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*Central Asia- Caucasus Institute
Silk Road Studies Program*

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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 & Silk Road Studies Program Joint Center. 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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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.

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PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS IN ABKHAZIA: OPPOSITION ON THE RISE?

Johanna Popjanevski

The recent parliamentary elections in the unrecognized Republic of Abkhazia show that President Sergei Bagapsh maintains strong public support. Bagapsh loyalists gained 28 of 35 seats in the People's Assembly, suggesting that the Abkhaz opposition poses little threat to the incumbent government. Nonetheless, the vibrancy of the opposition indicates new tendencies on the Abkhaz political arena. It indicates that Bagapsh's so far unchallenged government may face a battle with the growing pro-Russian opposition movement in the upcoming years and that the years of political unity in Abkhazia may have come to an end.

BACKGROUND: The de facto Republic of Abkhazia held parliamentary elections on March 4 and March 18. More than 100 candidates from 12 different parties competed for the 35 seats, in an election campaign marked by controversies between Bagapsh and the opposition coalition movement Forum for Public Union. The "Forum", including 12 political parties of which the majority supports Vice President Raul Khajimba, for the first time flexed its muscles, accusing Bagapsh of interfering with the election campaign to ensure the election of a loyal parliament. After a February 23 television appearance by Bagapsh, several opposition candidates called on Abkhaz Prosecutor General Safarbei Mikanba to comment on Bagapsh's alleged insult of two opposition candidates, and on Bagapsh himself to apologize for his attempts to discredit the opposition. Bagapsh opponents moreover opposed the de facto President's request for Vladimir Arshba, an ally of former Abkhaz leader Vladislav Ardzinba, to withdraw his candidacy in the ethnic Russian-dominated Sukhumi No.7 constituency, an attempt by Bagapsh to clear the way for the inclusion of national minority groups in the parliament.

During the 2004 elections, Bagapsh's backing among the ethnic Georgian population in the Gali region was

crucial for his victory over Khajimba. Ever since, the de facto President Bagapsh has increasingly profiled himself as the protector of national minority groups in general, and recently, of the Armenian community in particular. Ethnic Armenians, who in spite of their significance in the Abkhaz economic realm are heavily underrepresented in Abkhaz decision making, voiced their aspiration in the election run-up of increased



Sergei Bagapsh

representation in the People's Assembly, demanding 40 percent of the seats.

Since the heated 2004 presidential election battle, which divided the Abkhaz political scene between supporters of Bagapsh and his rival Raul Khajimba,

Bagapsh has effectively avoided clashing with the opposition. However, the de facto President showed no reluctance to engage in the recent political controversies. Bagapsh willingly admitted to requesting Arshba to register in a different constituency, arguing that it is nothing but in the interest of the Abkhaz state to avoid Abkhaz and national minority representatives competing against each other for political representation. The de facto President, moreover, dismissed attempting to bring the opposition into disrepute, describing its electoral participation as a sign of political plurality, essential for the legitimacy of the Abkhaz state.

Following the 2004 election compromise, through which Khajimba was appointed Vice President, Khajimba too has called for political unity; reluctant to criticize the government to which he belongs. In a recent press conference, Khajimba called on his supporters to refrain from confrontations over the results. Moscow adopted the same line, describing the election as a continuation of democratic trends in Abkhazia.



Raul Khajimba

Nonetheless, the controversies between Bagapsh and the opposition continued as it became evident that Bagapsh's allies had won an overwhelming victory after the second election round on March 18, gaining 28 of the 35 seats in the new People's Assembly. Several oppositionists threatened to file official complaints to the Supreme Court, pointing at cases of multiple voting and the illegitimate issuing of ballot papers. Bagapsh for his part continued to dismiss the criticism, deeming the polls an overall success.

IMPLICATIONS: The March 2007 elections illustrate new tendencies in the Abkhaz political climate. "The Forum", which has previously declared that it supports Bagapsh as long as his policies represent the interests of the Abkhaz people, is increasingly profiling itself as an opposition movement, indicating that the political unity that both Bagapsh and Khajimba have promoted since the dramatic Presidential election battle in 2004 has come to an end.

The rise of the opposition takes place in an Abkhaz public climate where pro-Russian sentiments appear to be growing. Since the deployment of Georgian troops in the Kodori valley last summer, fears of a Georgian intervention have risen in Abkhazia, and Vladimir Putin's Russia is increasingly appearing as the only guarantor of Abkhazia's de jure separation from Georgia. Whereas Bagapsh has so far united the population around the idea of Abkhaz independence, he is facing increasing criticism for his inability to deal with the Kodori issue and to receive international recognition for his demands.

