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CAUCASUS

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Central Asia- Caucasus Institute
Silk Road Studies Program

Central Asia-Caucasus Analyst

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THE CENTRAL ASIA-CAUCASUS ANALYST

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The Central Asia-Caucasus 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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Submission Guidelines:

Analytical Articles: Analytical articles require a three to four sentence Key Issue 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. The ideal length of analytical articles is between 1,000 and 1,300 words. The articles are structured as follows:

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

BACKGROUND: 300-450 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: 300-450 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.

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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AMERICA STRIKES BACK? GEOPOLITICAL RIVALRY IN CENTRAL ASIA AND THE CAUCASUS

Stephen Blank

By all indications, the United States has decided to intensify its challenge to Russia's neo-imperial policies in the CIS. President George W. Bush, Vice-President Dick Cheney, and Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice have all recently made clear statements of unhappiness with Russia's regression away from democratization, its efforts to use energy to blackmail and intimidate CIS governments, and its efforts to use energy and other instruments of power as a means to excluding American presence from the CIS. Washington has also announced a series of initiatives regarding Central Asia and the Transcaucasus that betoken an enhanced and more forthright geopolitical rivalry with Russia (and China) in the CIS.

BACKGROUND: The statements and intentions coming out of Washington do not herald the advance of a new Cold War, as some of the more hysterical comments coming out of Moscow indicated, but they could very well signify an end to strategic partnership. More precisely, they do signify Washington's realization, albeit rather late in the game, that geopolitical rivalry in the borderlands is for real and not as former State Department officials claimed, a "mug's game." Win-win solutions involving Moscow and Washington are unlikely to be broached by Washington, and it may more forthrightly acknowledge that a rivalry in these areas exists.

Despite earlier professions or expectations after September 11 of Russo-American cooperation in the CIS, Russia in fact used the advent of U.S. troops to Central Asia to reinvigorate its comprehensive drive to reintegrate the CIS around its energy, economic, and military initiatives. While State Department officials proclaimed that Washington sought no geopolitical rivalry in Central Asia and the South Caucasus, Russian officials increasingly loudly sought to induce or compel these states to follow Russia's line and made clear their opposition to America's presence there. And while American aid to Central Asia declined and its strategy became increasingly caught up in the call for democratization, Russia spent more money on building ties to the region and its instruments of

power, including both economic and military means. Worse yet, Washington displayed no interest or willingness to counter the widespread propaganda, emanating from Moscow and local regimes, that the U.S. Government or the CIA was behind the Rose, Orange and Tulip revolutions, and that it was planning to unseat more Central Asian or CIS regimes.

This lack of any kind of public diplomacy represented a grievous fault, and grievously has Washington paid for it. In fact, Washington's silence convinced Central Asian governments that Washington either did not understand their region or share its concerns, or that it was actively opposed to the continuation of their admittedly repressive and authoritarian regimes. They were also convinced that Washington did not understand what was self-evident to them, although also self-serving, namely that the only alternative to their rule is not democracy but either a different set of authoritarian and crooked regimes or terrorism, a threat they take very seriously even if it is deliberately exaggerated.

Worse yet, before 2005 Washington gave no answer either to local regimes or to Moscow and Beijing as to what its strategic aims or objectives were in Uzbekistan or elsewhere in Central Asia. And though it handsomely paid the Akayev regime for its use of the Manas base in Kyrgyzstan, it conspicuously refused to reward the Karimov regime equally.

This last motive in particular, not the push for democracy, was the main driving force behind Uzbekistan's estrangement from the United States. But Tashkent's egregious human rights behavior at Andijan, as well as before and since that vent, only added fuel to the fire of mutual estrangement and encouraged Russia and China to support the ouster of U.S. forces from Uzbekistan. Both those states are also seeking to push the U.S. base out of Kyrgyzstan, though Washington is only slowly waking up to this.

IMPLICATIONS: The aforementioned trends indicated that as of 2005, the democracy campaign was becoming counterproductive, that the U.S. had taken Central Asia for granted, that its policymaking processes and institutions were incoherent as regards that region, and that Russia and China, newly invigorated by rising economies, were now confident in their ability to fight back and resist American imperatives.

In reply, Washington has lately begun to craft a new policy to meet these changing circumstances.

First, its relationship with Uzbekistan is moribund if not dead. Cooperation is unlikely except on urgent issues like removing nuclear materials and reactors from there with Russian cooperation. Instead, Washington will now look to the thriving Kazakhstan as its main partner there. This new stance owes much to the need for diversification of energy. Secretary of Energy Samuel Bodman and Vice-President Cheney both traveled to Kazakhstan to encourage it to join the Baku-Ceyhan pipeline and avoid Russian schemes for total energy domination of Central Asia. But beyond that, Washington will continue aiding Kazakhstan and Azerbaijan militarily, particularly with regard to their navies so that they can independently defend their Caspian Sea energy platforms and interests, without being swallowed up in Moscow's plans for a Russian-dominated Caspian navy.

Second, the State Department has announced its intention to place Nagorno-Karabakh and other frozen conflicts on the agenda for the forthcoming G-8 meetings in July in St. Petersburg. While it is unclear if Russia is contributing to the stalemate in Karabakh, it certainly lies behind the failure to make any progress

on the 'frozen' conflicts in Moldova and Georgia. Thus Washington will use this occasion to arraign Russia in public if not confront it in private at those meetings on those issues and possibly reinvigorate its diplomatic efforts to move them to resolution, as is currently happening with regard to the Karabakh conflict.

Third, the State Department has not only reorganized itself to bring Central and South Asian states into a single bureau led by Assistant Secretary of State Richard Boucher, it also is offering bold new proposals to help integrate Central and South Asian infrastructures through massive electricity projects and other future energy projects. India and Pakistan already are seeking oil and gas from the area and they need electricity too. Success in implementing these large-scale projects will also redound very much to the stability and further prosperity of Afghanistan. In view of the U.S.' strategic partnership with India, this program also would materially aid India's continuing military and economic efforts to upgrade its strategic presence in Central Asia.

Fourth, the Administration in April welcomed Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev to Washington in spite of earlier qualms about human rights and democracy. Again, this signals intensified interest in energy and in neutralizing Iran as well as Russia in the South Caucasus. Although Azerbaijan cannot accept being used as a base in a possible Iran operation, it can continue to give overflight rights for planes going to Manas and Afghanistan, help influence Kazakhstan to join the Baku-Ceyhan pipeline, and devise alternatives to Russian schemes for energy export.

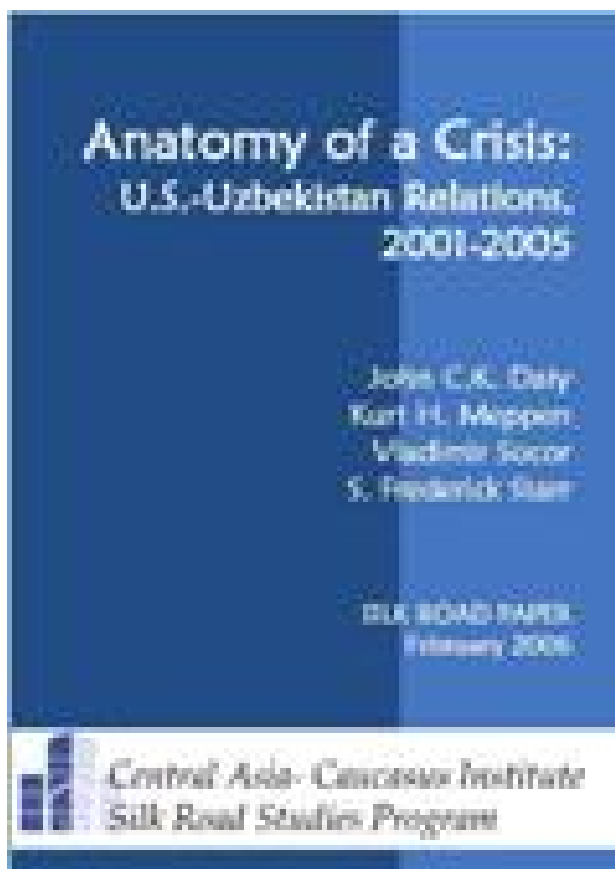
Aliyev's visit to Washington and Cheney's to Astana may also signify the Administration's increased awareness that its democracy project ran into the sand and was terribly counterproductive in Central Asia. Certainly it gained nothing for Uzbeks, Kazakhs and others, and only led their governments closer to Moscow. Although a Senatorial move to impose sanctions on Uzbekistan's leaders is now underway, any successful program to improve governance in Central Asia must engage both the governments and the reform communities in these regions to have any chance of success. Moreover, as geopolitical rivalry

with Moscow grows, more classically defined national interests are likely to prevail as the U.S. priority, because if Washington cannot maintain dialogue with these regimes, it cannot gain much access to reformers or leverage the bilateral relationship with their governments in favor of reform.

