security organs have effective control over the entire territory of the republic. (RIA-Novosti)

NEARLY ONE-QUARTER OF AZERBAIJANIS SUPPORT INTRODUCING ISLAMIC LAWS**18 February**

A public opinion poll found 23.2 percent of respondents support the introduction of Islamic laws in Azerbaijan. The poll, conducted from September to October 2004, surveyed a sample of 1,200 Azerbaijani citizens and was conducted by the ADAM Social Research Center. The survey found that although 93.2 percent of Azerbaijanis identified themselves as Muslims, under 20 percent worship regularly and only 13.5 percent recognize the authority of any Islamic religious authority. Nearly 70 percent of those surveyed said that they are "ill-disposed to people that adopted another religion." (Turan)

RUSSIA-GEORGIA TIES PLAGUED BY OUTSTANDING ISSUES - GEORGIAN MP**18 February**

The cold welcome Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov got in Tbilisi has nothing to do with the Russian minister's refusal to lay wreaths at Tbilisi's monument commemorating the fighters for Georgia's unity, Konstantin Gabashvili, chairman of the Georgian parliamentary committee for international relations, told Interfax on Friday.

There are several outstanding problems in the two countries' relations, and a solution to them is crucial to bringing their ties back to normal, Gabashvili said. "The conflict zones, where the annexation of Georgian territories is effectively taking place, and Russia's military bases are among the problematic issues Russia has been using to put political pressure on Georgia," he said. Putting pressure on Georgia is the wrong policy, and "it will not change anything for Russia now," Gabashvili said. (Interfax)

KAZAKH PRESIDENT HAILS COUNTRY'S ACHIEVEMENTS, PROPOSES CENTRAL ASIA UNION**18 February**

In his annual address to the nation before a joint session of parliament on 18 February, President Nursultan Nazarbaev hailed Kazakhstan's achievements over the past 10 years and proposed the creation of a Central Asian union. Nazarbaev stressed that the preceding decade has seen Kazakh citizens' wages, salaries, savings, and pensions rise significantly. "For the first time in our history, we have created an independent state constructed on the principles of Western democracy, taking into account the experience of leading East-Asian states and the

specific features of our society, with its many ethnicities and faiths," Nazarbaev said. Noting that Central Asia is the scene of great-power rivalries, Nazarbaev proposed the creation of a union of Central Asian states. "We need to move from words to close economic integration, a common market, and a common currency," he said. (Kazakhstan Today)

PUTIN SAYS RUSSIA WILL CONTINUE NUCLEAR COOPERATION WITH IRAN

18 February

President Vladimir Putin said after his meeting in the Kremlin on 18 February with visiting Iranian Supreme National Security Council Secretary Hojatolislam Hassan Rohani that Iran has no plans to develop nuclear weapons. Putin said that "recent actions of the Iranian side" have convinced Russia that Iran does not intend to produce nuclear weapons. "This means that we will continue our cooperation in all spheres, including the nuclear sphere," Putin added. Putin said Atomic Energy Agency Director Aleksandr Rumyantsev will travel to Tehran later this month to sign an agreement on the return to Russia of spent nuclear fuel from its Bushehr nuclear plant. Putin also reminded the media that Iranian officials have invited him to come to that country, adding that the date of that visit will be specified at a later date. (ITAR-TASS)

GEORGIA, RUSSIA FAIL TO DISGUISE MUTUAL ANTIPATHY

19 February

Talks in Tbilisi on 18 February between visiting Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov and senior Georgian officials failed to defuse any of the major sticking points in bilateral relations, Georgian and Russian media reported. The visit was blighted from the beginning by Lavrov's refusal to lay a wreath at a monument in Tbilisi to Georgian troops killed during the offensives launched against the unrecognized republics of Abkhazia and South Ossetia in the early 1990s. Lavrov told journalists that, contrary to normal diplomatic procedure, that event was not included in the preliminary schedule of engagements until the day before his visit. Tbilisi responded by downgrading the visit from an official to a working one and sending only Deputy Foreign Minister Merab Antadze to greet Lavrov at Tbilisi airport, where no guard of honor was provided. Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili branded Lavrov's refusal "unexpected, strange, and unacceptable." (Caucasus Press)