CONCLUSIONS: All these moves add up to the beginning of a framework for a new and different American policy. But for it to succeed, there must be far greater inter-agency cohesion than was previously the case and much greater awareness of the strategic realities in the region. For example, it is unlikely that Kazakhstan can or will play the role of Washington's main partner if that endangers its careful balancing act with its two neighbors, Russia and China. More resources must also be devoted to the areas along with placing it on a higher profile so that cabinet members and higher officials continue to travel there, and their

opposite numbers visit Washington more frequently. Such a shift is necessary, because these are the areas of priority of Russian (and to a slightly lesser degree Chinese) engagement. As the past few years have clearly shown, Russia and China will not countenance anything like win-win schemes, which are completely contrary to their cognitive universe and experience. While it is not certain that America's new moves represent a fully reconceived and coherent policy, what is clear is that the geopolitical rivalry in the Caucasus and Central Asia is now moving into high gear and will remain there for a long time to come.

AUTHOR'S BIO: Professor Stephen Blank, Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, Carlisle Barracks, PA. The views expressed here do not represent those of the US Army, Defense Dept. or the U.S. Government.



New Silk Road Paper!

Anatomy of a Crisis: U.S.-Uzbekistan Relations, 2001-2005

by John C. K. Daly,
Kurt H. Meppen,
Vladimir Socor
and S. Frederick Starr

Few, if any, observers anticipated the rapid downward spiral of U.S.-Uzbek relations during the past several years. This *Silk Road Paper* includes two articles and a detailed, annotated chronology, which seeks to identify the causes for the collapse of the strategic partnership, providing a clear understanding of the sequences of events that is necessary for both Washington and Tashkent to look ahead and seek to plot a rational path forward.

This 110-page paper is available from the offices of the Joint Center cited on the inside cover of this issue, or freely downloadable in PDF format from either www.cacianalyst.org or www.silkroadstudies.org.

KADYROV'S BLUFF': WHY CHECHNYA'S STRONGMAN CONTINUES TO TEST HIS POLITICAL BOUNDARIES

Kevin Daniel Leahy

A number of observers have recently alluded to the increasingly tense relationship between pro-Moscow Chechen president Alu Alkhanov and his newly appointed prime minister, Ramzan Kadyrov. On a superficial level, the deterioration in their relationship stems largely from a latent hostility on Alkhanov's part arising from political and personal pride, as well as from a certain economic rivalry between the two men. However, the roots of this tension are to be found in the subtext of Moscow's decision making structures pertaining to Chechnya, which in recent times have manifested a distinctly dichotomous character.

BACKGROUND: While visiting Jordan during October of last year, Alu Alkhanov went on record, complaining that his then-first deputy prime minister, Ramzan Kadyrov, was undermining his rule as president. This was the first overt indication of tension between the two men since Alkhanov – equipped with the Kadyrovsty's requisite blessing – acceded to the presidency in August 2004. Back then, Kadyrov heralded him as “a steadfast general, a firm politician and a principal opponent of separatism”. In truth, however, this rather curt endorsement was almost certainly duplicitous, for Kadyrov evidently regarded the former interior ministry general as weak and malleable – certainly no threat to his own role as power-broker within the structures of the pro-Moscow regime. Indeed, the true extent of Alkhanov's authority was soon called into question when allegations surfaced that he was ‘kicking up’ money to his de facto superior, Kadyrov. In fact, even while still a mere first deputy prime minister, Kadyrov's power and influence went far beyond that commonly associated with such a post. His writ is extensive, mainly because of the considerable paramilitary structures he controls. As a result of this, as well as the political patronage he receives from certain key personages in Moscow, he clearly believes that his political star is on the rise.

In recent months, Kadyrov has frequently made sweeping, seemingly off-the-cuff remarks on series of controversial topics, ranging from the redrawing of long-standing territorial boundaries to polygamy. Upon becoming acting premier, his pronouncements became ever more bold and ad hoc, a trend which – for the time being, at least – has seemingly reached an apogee following his rash (and possibly unconstitutional) decision to suspend the activities of the Danish Refugee Council in Chechnya. This brash decision, taken on foot of the publication of caricatures of the Prophet Mohammed in a Danish newspaper, drew condemnation from several prominent Russian politicians who accused the new premier of overstepping his authority. But the fact that Kadyrov feels able to skirt constitutionality so brazenly tells us much about the political dynamics within the pro-Moscow regime in Chechnya, and perhaps even more about the nature of relations between Moscow and Grozny. The successive government posts held by Kadyrov (as first deputy premier and then prime minister) are, by their very inception, to do mainly with economic matters concerning the republic. Traditionally, matters of a high political nature, or those pertaining to foreign relations, are the preserve of the president of the republic – in this case, Alu Alkhanov. Kadyrov's nonchalant circumvention of these conventions

shows firstly, how little respect he holds for the integrity of the existing power structures; and secondly, how confident he is that the federal centre will not object unduly to this kind of behavior.

IMPLICATIONS: Since his father's death, Kadyrov has cultivated a healthy working relationship with president Putin and his quietly influential deputy chief of staff, Vladislav Surkov. However, relations with other colleagues - particularly some of those closer to home - are rather less buoyant. Tensions between Russia's military brass and the Kadyrovsty have existed since the time of Kadyrov senior. Echoing sentiments routinely expressed by his late father, Ramzan insists that there are no more "bandit formations" in Chechnya, and can therefore see no reason why federal troops should remain in the republic. When asked about the possible withdrawal of troops during a recent interview with *Kommersant*, Kadyrov simultaneously revealed both his contempt for the Russian generals, and the underlying tensions caused by this issue, remarking: "As for the generals...I'm not going to say that I care about their opinion."

For some in Russia's military hierarchy, however, the prospect of a withdrawal is an anathema. Quite a few harbor vested professional and economic interests in this conflict; interests which can only be upheld through maintaining a federal military presence in Chechnya. Statements from Kadyrov expressing bewilderment at their continued presence are, therefore, decidedly unwelcome and have made him powerful enemies in this constituency. Indeed, it is possible to perceive the recent decision to place Kadyrov's militia under the aegis of the Russian army as the latest overt manifestation of this longstanding, mutual antagonism.

As mentioned previously, Kadyrov's relations with president Alkhanov are deteriorating sharply. The latter clearly feels undermined by the sheer rhetorical impunity of the young prime minister, and indeed numerous observers covering last year's parliamentary elections remarked on the almost tangible tension that exists between the two men.

Importantly, Kadyrov has also irked some important personages further up along the federal chain. Dimitri Kozak, the Russian president's representative in the North Caucasus, is one such person. The Kadyrovsty are representative of the intra-governmental, clan-based "corporate groups", which Kozak believes are at the root of a systemic crisis of government which afflicts the entire region. Indeed, in addition to rebuking Kadyrov over the banning of the Danish Refugee Council, Kozak has also launched an investigation into reports that the study of Islamic literature has become compulsory in Chechen schools. Furthermore, he has recently cast doubt on the prospect of Kadyrov acceding to the presidency at any time in the near future. Clearly, therefore, Kozak and the Russian military (for different reasons) place far less stock in Kadyrov's utility than their immediate superior, president Putin. In fact, Russia's policy toward its client regime in Chechnya - and more particularly toward Kadyrov - has assumed the pantomimic proportions of a 'good cop, bad cop' stage routine, with Putin and Surkov playing the benevolent role of the former, while Kozak, the Russian military, and certain high-placed siloviki assume the more confrontational role of the latter. These siloviki, it should be noted, view Kadyrov with abject suspicion, and many believe that he is a 'creeping separatist'. This incoherence has contributed mightily to Kadyrov's recent injudiciousness: assured of Putin's political goodwill, he feels entirely unencumbered by extra-presidential, federal structures.

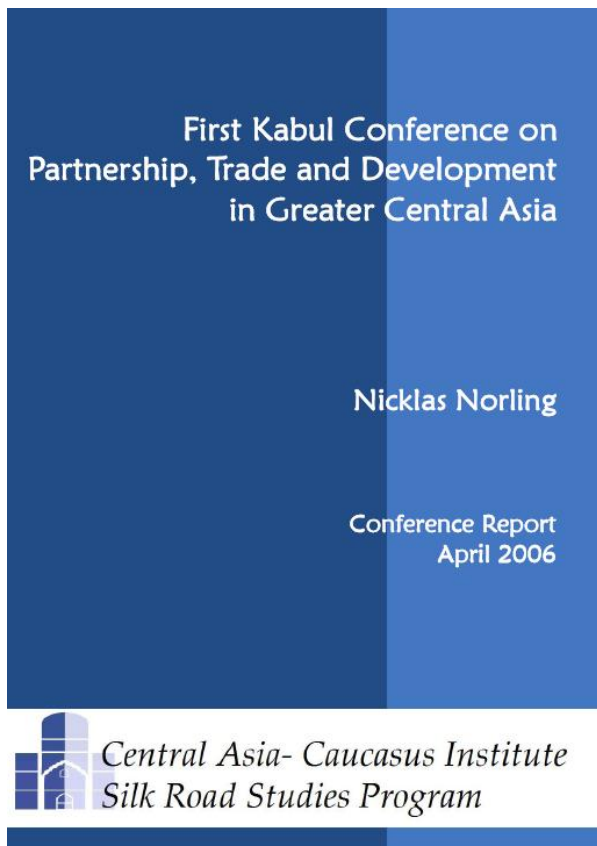
CONCLUSIONS: In light of his recent behavior on the political stage, it seems clear that Ramzan Kadyrov is entirely indifferent about the appropriate decorum befitting a regional head of government. Although to a certain extent Kadyrov's personal arrogance accounts for his insouciance, blame must also be apportioned to the federal authorities. There is a clear dichotomy of approach when it comes to dealing with Kadyrov. Seemingly, the higher up the federal chain one goes, the more indifference one discerns regarding his political uncouthness. Putin and his immediate circle rarely

comment on (let alone condemn) his increasingly frequent extravagances. Commonly, it is left to lower ranking federal representatives to elicit glib, often qualified retractions from him in the wake of such incidents. As long as he receives the unquestioning, entirely uncritical patronage of the president and his immediate circle, Kadyrov will continue to test his political boundaries.

Should the powers that be decide to put a stop to his march, then they would likely begin by shedding this reticence to proffer criticism when deserved. Should they decide not to, then Kadyrov will continue to thumb his nose at Kozak, the Russian military, and political convention in general, while simultaneously escalating intra-governmental tensions between himself and Alkhanov. Finally, Kadyrov's brazenness will invariably give rise to

speculation about the true extent of his loyalty to Putin and his clique. However, to speculate along these lines is to misunderstand the relationship itself, which is ultimately based on mutual self-interest, not loyalty. Putin presently perceives Kadyrov as a capable counterweight to the rebel movement, while Kadyrov increasingly regards his relationship with Putin as a means of staving off his burgeoning array of domestic opponents. Hence, Kadyrov is unlikely to wantonly provoke his benefactors in the Kremlin, as quarrelling with Putin would leave him precariously isolated astride an increasingly fractious domestic political landscape.

AUTHOR'S BIO: Kevin Daniel Leahy holds a postgraduate degree in International Relations from University College Cork, Ireland.



New Conference Report!

**First Kabul Conference on
Partnership, Trade
and Development in
Greater Central Asia**

by Nicklas Norling

This report sums up the discussions held during the conference organized by the Joint Center in cooperation with the First Kazakhstan President Foundation in Kabul, April 1-2, 2006.

This 45-page report is available from the offices of the Joint Center cited on the inside cover of this issue, or freely downloadable in PDF format from either www.cacianalyst.org or www.silkroadstudies.org.

PAKISTAN-AFGHAN RELATIONS: HOSTAGE TO THE PAST

Rahimullah Yusufzai

The uncertain state of relations between Afghanistan and Pakistan is such that points of disagreements crop up suddenly and from the least likely source, such as Kabul's objection to the naming of Pakistani ballistic missiles after Afghan war heroes. President Karzai's February trip to Pakistan was the tenth high-level bilateral visit in four years. A host of agreements has been signed in various fields, and leaders refer to the growing ties between their governments as a sign of their good-neighborly relations. But the security-related irritants continue to haunt their relations and threaten to weaken the U.S.-supervised cooperation between Islamabad and Kabul in the war on terror in the region. At times, it appears that Afghanistan and Pakistan have been unable to put behind them the bitterness of their unfriendly relations in the past.

BACKGROUND: When Pakistan won independence from British rule in 1947, Afghanistan was the only country in the world to oppose its membership in the United Nations. Kabul took the plea that the Pakhtun and Baloch people inhabiting Balochistan and the North-West Frontier Province (NWFP) bordering Afghanistan had not been given the right of self-determination and, as such, their territories were forcibly merged into Pakistan. This led to the Pakhtunistan problem, as successive Afghan governments publicly highlighted the rights of Pakhtuns and Baloch and demanded a separate homeland for the Pakhtun people. However, Afghanistan's support for Pakhtunistan was half-hearted because it didn't want its own Pakhtun population to start thinking of a merger of Pakhtun territories into a single new state of Afghan and Pakistani Pakhtuns. An additional problem was the Durand Line border, which Kabul argued its past rulers agreed to under duress at a time when the British Empire was at its peak.

Kabul began hosting separatist Pakistani Pakhtuns and Baloch and in retaliation Islamabad gave refuge to dissident Afghans. There were occasional border skirmishes during this period but the situation turned serious when Pakistan in the early 1970s

agreed to give refuge to leaders of Afghan Islamic groups including Gulbaddin Hekmatyar, Maulvi Yunis Khalis and Burhanuddin Rabbani following a failed uprising against the government of President Sardar Mohammad Daoud.

The communist Saur Revolution in Afghanistan in April 1978 and the ensuing Soviet invasion changed the political scenario of the region, making Pakistan a so-called "frontline state" that hosted the seven major Afghan resistance groups and arming, training and equipping mujahideen fighters in cooperation with the CIA. Pakistan became increasingly deeply involved in Afghanistan through its support first for the Afghan mujahideen and subsequently the Taliban. Yet Pakistan took a U-turn under U.S. pressure in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks by giving up its support to the Taliban regime and facilitating Washington's military intervention in Afghanistan in October 2001. Islamabad's help was crucial in ousting the Taliban from power and pursuing the US war on terror against al-Qaeda in the region.

The US is keen to seek continued Pakistani support in its war against al-Qaeda and the Taliban. It knows that friendly relations between Islamabad and Kabul are vital to sustain this war and extend the writ of President Karzai's fledgling government

to all parts of Afghanistan, particularly the Pakhtun-populated provinces on the border with Pakistan. American military commanders have frequently complained that their soldiers risk harm at the hands of Taliban fighters who often find refuge in Pakistan and receive sympathy and support in the tribal areas bordering Afghanistan. It was largely due to U.S. pressure and inducements that Islamabad agreed to deploy about 80,000 soldiers in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA), which includes the restive South Waziristan and North Waziristan, to hunt down al-Qaeda and Taliban-linked foreign and Pakistani militants hiding in the tough, mountainous terrain close to the Durand Line border. More than 600 Pakistani soldiers have been killed in fighting in the area. Even though the foreign and local militants have suffered setbacks and lost most of their sanctuaries in both South and North Waziristan, that war is far from over.

IMPLICATIONS: The uncertain nature of Pak-Afghan relations could also be evidenced from the criticism one hears from certain Afghan intellectuals and sections of the increasingly vibrant media in Afghanistan about Pakistan Army's operations against al-Qaeda and Taliban suspects in the two Waziristans and rest of the tribal areas. In their view, the Pakistan government under certain protocols was under obligation to take Afghanistan into confidence before sending troops and undertaking military action in the Pakistani tribal areas. The US and NATO military commanders, on the other hand, want even more Pakistani troops in the tribal areas to take the battle to the al-Qaeda and Taliban commanders and fighters reportedly hiding there.

The Afghan authorities, together with the media and some members of the intelligentsia, are also critical of Pakistan for closing down camps for Afghan refugees in the two Waziristans and in other parts of the tribal areas. In fact, the Pakistani decision to shut down the camps for Afghan refugees is supported by both the U.S. and Afghan governments because it deprives the Taliban of

places where they could find refuge and recruit new members.

Such distrust and criticism has often led to angry rebuttals and poisoned relations between the two neighboring countries. Though much headway has been made in terms of enhanced trade ties linking Kabul with Islamabad, the political problems refuse to go away and prevent the two countries from achieving the full potential of their economic cooperation. The volume of Pakistan's trade with Afghanistan has reached one billion dollars from about \$200 million during the Taliban rule. Some hesitant steps have also been taken to enhance social, cultural and sports ties and experimental runs of the bus service between Peshawar and Jalalabad have taken place. However, all this becomes irrelevant in forging closer ties between the two countries as soon as authorities in Kabul start blaming Islamabad for the violence in parts of Afghanistan and the Pakistanis react by pointing out how ungrateful the Afghans were after having enjoyed Pakistani hospitality for years.

CONCLUSIONS: Relations between Afghanistan and Pakistan are still hostage to the past. The bitterness that began with Afghanistan's hostile reaction to Pakistani membership of the UN has haunted their ties for 59 years since Pakistan's independence. Interference in each other's affairs, culminating in Pakistan's influential role in choosing Afghan rulers for a while in the 1980s, has further complicated the situation. So much is the lack of trust among Afghan and Pakistani authorities that the former claim Osama bin Laden was in Pakistan and the latter insist the al-Qaeda leader was hiding in Afghanistan. This is one way to pass on the blame for the failures in the U.S.-led war on terror.

The Americans have encouraged setting up forums to enable the Afghans and Pakistanis to quietly discuss their complaints against each other and remove misgivings. One such forum is the tripartite military commission aimed at coordinating anti-terror operations by armed forces of Pakistan, Afghanistan and the US in the region. Such arrangements have further empowered the U.S. to

interfere in the affairs of Afghanistan and Pakistan and serve as a referee and arbiter in disputes involving the two countries. However, the lack of trust between Kabul and Islamabad is so acute that the two are often unable to bilaterally resolve their disputes without third-party intervention. Owing to growing Taliban insurgency in Afghanistan, one cannot hope for any improvement in the security situation in the war-ravaged country. The embattled Afghan government is expected to become even more

critical of Pakistan in future on account of the increase in Taliban attacks. Pakistan is likely to reply in the same currency, and there are already

signs that its tone in denying accusations of support for Taliban is becoming aggressive. The fireworks will continue, and it would be futile to expect any major improvement in their uneasy political and diplomatic ties in the near future.