CHECHEN AMBUSH

21 February

Chechen President Alu Alkhanov said Monday authorities were investigating whether federal forces opened fire without provocation on a car in Chechnya, killing five people, including two presidential security officers. Alkhanov said on Chechen state television that the gunfire apparently came from an armored personnel carrier assigned to a checkpoint between the village of Kurchaloi and Geldagan. The attack happened near the checkpoint Friday, he said. "It does not matter to the population of the republic of Chechnya who has perpetrated this crime -- guerrillas or people wearing shoulder straps," Alkhanov said in televised remarks. "Crimes committed by the latter deliver a heavier blow to the Chechen people because they hope for their protection." Alkhanov said the gunmen did not ask the passengers to produce any identification or make any other demands, although it was not immediately clear how he would know that. (AP)

KAZAKHSTAN PRESIDENT SIGNS CONTENTIOUS ANTI-EXTREMISM BILL INTO LAW

21 February

Kazakhstan's president signed a contentious anti-extremism bill into law Monday, his office said. Rights groups say the legislation could be used to restrict religious and civil freedoms. President Nursultan Nazarbayev's office said the bill aims to prevent religious, political and other forms of extremism in the oil-rich Central Asian country, whose neighbors have been plagued by Islamic militant attacks. The bill, approved by Parliament earlier this month, names political parties and media among potential sources of extremism. It gives the city court of the capital, Astana, the authority to designate a group as extremist. The bill also expands law enforcement agencies' and prosecutors' rights to use surveillance and to suspend organizations suspected of extremism. Local rights groups, however, say the bill does not precisely define extremism and could be used to persecute civilians and mainstream religious organizations that are not engaged in extremist activity. Radical Islamic groups emerged in predominantly Muslim Central Asia after the 1991 Soviet collapse. Bombings and other problems blamed on religious groups have hit Kazakhstan's neighbors, Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan, in recent years. No Islamic militant attacks have been reported in Kazakhstan, which has a large non-Muslim population. But Nazarbayev recently warned that

radical religious groups were stepping up activity here, and urged tougher security measures. (AP)

SIX JAILED IN UZBEK BOMBING

21 February

A court in Uzbekistan has jailed six people over last year's attacks against US and Israeli embassies. Monday's verdict was the latest end to a wave of controversial trials after bombing attacks on the embassies killed four Uzbek security guards. Well over 100 people have been jailed so far for the violence. The defendants - two women and four men, two of the latter being blind - were jailed for between seven and 16 years for their alleged roles in the violence in March and April in locations across this former Soviet republic and in July against the two embassy buildings, the lawyer said. Human rights groups have repeatedly criticised the standard of the trials, accusing the security forces of torturing defendants - a practice that a UN official said in 2002 was systematic in Uzbekistan. Prosecutors in the latest trial said that key defendant Murod Latipov - one of the blind men - had recruited young men to train at alleged terrorist camps in neighbouring Tajikistan. His wife Mastora was jailed for 16 years at an earlier trial for her alleged role in the March and April attacks. Among other things the couple had arranged foster parents for children of the female bombers, the prosecution said. Prior to his arrest Latipov told journalists that the couple had known one of those alleged to have blown herself up last March, Dilnoza Khalmuradova, but insisted that his wife had merely led classes teaching women to read the Quran. (AFP)