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THE CHANGING NATURE OF AZERBAIJANI ELECTIONS

Alman Mir Ismail

The re-elections to the Azerbaijani Parliament on May 13 showed considerable progress in the conduct of the election on actual Election Day, including during the vote count procedures. Yet, it also showed the growing power of money, which allows oligarch-type candidates to “buy” votes prior the election day. As long as these are government-connected, no reason remains for the authorities to engage in fraud. Yet, this tendency shows the dangerous future for the multi-party system in the country, with a majority of the opposition parties being in poor and marginalized condition and not able to compete in such money-driven political races.

BACKGROUND: On May 13, Azerbaijan held “mini” parliamentary elections, re-runs in the ten constituency remaining vacant since last November due to the election fraud there and the subsequent annulment of the election results by the Central Election Commission and the Constitutional Court. These re-elections presented the government of Azerbaijan with another opportunity to prove to the international community and domestic voters that it is capable of pulling together its political will and

to conduct free and fair elections. At the same time, it presented a new test to the international community, more specifically to the Council of Europe, where Azerbaijan’s commitments to democracy will be discussed in the June session.

The pre-election campaign season was much calmer and less dynamic as the one in November, due to obvious reasons of voter apathy and the boycott of the re-elections by the major *Azadliq* opposition

block. Yet, all eyes were focused on the actual Election Day and particularly to the moment of vote count, since almost all previous elections in the country experienced major election fraud in this field. Notably, last year the OSCE/ODIHR monitoring mission reported that the “counting process in more than 43 percent of the polling stations observed were bad or very bad.”

This time, the conduct of the elections on actual Election Day, including the vote count, experienced major improvements. The U.S. Embassy in Baku released a statement on Monday, which said that “The United States believes there was some progress in the conduct of Azerbaijan’s May 13 parliamentary rerun elections, and shares the views in the May 15 statement by the OSCE/ODIHR Limited Election Observation Mission. Specifically, we welcome improvements in finger-inking, candidate registration, largely unimpeded campaigning, and quick posting of the results on the website of the Central Election Commission. We were pleased to see the large numbers of domestic election observers who participated, including representatives of the Election Monitoring Center.”

The Council of Europe monitoring group’s head Leo Platvoet also expressed a similar opinion on ANS TV’s *Nezer Nogtesi* program about the visible progress during the rerun elections. Both the U.S. embassy and Council of Europe also noted some remaining shortcomings in the election process, such as the composition of the election commissions, yet still most international observers came to the conclusion that the by-elections were cleaner and fairer than previous elections. Similarly, the OSCE/ODIHR monitoring mission also noted that “the repeat election process reflected some improvements, such as an inclusive candidate registration, a largely unimpeded campaign, and increased opportunities for the participation of domestic observers.” Ali Hasanov, head of the President’s Office’s Political Department said that the “by-elections proved that the Azerbaijani government is interested in democracy and that it is willing to apply its political will to conduct free and fair elections.”

It should be also noted that the results of several exit polls conducted by independent foreign NGOs, including the one sponsored by the U.S. Government, were almost entirely consistent with official results. The winners were overwhelmingly candidates of the ruling *Yeni Azerbaijan Party* (YAP) and independents with affiliations with the authorities.

IMPLICATIONS: What is the reason behind this landslide victory of the ‘candidates of power’ even as the vote count appeared free and fair? The answer could lie in the changing nature of Azerbaijani elections. For the most part of the 1990s and early 2000s, the elections were fraudulent due to the fact that the ‘candidates of power’ were not campaigning actively on the ground and were mostly relying on the President’s office and the YAP headquarters for political support. The Parliament in the 1990s was mostly composed of representatives of the intelligentsia and former Soviet Nomenklatura, who were unwilling and incapable to wage a modern-style election campaign. Besides, at that time, the opposition parties were much stronger and voters were much more driven by ideology.

In today’s Azerbaijan, the emerging business elite and the increasing ambitions of wealthy oligarchs to enter politics are driving the intelligentsia and YAP-supported Nomenklatura into the shadows. It is these wealthy, government-connected personalities that now play the most important role in the elections. They spend huge amounts of money on advertisement, voter outreach activities (concerts, town hall meetings, door-to-door campaigning) as well as often through ‘vote buying’, both literally and through persuasion and pressure. Meanwhile, the opposition parties are in complete stagnation after more than thirteen years of continued losses and marginalization. The general Azerbaijani public has also moved away from the ideologically driven politics of the 1990s to more pragmatic and day-to-day materialistic politics of the 2000s.

With substantial numbers of people still living in poverty and difficult socio-economic conditions, many of them happily trade their votes for money

or deliverables such as paved roads and fixed electricity lines, the power of money is becoming the most important factor in the election process. Thus, most of the wealthy, oligarchic 'candidates of power' are able to secure votes prior to election day, and there is little incentive remaining for the authorities to commit election fraud on actual election day, including during the vote count. This is facilitated by the electoral system, based on single-members constituencies, which weakens the role of political parties and provides opportunities for single candidates to win elections in individual districts by delivering or promising to deliver goods.

The May 13 rerun elections could change the nature of Azerbaijani politics. From now on, candidates with money are in a much more advantageous position to win seats in parliament. Thus, the poor and marginalized opposition parties are unlikely to continue to lose future elections and stay out of the decision making process.

This tendency is on the one hand an improvement, as it implies a lesser degree of state interference in the electoral process and a more pluralistic process. Indeed, in both the November and May elections, some parliamentary seats were hotly contested by several representatives that were closely connected to the authorities. On the surface at least, it will be the people that choose their representatives.

But on the other hand, the present tendency is dangerous, because it risks to reduce liberal democratic values in society even as elections are free and fair. As one former candidate to the November 2005 Parliamentary elections put it, "in today's Azerbaijan if there are free and fair elections, only oligarchs will enter the Parliament." As long as there is a strong state, this will mean stability in parliament. But as witnessed in Kyrgyzstan, parliamentary elections, if unchecked,

can become hideouts for business interests of a more shady and even criminal type.

CONCLUSIONS: Azerbaijan has entered a new phase in its democratic development, a phase where the actual election process can be conducted freely and fairly without major violations of law, something long wished for and advocated by the international community. Yet this will not mean that the political system will be built on democracy and liberal-democratic values – it will not be a marketplace of ideas but simply a marketplace. This is to a significant extent related to the decreasing appeal of political ideologies to the population, compared to material benefits of a growing economy. Resource-scare opposition parties are at a serious disadvantage to compete in such an election environment, and most elected oligarch MPs support the policy of the government, at least for now. Thus, Azerbaijan is increasingly moving towards a style of governance lacking an active and vibrant public debate and a real balance of power between government and opposition.

If this shows that the government has adapted its strategies to new realities, it equally indicates that the opposition has completely failed to do so. Hence it will now be up to the opposition to restore its capability to promote an issue-based debate and participate in the political life of the country with alternative policy views. Whether this will happen will also be dependent on state policy and on the role of external actors.

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FIELD REPORTS

RELIGIOUS QUESTIONS IN AZERBAIJAN'S NORTH

Gulnara Ismailova

In Azerbaijan's northern regions, increasing amounts of leaflets with religious content have been distributed, asking Muslims to forsake the Islamic traditions that have developed for centuries in Azerbaijan. Missionary organizations distribute these leaflets by throwing them into the courtyards of houses.

The leaflets include messages noting that it is not necessary to establish gravestone monuments above the tombs of close relatives. They claim it is enough to set up a raw stone without inscriptions above a grave mound. Leaflets also teach that it is not necessary to arrange commemorations following the death of a person. According to experts, Azerbaijan's convenient geographical location, the realization of large-scale international energy projects and the low level of religious awareness among the population are reasons that radical religious organizations of a Wahhabi persuasion are seeking to spread their message.

Wahhabism has emerged in the northern regions of Azerbaijan in the past several years. Of Azerbaijan's more than 1,400 mosques, ca. 150, mainly in northern areas of the country as well as the Abubakr Mosque in Baku, are controlled by Wahhabis. If the typical Azerbaijani mosques are visited mainly by representatives of the elder generation the Wahhabi mosques cater to an audience of people mainly in their twenties, or some in their thirties.

The head of the State committee on work with religious organizations (SCWRO) Rafik Aliyev has repeatedly talked about the stirring up of Wahhabism in the frontiers of the northern areas of the country. Speaking of the leaflets, he observed that "they offer to the Azerbaijani people to accept

'a true Islam', 'true canons of Islam', etc. I think there are certain groups who wish to strain the situation around religious communities, and in general in the country. We should not pay excessive attention to these leaflets, and they are not of serious content, capable in any way of significantly destabilizing the situation in Azerbaijan".

In its turn, the Spiritual Directorate of Muslims of the Caucasus (SDMC), is taking action against the distribution of such literature in Azerbaijan and accuses the State Committee of inactivity in this instance. According to theology expert Nariman Gasimoglu, a reduction of radical Islamist activity in Azerbaijan is not to be expected. "The forces trying to distribute in the country the Islamic extremism of its worst kind, i.e. wahhabism, represents the greatest danger. Missionaries from the Arabian countries, in particular Saudi Arabia as well as from Iran, are increasingly active. The backbone of the extremist cells created by them is basically made up of young men in their early twenties from vulnerable families, as well as students with major in theology and unemployed students".

SCWRO representative Elchin Askerov argues that wahhabism is not dangerous per se, but that only its radical branch is. "Radicals accuse other wahhabis of not following "the true doctrine". Carriers of radical ideas do not gather in mosques, but prefer to carry out confidential assemblies. However, these groups are not capable to create any threat in the country yet. At the same time I wish to emphasize that the Azerbaijan authorities hold the situation, including religious issues, under strict control even

in the most remote regions and are capable to prevent any threat to public and political stability.

Making comments on the recent increase in the activity of Islamic radical groups in Azerbaijan, the minister of National Security, Eldar Mahmudov, declared that they aspire to change the secular character of Azerbaijani statehood. "Though we have good experience in fighting the activities of radical religious and terrorist organizations, information has just emerged on plans on the part of the 'Al-Qaeda Caucasus' group to recruit Azerbaijani girls into the troops of suicide terrorists. This is the worst revelation we have been exposed to in the past several years".

At the end of April, the Court on Severe Crimes sentenced to long terms of imprisonment the head and members of the Islamic group "Djamaat al-Muvahiddun". Seven representatives of Wahabbi underground groups were sentenced to between 9 and 15 years. They were charged with preparing acts

of terrorism, using of violence against representatives of the state authority, of robbery, purchase and storage of explosives, illegal passing of state borders, and usage of others' passports.

Radical wahabbis are pursued in Azerbaijan but, as Baku analysts note, the more strongly authorities pursue them, the more popularity they gain. According to estimates by experts, the number of Wahhabis in Azerbaijan has increased from ca. 6,000 five years ago to 25,000 or more presently.

Experts studying the radical islamization of parts of the youth converge in the opinion that this phenomenon is caused by the increasing numbers of uneducated and desperate young men who have no opportunities for self-realization, and also the existence of refugee camps where various external forces operate under the cover humanitarian assistance. Until these problems are eliminated, Azerbaijan will remain a fertile field for radical religious organizations and sects.

KNOWN MAFIA BOSS MURDERED IN KYRGYZSTAN

Erica Marat

On May 10, reputed criminal kingpin Rysbek Akmatbaev was assassinated in a village near the Kyrgyz capital Bishkek. Better known by his first name, Rysbek was a near-mythic figure in Kyrgyzstan. Since the early 1990s, he was known across Kyrgyzstan as the informal leader of the Issyk-Kul oblast. Rysbek controlled local businesses through racketeering. At the same time he sponsored numerous championships and provided financial support to various sportsmen.

Rysbek became politically active after his younger brother, Tynychbek Akmatbaev, died in a October 2005 prison riot. Tynychbek, a member of

parliament, headed the parliamentary committee on organized crime. In the days following Tynychbek's assassination, Rysbek collected crowds in central Bishkek to demand the resignation of Kyrgyz prime minister Felix Kulov down. He accused Kulov of responsibility in Tynychbek's death and of being allied with imprisoned mafia boss and Akmatbaev brothers' long-time foe Aziz Batukaev, an ethnic Chechen.

Rysbek survived two assassination attempts in 1996 and 2000, reportedly instigated by Batukaev. He had the reputation of being a devoted Muslim. Rysbek's supporters held public prayers during protests

against Kulov. Some Kyrgyz experts claim that Rysbek informally backed Kyrgyz president Kurmanbek Bakiev and his son Maksim Bakiev.

During the reign of Askar Akayev, Rysbek was escaping government prosecution in Kazakhstan, Russia and West European states. After the March 24, 2005, Tulip Revolution, Rysbek and his six crime accomplices were acquitted of all charges, including triple homicide. However, a few weeks after the trial, three members of Rysbek's gang were assassinated.

On April 10, Rysbek won a parliamentary seat through by-elections with almost 80 percent support in his hometown of Balykchi. As a part of his political campaign, Rysbek promised to force all parliament and government members with large businesses to pay taxes. Apparently, Rysbek possessed controversial information and incriminating evidence against some political leaders.

However, the Central Election Commission (CEC) delayed registering Rysbek's victory. The Kyrgyz political elite seemed to have divided into two groups – those in support of Rysbek's legitimate victory and those against. However, Rysbek hired a team of prominent lawyers to contest hurdles set by the CEC. In contrast to government officials, Kyrgyz civil society mobilized in an unprecedented peaceful demonstration to oppose the merger of the political and criminal worlds. On April 29, about 15,000 people marched in central Bishkek to protest the penetration of criminal figures into the state and to remind President Bakiev of the widespread corruption across state structures.

According to Rysbek, he was the “uncrowned” thief in law in Kyrgyzstan. Rysbek clearly had both friends and foes within the Kyrgyz government and parliament. His cooperative and conflicting relations with some lawmakers and state officials provoked latent disagreements between various political forces. Moreover, expressed support or condemnation against Rysbek's participation in the

Kyrgyz politics revealed informal coalitions between state officials and organized criminal groups.

A number of controversial versions regarding Rysbek's possible assassins are being discussed in the Kyrgyz mass media. The Kyrgyz president and prime minister are among the suspected. Rysbek's impunity gained after the March 24 revolution considerably undermined Bakiev's public approval rating. At the same time, it was clear that Rysbek openly threatened Kulov by declaring a *jihad* against him. Furthermore, some Kyrgyz analysts assume that law-enforcement agencies were interested in removing the controversial criminal because of his increased political power. The official version of the Kyrgyz Ministry of Interior, however, asserts that Rysbek died as a result of a violent showdown between competing criminal gangs.

There are also some suspicions that Rysbek is still alive and he simply staged his own assassination to leave the political scene and escape public attention. It was considered suspicious that only a week after Rysbek's death, his family members came to meet with president Bakiev despite the fact that the seven-day death commemoration is an important event in Kyrgyz traditions. Moreover, although official sources from law enforcement confirmed Rysbek's death, no medical expertise was consulted nor was the body seen.

By all means, Rysbek's death shook Kyrgyz political circles. Against the background of the recent armed clash at the Tajik-Kyrgyz border between Kyrgyz border guards and a militant group on May 12, when six civilians and soldiers died, Bakiev's meeting with the family of a slain criminal generated popular criticism.

Rysbek's death signals that showdowns between state officials and illegal non-state actors are ongoing and turning increasingly violent in Kyrgyzstan. The removal of the mafia boss will likely propel his numerous supporters to act more aggressively against rival political forces.

IMU ACCUSED OF ATTACK ON TAJIK, KYRGYZ BORDER POSTS

Kakha Jibladze

Last week, a group of armed people attacked Tajik and Kyrgyz border posts in the Ferghana Valley, seizing weapons and killing at least six people. The attack has been blamed on the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) which carried out armed incursions in the region in 1999-2000. There might also be a connection with the January attack on a prison in northern Tajikistan.

In the dead of night, at 2.00 AM on 12 May, gunmen attacked the Lyakkon border post in the Isfara region in northern Tajikistan, killing three border guards. The attackers seized 19 automatic rifles, one heavy-caliber machine gun and cartridges there, before escaping to Kyrgyzstan's Batken province across the border. The men changed the Opel they were driving in Kyrgyzstan for a passing Mercedes Benz - killing its unlucky driver. Passing Batken on their way to the second largest city of Kyrgyzstan, Osh, the gunmen attacked a Kyrgyz border post at about 5.00 AM, when Kyrgyz guards started to check their car. They killed a further two border guards and wounded one custom official as well as a border guard in the ensuing shoot-out. The men then tried to escape in their car but because it was damaged in the fight, they had to leave it in a nearby village, after which they escaped to the mountains, taking the weapons with them. A rumor that the group also attacked an Uzbek border post has been denied by Uzbek officials.

In one of the two cars that the gunmen had left behind on their raiding trip, 17 automatic rifles and the machine gun were found. In the other, border guards found a mask and traces of blood. The gunmen would have been at least seven persons strong; up to four may have been killed during the attack in Kyrgyzstan and two others were later arrested, but reports differs on this matter. Officials say the members of the group comprised citizens of Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan.