POLITICAL ASYLUM FOR TERRORISTS UNACCEPTABLE - RUSSIAN DIPLOMAT

22 February

A high-ranking Russian diplomat has reiterated Moscow's position that, in the fight against terrorism, "double standards," such as granting political asylum to Chechen separatists as some Western countries have done, are unacceptable. "The fact that persons [such as Akhmed Zakayev or Ilya Akhmadov], who are on international wanted lists for terrorist crimes, receive political asylum and the freedom to travel in some countries arouses concern," Anatoly Safonov, the Russian presidential envoy for international cooperation in fighting terrorism and international organized crime, told Interfax on Tuesday. Chechen separatist emissaries Zakayev and Akhmadov have been granted political asylum in Britain and the United States, respectively. "We need unity and a common vision of goals in combating terrorism. The

use of a 'double standard' approach and the division of terrorists into 'good' and 'bad' is absolutely unacceptable," Safonov said. (Interfax)

KYRGYZ DEMONSTRATORS SUPPORT OPPOSITION NEWSPAPER

22 February

Representatives of Kyrgyzstan's opposition and free-speech advocates demonstrated in Bishkek on 19 and 21 February in defense of the independent newspaper "MSN," RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service reported. The newspaper faces a number of defamation lawsuits, and President Askar Akaev recently threatened to file suit as well. The protest on 19 February drew 200 people, who passed an appeal calling the president's intention to sue "MSN" part of a series of "threats and other repressive measures planned during upcoming [27 February parliamentary] elections and...aimed at retaining power by any and all means." Protestors charged that the lawsuits against "MSN" are aimed at depriving Kyrgyz citizens of access to objective information. In a briefing on 21 February, presidential spokesman Abdil Segizbaev told journalists that the only way "MSN" can avoid a lawsuit from the president is if it fully retracts a recent article that alleges that President Akaev and members of his family control numerous businesses in Kyrgyzstan. (RFE/RL)

UZBEK PROTESTORS DECRY ILL EFFECTS OF TAJIK ALUMINUM PLANT

22 February

A group of residents from Uzbekistan's Surkhandarya Province held a demonstration outside the Tajik Embassy in Tashkent on 18 February to protest the ill effects that emissions from the Tajik Aluminum Plant are having on their region, RFE/RL's Uzbek Service reported. The protestors stated that the emissions are causing increased rates of illness and birth defects. In a written appeal to Tajik President Imomali Rakhmonov signed by more than 3,000 Surkhandarya residents, they expressed concern at plans to increase production at the plant, which is located near the Tajik-Uzbek border, and to construct additional production facilities. Tajik Ambassador to Uzbekistan Ghulomjon Mirzaev met with protestors and promised to deliver the appeal to the competent authorities. Mirzaev said that modern equipment will be installed to minimize harmful emissions, adding that the issue should be resolved through bilateral agreements, not demonstrations. (RFE/RL)

KAZAKH PRESIDENT PROPOSES CENTRAL ASIAN UNION ON THE EU MODEL

23 February

President Nursultan Nazarbayev of Kazakhstan has proposed the forming of a "Central Asian Union".

"The Treaty of eternal friendship between Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan can serve as a solid foundation for such union," Nazarbayev said during his annual appeal at the joint session of both houses of Kazakhstan's parliament. Other countries of the region (Tajikistan and Turkmenistan) can join the new union. Mr Nazarbayev stressed: "In the region, we share economic interest, cultural heritage, language, religion, and environmental challenges, and face common external threats." "The founding fathers of the European Union could only wish they had so much in common," he emphasized. "We should direct our efforts towards a closer economic integration, a common market and a single currency," he noted.

"The global economy demands larger markets," Nazarbayev added. In his opinion, today "we are again witnessing superpower rivalry for economic dominance in our region. We have to address correctly this new global and geo-economics challenge. We have a choice between remaining the supplier of raw materials to the global markets and wait patiently for the emergence of the next imperial master or to pursue genuine economic integration of the central Asian region," he said. "I choose the latter," stressed the President. "Further regional integration will lead to stability, regional progress, and economic, military and political independence. This is the only way for our region to earn respect in the world. This is the only way to achieve security, and to fight effectively against terrorism and extremism. Regional integration will advance the interests of all the common folk that live in Central Asia." (Uzreport.com)