Both Tajik and Kyrgyz authorities claim the gunmen were members of the IMU, the radical Islamic movement that is thought to have been largely destroyed in Afghanistan at the end of 2001 during the U.S.-led assault on Taliban-ruled Afghanistan. The group's original aim was to bring down the regime of Uzbek president Islam Karimov - but apart from Uzbeks, attracted also Kyrgyz and Tajiks under its banner. The group made armed incursions into southern Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan in 1999-2000, after which it found shelter in Afghanistan. The movement was weakened greatly during the campaign against the Taliban in 2001. But according to the Tajik authorities, it has become increasingly active after the mass killings in the Uzbek city of Andijan in May 2005, which the Uzbek authorities blame on an uprising by Islamic radicals. The official version now is that the group which attacked the border posts is connected to the IMU and Hizb-ut-Tahrir, another radical but to self-avowedly peaceful Islamic organization.

True or not, there seems to be a link between last week's events and an earlier incident in northern Tajikistan: one of the alleged gunmen was 25-year-old Dilshod Rakhimov, who was wanted since January this year when he attacked the Ghayroghum prison, freeing his brother who was held there on accusations of having connections with the IMU and illegal possession of arms. Then, Dilshod with two or three others would have freed his brother, killing the prison director. Notwithstanding joint Tajik-Kyrgyz efforts, the perpetrators of this deed have not been found. But according to different sources in northern Tajikistan, Dilshod Rakhimov was either arrested or killed during the attack on the Kyrgyz border post. According to one source, Rakhimov used to serve with the border guards at Lyakkon and his

familiarity with the border post would have made it easy for him to attack it when nobody expected it.

Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan cooperated closely to find and eliminate the armed group. The border region is now teeming with police and border forces. Border control has increased in the area where earlier, several border crossings between Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan were completely unguarded.

The aim of the attack is still not clear. One theory has it that the attack is not connected to radical Islam but to drug smuggling. The mountains around the Ferghana Valley, where Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan meet, are one of the

main routes for drugs smugglers, smuggling narcotics from Afghanistan through the Ferghana Valley further to Kazakhstan and Russia.

In both cases, the motive to attack the border posts remains murky. "Incidents in the Tajik-Kyrgyz border area are increasing," says an analyst in Tajikistan, "but if they were radical Islamists, what was their political motive?" As for the drugs smuggling theory: "Bribing officials would have been easier for a small band than fighting your way through."

GEORGIAN MILITARY BASE IN SENAKI OPENED

Kakha Jibladze

On April 30 the Georgian Defense Ministry officially unveiled the Senaki military base in western Georgia. The base highlights the positive trends in the ministry to improve conditions for soldiers. However it also draws attention to the extent of reform still needed to bring the Georgian military up to NATO standards.

The ministry has been under attack lately for non transparent spending and the Minister Irakli Okruashvili's aggressive stance toward both Russia and the de-facto government in South Ossetia. The new military base, located in western Georgia not far from the contested territory of Abkhazia, has fed the separatist governments' accusations that Tbilisi is still considering a military solution to the frozen conflicts in both Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

During the opening event, which took place on the 15th anniversary of the Georgian armed forces, Okruashvili and other government officials were quick to dismiss allegations that the base was built to threaten Sukhumi. According to the minister, the

base has meant jobs for hundreds of locals, which is adding to the economic development of a very depressed part of the country. Other government officials pointed out that for an offensive attack against Abkhazia they would have built the base in Zugdidi, a town much closer to the Abkhaz border than Senaki.

The controversy surrounding the base did not stop Okruashvili, on the day of the opening, from stating on a popular television news program that if Tskhinvali is not part of Georgia by January 1, 2007, he will resign. Even though he referred to the region of South Ossetia which is in a completely different part of the country, conflict analysts criticized the defense minister for his lack of sensitivity. Officials close to the peace process with both territories were quick to distance themselves from his statements. Georgian State Minister for Conflict Resolution Issues Giorgi Khaindrava responded, calling the statement 'groundless' and remarking that bellicose announcements only make the tense situation between Tbilisi and separatist governments worse.

The defense minister also used the base's opening to clear the air concerning the ministry's spending. According to Georgian media reports, construction of the base will cost the ministry a little over \$20 million once it is completed this year. Okruashvili said the government paid a little less than half of that from the state budget; \$5 million reportedly came from the army fund supported by Georgian businessmen.

This fund has been the subject of controversy and scandal for over a year. According to members of NATO states close to the integration process, the funds have been a source of concern for the alliance. The Georgian government announced the funds closed late last year, although military analysts still complain there is no independent oversight commission to watch the ministry's spending.

Transparency concerns aside, the base represents a whole new world for Georgian soldiers. While drafted soldiers still complain of poor conditions and the lack of proper meals, the base in Senaki provides state of the art comfort for 3,500 volunteer servicemen and women. According to the ministry, upon completion there will be separate officer quarters and a sports hall. The base has been touted as meeting 'NATO' standards. While it is unclear exactly what is meant by that definition, the Senaki base is certainly an improvement over older bases. Another such base is scheduled to be built in Akhalkalaki, according to Georgian media reports,

once the Russian base has been dismantled and removed.

According to Okruashvili, this base symbolizes the Georgian army's transition from a mostly drafted army to a professional one: in a televised interview he noted that over half the army is now volunteers instead of conscripts and by 2009 the entire armed force will be volunteers. During his speech at the opening, he noted that volunteers were paid over \$200 a month in 2005 while conscripts received less than \$10.

The base is a bright new face for the Georgian military and a symbol of a dedicated ministry that can provide for its army. However, while the ministry spent an estimated 10 percent of its budget on the Senaki base, critics point out that conscript soldiers are still deserting their stations due to substandard living conditions and insufficient food. The Senaki base is a good beginning on the road toward NATO, but a strong military starts with well-fed soldiers throughout the country. If the defense ministry wants to prove to the world that Georgia is ready to join the NATO alliance, taking care of the conscripts would be a good first step.



*Central Asia- Caucasus Institute
Silk Road Studies Program*

NEWS DIGEST

VISITING DUTCH FOREIGN MINISTER ENDORSES KAZAKH BID FOR OSCE CHAIR

4 May

Speaking after meeting with Kazakh President Nazarbaev in Astana, Dutch Foreign Minister Bernard Bot endorsed on May 4 the Kazakh bid to assume the rotating chairmanship of the OSCE in 2009. Bot commented that "Kazakhstan's chances to chair the OSCE are high" and stressed the significance for the OSCE of having a Central Asian state in the chairmanship. He also noted the need for Kazakhstan to deepen democratic reforms and improve the human-rights situation prior to assuming the position, however. The visit is linked to Dutch interest in increasing investments in the Kazakh energy, financial, and agricultural sectors. Bilateral trade has also been steadily increasing, from \$644 million in 2004 to over \$1 billion last year. (Interfax)

INVESTIGATION OF FORMER KYRGYZ PREMIER CLOSED

4 May

Opposition Kyrgyz parliamentarian and former Prosecutor-General Azimbek Beknazarov announced on May 4 that "all criminal cases" targeting former Kyrgyz Prime Minister Nikolai Tanaev have been closed. Beknazarov criticized Prosecutor-General Kambaraly Kongantiev for halting the corruption investigation involving Tanaev due to "his poor health" and for allowing Tanaev to leave the country for Russia. Tanaev was arrested in September while attempting to leave Kyrgyzstan, reportedly in violation of the terms of his release following his preliminary interrogation. (AKIpress)

TAJIK ISLAMIC PARTY ACCUSES SECURITY FORCES OF MURDER

5 May

A leader of the Islamic Revival Party of Tajikistan (IRP) accused the Tajik Interior Ministry on May 4 of murdering one of the party's activists, RFE/RL's Tajik Service reported. Speaking in Dushanbe, Vahedkhon Quassidinov

said IRP member Sadullo Marufov was arrested on May 3 and detained for questioning at a police station in the northern Tajik town of Isfara, the Avesta website reported. Quassidinov then accused security forces of pushing Marufov to his death from the third floor of the police station and claimed that the findings of an autopsy revealed that Marufov was violently assaulted prior to the fall. Tajik Interior Ministry officials confirmed to RFE/RL's Tajik Service that an unnamed IRP member had died after falling from the third floor of the police station but refused to describe it as a killing. Deputy Interior Minister Abdurahim Qahhorov announced that an official team has been dispatched to Isfara to conduct a thorough investigation. (RFE/RL)

UZBEKISTAN CLOSURES ANOTHER NGO

5 May

An Uzbek court issued an order on May 4 calling for the closure of the local offices of Counterpart International, a nongovernmental group funded in part by the U.S. State Department and the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), according to RFE/RL's Uzbek Service. The Justice Ministry accused the organization of "breaking" a number of unspecified laws, according to Interfax. In a statement released on May 3, Counterpart International defended its work, reporting that it has delivered nearly \$80 million in medical and humanitarian aid during its work in Uzbekistan. The group rejected accusations that it violated Uzbek laws. Over the past six months, Uzbek authorities have closed down a number of nongovernmental organizations, including the offices of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), Freedom House, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty's (RFE/RL) Tashkent bureau, and, last month, a public-service project operated by the American Bar Association, an independent association of lawyers. (RFE/RL)

IRANIAN PRESIDENT ARRIVES TO BAKU TO ATTEND ECO SUMMIT

5 May

Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad arrived in Baku to attend the 9th summit of the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) due to begin on Friday, IRNA reported. Iran, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkey, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan are the member states of the organization. Participants in the one-day meeting are to prepare the agenda of the 9th summit of ECO member states. Besides Ahmadinejad, his counterparts from Afghanistan and Azerbaijan, Hamid Karzai and Ilham Aliyev, as well as the prime ministers of other member states will attend the summit. Officials from some international organizations will also take part in the meeting. In addition to taking part in the summit, Ahmadinejad will hold bilateral meetings on the sidelines of the summit with Aliyev and Karzai and the prime ministers of other ECO member states. Iranian Foreign Minister Manouchehr Mottaki is among those attending the 16th meeting of ECO foreign ministers. Mottaki told IRNA upon his arrival in Baku on Thursday that a more active ECO can help member states achieve self-sufficiency in all fields. The ECO held its 8th summit in Tajikistan on September 14, 2004. (Iran Mania)

THOUSANDS CALL FOR GEORGIAN PRESIDENT'S RESIGNATION

5 May

Some 5,000 people attended an opposition rally in Tbilisi on May 5 to call for the resignation of President Saakashvili and the Georgian government and for closer ties with Russia. The rally was organized by the "Anti-[George] Soros" movement established last fall and by the Samartlianoba (Justice) party headed by former National Security Minister Igor Giorgadze. Anti-Soros leader Maya Nadiradze told participants that 15,000 people have signed a petition demanding that the government resign. (AFP)

RUSSIA DECRIES SPEECH BY U.S. VICE PRESIDENT

5 May

A speech by U.S. Vice President Dick Cheney criticizing Moscow has triggered a bitter backlash in Russia, whose leaders have accused Washington of starting a new Cold War, Reuters reported on May 5. In a speech in Vilnius,

Lithuania, on May 4, Cheney accused Moscow of backsliding on democracy and of using its energy resources for blackmail. Within hours, the Kremlin responded by calling Cheney's comments "completely incomprehensible." Deputy Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said Cheney's speech was "full of a subjective evaluation of us and of the processes that are going on in Russia. The remarks...are completely incomprehensible for us." The daily "Kommersant" on May 5 compared Cheney's comments to British Prime Minister Winston Churchill's famed 1946 "Iron Curtain" speech. In a long commentary, the official government-run daily "Rossiyskaya gazeta" wrote that Russia is "being asked to deny ourselves and take orders from those who know better and will decide everything for us." (RFE/RL)

RUSSIA BANS POPULAR GEORGIAN MINERAL WATER

5 May

Russia announced on May 5, citing health and safety concerns, a ban on imports of the popular Georgian mineral water Borjomi, Russian and international news agencies reported. The move marks the latest in a series of trade disputes between Russia and its Western-leaning neighbors. "Analyses have shown that 56 inspected shipments of Borjomi mineral water...do not correspond to safety requirements," Russia's top public health official, Gennady Onishchenko, wrote in a letter. "I therefore revoke from May 7...Borjomi mineral water safety certificates until the reasons and conditions that have caused the above-mentioned irregularities are eliminated." Borjomi is one of the most popular brands of mineral water sold in Russia. In March, Russia banned wine imports from Georgia and Moldova, similarly citing health concerns. (RFE/RL)

KAZAKH PRESIDENTIAL AIDE NAMED TO HEAD MEDIA COMPANY

6 May

Maulen Ashimbaev, deputy head of the Kazakh presidential administration, was elected chairman of the board of directors of the media company Khabar at a board meeting in Astana on May 5. Gulnar Iksanova, who had been chairwoman, was

named director at the same meeting. Culture and Information Minister Ermukhamet Ertysbaev has recently called for the state to increase its control over Khabar, which was founded by Darigha Nazarbaeva, the president's daughter. The state owns 50 percent plus one share of the holding company that controls Khabar. (Kazinform)

TAJIK POLICE ARRESTED FOR MURDER OF OPPOSITION ACTIVIST

10 May

An unidentified official in the Tajik Prosecutor-General's Office in Dushanbe said on May 10 that three police officers have been arrested in connection with the death of an opposition party activist. Sadullo Marufov, a member of the Islamic Revival Party of Tajikistan, fell to his death from the third floor of a police station in the northern town of Isfara on May 4 after being detained by police on May 3. (Avesta)

SAAKASHVILI ORDERS PROBE INTO SALE OF FAKE GEORGIAN WINES IN EUROPE

10 May

Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili said at a Cabinet meeting on Wednesday that maybe Prime Minister Zurab Nogaideli and Agriculture Minister Mikhail Svimonishvili should taste the cheap wines sold in Baltic countries under the brands of the famous Georgian wines Khvanchkara and Kindzmarauli. The two officials tasted the wine, saying it didn't taste good. "As long as the Agriculture Ministry and Georgian winemakers remain passive, smart people in Europe will be selling cheap wines under Georgian brands and make hundreds of millions of dollars in profit," Saakashvili said. Saakashvili ordered the justice minister to start a criminal investigation into Georgian wine counterfeiting in Europe. He also said that some Russian media had called on Russians not to buy Georgian wines. (Interfax)

GEORGIAN PARLIAMENT PASSES NATO INTEGRATION RESOLUTION

11 May

The Georgian parliament has passed a resolution on the country's integration into NATO and an address to the parliaments of NATO member states. "Georgia's desire to join NATO is based

not only on the invariable will of the Georgian authorities, but also on the accord of the main political forces and on public consensus," the resolution reads. "Georgian integration into NATO is closely linked to strengthening democratic institutions and the peaceful political settlement to conflicts in the country," the document reads. (Interfax)

LEAVING CIS MAY AFFECT GEORGIA - RUSSIAN OFFICIAL

11 May

Georgia's possible departure from the CIS will hardly affect the Russian economy, Modest Kolerov, head of the presidential department for inter-regional and cultural relations with foreign states, told Interfax on Thursday. "Russia will lose nothing in case of Georgia's departure from the CIS. It is Georgia that will bear the consequences, primarily from the point of view of labor," he said. "Georgian representatives said that economic cooperation was the only reason why they are in the CIS. That is a selfish and cynical statement they made," he said. (Interfax)

HAIL DESTROYS OVER 80% OF VINEYARDS IN EASTERN GEORGIA

11 May

Nearly 80% of vineyards in the Gurjaani and Sagarajo districts in eastern Georgia were destroyed by hail on Wednesday night. The hail also damaged homesteads. The Lagodekhi and Akhmeti districts suffered large damages on Tuesday. Locals said they had not seen such hail in eastern Georgia for the past 30 years. Regional authorities said that grape harvest in Kakhetia would be much smaller this year. (Interfax)

KAZAKH MEDIA MINISTER BRUSHES OFF RESIGNATION DEMAND

12 May

Kazakh Culture and Information Minister Ermukhamet Ertysbaev told journalists on May 12 that he has no intention of complying with a request from the Kazakh Journalists Union that he resign. Stressing that he answers to President Nursultan Nazarbaev, Ertysbaev charged that the Journalists Union is "interfering with the work of executive-administrative bodies of power, and it is crudely violating the constitution and laws by making attempts to have an impact on the head of

state." Ertysbaev said that in the nearly four months since he was appointed to his ministerial position, he has received "no criticism from the president, nor has there been any criticism from the prime minister [Daniyal Akhmetov]." He concluded, "I strongly recommend journalists not to become pawns in a political game of my opponents." (Interfax-Kazakhstan)

TWO THOUSAND KIDNAPPED IN CHECHNYA SINCE 2002 - MEMORIAL CENTER

12 May

Kidnappings are hampering the normalization of the situation in Chechnya, Memorial Center representative Dmitry Grushkin told Interfax on Friday. Almost 2,000 residents of Chechnya have been kidnapped in Chechnya since 2002, he said. "According to our data, 1,893 people have been kidnapped since 2002, including 653 people found alive, 186 found dead, with 1,023 still missing," Grushkin said. (Interfax)

KYRGYZ SECURITY FORCE NEUTRALIZE MILITANT GROUP

12 May

Kyrgyz law enforcement and security forces have completed an operation to neutralize militants who infiltrated the southern part of Kyrgyzstan from Tajikistan early on Friday, the presidential press service told Interfax on Friday evening. "Four militants were killed and one captured in the operation," the press service said. "It is so far unclear what group the militants were affiliated with," it said. Kyrgyz border guards were earlier reported to have killed one gunman and captured another. Three border guards were killed and two others wounded in the battle in the Batken region in southern Kyrgyzstan, which continued throughout Friday. (Interfax)

PROTESTERS IN KYRGYZSTAN BLOCKING ROAD, WANT PREMIER'S DISMISSAL

13 May

Supporters of Kyrgyz parliamentary candidate Ryspek Akmatbayev, who was killed by an unidentified gunman several days ago, have said they will be blocking the highway connecting Bishkek and Cholpon-Ata until Prime Minister Felix Kulov and a number of top security officials

are dismissed. The protesters have been blocking the road, which connects the capital city with the resort area surrounding Lake Issyk-Kul, since May 12. Interfax learned from the protesters' headquarters that they are insisting that Kulov, Interior Minister Murat Sutalinov, and Deputy Interior Minister Omurbek Suvanaliyev be dismissed. They also want President Kurmanbek Bakiyev to arrive at the scene and meet with them. The protesters said they would be waiting for their demands to be met one week.

"Otherwise, we will have to resort to extreme measures," the headquarters said. (Interfax)

ARMENIA, AZERBAIJAN FAIL TO AGREE ON SOCCER-MATCH VENUE

13 May

Six hours of talks at the Swiss headquarters of the Union of European Football Associations (UEFA) on May 12 between representatives of the football federations of Armenia and Azerbaijan failed to yield an agreement on the venue for matches, scheduled for September 2007, between the two countries in the qualifying competition for the 2008 European soccer championship. The Armenian Football Federation, backed by Armenia's government, wants the two fixtures to be played in Baku and Yerevan. But the corresponding Azerbaijani body is categorically against this, saying that Azerbaijan cannot guarantee the security of Armenian players and coaching staff and that the games should therefore take place in third countries. (zerkalo.az)

GUNMEN ATTACK POSTS ON TAJIKISTAN BORDER

13 May

Gunmen attacked border posts on both sides of the frontier between Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan early Friday, killing five people and injuring two, Kyrgyz and Tajik officials said. The attacks occurred in the Fergana Valley, a densely populated and impoverished region. Kyrgyz regional police spokesman Jenishbek Ashirbayev said seven gunmen attacked a Tajik border post, seizing automatic rifles and a machine gun before breaking into Kyrgyz territory. He said the group then clashed with Kyrgyz border guards, killing two soldiers in the Batken region, about 450 miles southwest of the Kyrgyz capital, Bishkek. They then fled further into mountains in Kyrgyzstan.

But Tajik Interior Ministry spokesman Khudoynazar Asoyev said the group included six men and that they attacked from Kyrgyz territory, killing two Tajik border guards and wounding another. He said the gunmen then retreated into Kyrgyzstan, seizing a Mercedes Benz, killing its driver and heading toward Batken. Along the way they clashed with Kyrgyz troops, killing the two Kyrgyz soldiers and injuring another, he said. (AP)

PICKETERS LIFT MOTORWAY BLOCKADE IN KYRGYZSTAN

14 May

Supporters of the slain Kyrgyz parliamentary candidate Ryspek Akmatbayev have lifted the blockade of the Bishkek - Cholpon-Ata motorway. The blockade was cancelled after Issyk-Kul Region Governor Esengul Omualiyev and parliamentary deputy Kubanychbek Isabekov met with Akmatbayev's sympathizers, the regional governor's press service told Interfax on Sunday. The situation is clam in the region, the press service said. The motorway, which links Kyrgyzstan's capital city with a resort zone at Lake Issyk-Kul, was blocked on May 12. But about 300 demonstrators remain near the entry to the town of Malykchi in the Issyk-Kul region. The action organizers insist on the resignation of Prime Minister Felix Kulov, Interior Minister Murat Satalinov and Deputy Interior Minister Omurbek Suvanaliyev. A group of supporters of the slain parliamentary candidate is expected to meet with the Kyrgyz president on May 15, sources in the protest committee said.

Akmatbayev, winner in the parliamentary election in the Balykchi electoral district, who was denied registration by the Central Elections Commission, was shot dead on Wednesday evening as he was walking out of a mosque outside Bishkek. (Interfax)

Prime Minister: Kazakhstan to Join Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan Oil Pipeline in June

15 May

Kazakhstan's prime minister said Monday that the energy-rich ex-Soviet republic will next month sign up to pump its oil through a pipeline that starts in Azerbaijan to Turkey, the government press office said. Daniyal Akhmetov told a Cabinet meeting that an agreement on joining the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline was currently being examined by

lawyers and was expected to be signed by the Kazakh and Azerbaijani presidents at a summit of the Council on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia, or CICA, in June. The summit venue wasn't specified. The BTC pipeline, which opened last May, allows the West to tap oil from the rich Caspian Sea fields, estimated to hold the world's third-largest reserves, bypassing Russia and Iran. In March, U.S. Secretary of Energy Samuel W. Bodman urged Kazakhstan to speed up talks on joining the BTC. Akhmetov said earlier that Kazakhstan could ship up to 30 million metric tons of oil (8.8 billion gallons) yearly through the 1,100-mile (680-mile) pipeline that runs from the Azerbaijani port capital of Baku, via Georgia to the Turkish Mediterranean port of Ceyhan, but no deal has been signed yet. Kazakhstan possesses the largest oil deposits in the Caspian Sea. It currently produces about 1.3 million barrels a day. By 2015, its daily oil output is expected to reach 3 million barrels. The 17-member CICA is a forum for discussions and consultations among Asian countries to promote stability and closer ties in the region. (AP)

LOTS OF OFFICIALS ARRESTED IN TAJIKISTAN FOR PART IN DRUG TRADE

15 May

About 800 officials have been arrested over the past five years on charges of involvement in drug trade, Tajik President Emomali Rakhmonov has said. "The struggle is going on without regard for ranks and occupied positions," he told an international conference of the fight of drugs in Central and South Asia on Monday. Rakhmonov said that the drug mob had well established and checked smuggling routes running across border and customs posts of many states. They also have "patrons with high mandates". "Otherwise, how can you explain that hundreds of kilograms of heroin in transit from Afghanistan freely pass border posts of Russia, reaching Moscow and Western Europe," Rakhmonov said. The three-day international conference will work out recommendations for Tajikistan's donor countries. A statistical summary of the activity of Tajik border guard since the beginning of this year was presented at the conference. The border guards have seized more than 1,000 kilogrammes of heroin, 17 automatic firearms, 137 gun and mortar shells and two

unguided missiles, and detained 71 drug runners. (ITAR-TASS)

INCURSION INTO KYRGYZSTAN LEAVES AT LEAST 13 DEAD

15 May

At least 13 people were killed when a group of armed men made an illegal incursion from Tajikistan into Kyrgyzstan's Batken province on May 12. Tajik television reported that a group of at least six armed men attacked a border outpost in Tajikistan's northern Sughd province on the early morning of May 12, killing two border guards, fatally wounding a third, and seizing 19 machine guns. The men then crossed into Kyrgyzstan, where they killed a customs official and a civilian at the Akturpak customs post. Later on May 12, Kyrgyz security agencies mobilized more than 200 men to find and neutralize the armed group, eventually killing four militants and capturing one. Kyrgyz forces lost four men in the operation. Kyrgyzstan's 24.kg news agency reported that five militants were killed and two captured. Kyrgyzstan's National Security Service (SNB) said that it confiscated 17 Kalashnikovs, more than 2,000 5.45-millimeter shells, and two 5-kilogram barrels of aluminum powder. The SNB's press service said that it believed the militants planned to carry out a terrorist attack. Kyrgyz President Kurmanbek Bakiyev told a meeting of senior security officials on May 12 that he was pleased with the rapid response of security forces. (RFE/RL)

CENTRAL ASIAN MINISTERS ARGUE AGAINST IRAN JOINING SCO

15 May

Speaking in Shanghai at a meeting of foreign ministers of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) on May 15, the Kazakh and Tajik ministers ruled out the possibility of Iran joining the SCO. Tajik Foreign Minister Talbak Nazarov told reporters, "So far this issue has not been discussed as the SCO is not able to expand

indefinitely and there is no document which would regulate the membership of this or that state, including Iran." Kazakh Foreign Minister Qasymzhomart Toqaev said, "Kazakhstan finds it necessary to temporarily refrain from SCO enlargement through permanent members and observers because the organization lacks the legal basis...for admitting new members." Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister Manuchehr Mohammadi said last month that Iran hopes to join the SCO this summer. Iran currently holds observer status in the SCO, as do India, Mongolia, and Pakistan. SCO members are China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan. (RIA-Novosti)

AFGHAN VIOLENCE 'LEAVES 16 DEAD' 15 May 2006

Police in Afghanistan say they have shot dead 11 suspected Taleban rebels in Kandahar province. They say five police were also killed in the gun battle, in which eight Taleban and five police were wounded. A Taleban commander and his deputy are reported to be among the dead after an hour long fire fight. Police say that the fighting began in Panjwai district, 30km west of the town of Kandahar, following reports that the Taleban were hiding there. "Unfortunately, we lost five of our men but we destroyed a dangerous group of Taleban. It's a big victory for our police," Mohammad Daoud Ahmadi, a spokesman for the Kandahar provincial governor, told the Reuters news agency. He said that a Taleban provincial level commander, Mullah Abdul Baqi, and a district level commander, Mullah Abdul Manan, were among those killed. The Afghan authorities blame Mr Manan for a series of attacks including suicide bombings and rocket attacks on government targets. Kandahar is the main town in the south of Afghanistan and regarded as an area where support for the Taleban is strong. Western forces - including Canadian and British troops - operate from a base at the town's airport. The Taleban were forced from power after the US-led invasion of Afghanistan in 2001. (BBC)