The so far unchallenged Bagapsh may now be faced with the difficult task of maintaining the strong support he enjoys among the Abkhaz public. His recent attempt to meet the will of the Armenian community and overall to secure a multiethnic parliament illustrates that the de facto leader is gearing up for this battle. Furthermore, in spite of his inflamed relationship with Moscow in connection with the 2004 Presidential election, Bagapsh appears determined to maintain a constructive relationship with Putin's administration, possibly to avoid losing support to the growing pro-Russian movement.

The events surrounding the recent elections indicate that the People's Assembly's expectations are rising. In comparison to previous parliamentary elections, the activity of the opposition illustrates an aspiration of transforming the so far passive People's Assembly into a body capable of challenging the government.

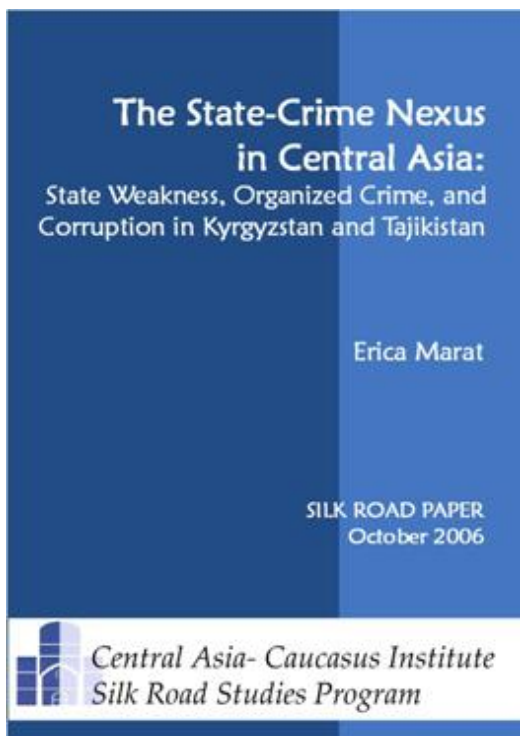
CONCLUSIONS: In light of the opposition's determination to find a ground for challenging Bagapsh's political monopoly, it is evident that "the Forum" is gearing up for the 2009 presidential election. This is not necessarily unfavorable for Bagapsh, as the presence of an active opposition can be used to strengthen his argument of democratic development in Abkhazia and ultimately thus to support the argument for Abkhazia's statehood.

Nonetheless, Bagapsh's response to the rise of his opponents, including his plead for a multiethnic parliament, suggests that the de facto Abkhaz leader is concerned about what may develop into a race for public support in the upcoming years. Although the election results indicate continuing support for Bagapsh's government, the March events have likely set the stage for a more dynamic political climate in

Abkhazia in which new domestic and foreign policy approaches may be needed to meet the challenge offered by the opposition.

This may have particular implications for the conflict resolution process. A more competitive political scene in Abkhazia may require Bagapsh and his allies to enhance their efforts to deal with the anticipated threat posed by Georgia's presence in the Kodori valley. Partly depending on what support is offered by Moscow, this may either force the Abkhaz side back to the negotiation table or result in an even tougher stance by the Abkhaz government in its relationship with Tbilisi. What is clear is that the adoption of an increased pro-Russian standpoint by the Abkhaz leadership will do little to convince the Western powers of its ambitions of joining the international community as an independent entity.

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New Silk Road Paper!

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by Erica Marat

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This 138-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.

CENTRAL ASIAN REGIONAL INTEGRATION: BETWEEN REALITY AND MYTH

Timur Dadabaev

In the beginning of April 2007, Kazakhstan's President, Nursultan Nazarbaev, once again proposed the creation of a Central Asian Union. This idea received a further boost during his visit to Bishkek. If and when the integration arrangement proves itself effective in dealing with regional problems, it will send a clear signal to regional states that regionally-based solutions are possible. If it fails to do so, Central Asia risks falling back into the century-old tradition of being manipulated and taken advantage of by external powers.

BACKGROUND: Initially, the idea of creating a community or union of Central Asian states was promoted by applying the simple logic that integration for these regional states, with their weak economies, shared security concerns and common challenges, is economically and politically more beneficial than to deal with these issues individually.

The history of regional integration developed through a series of summits. These included the

Space (CES); the April 1994 Cholpon-Ata summit, with agreements on cooperation in various fields; the July 1994 Almaty meeting (building a comprehensive economic and defense union); the creation of a Central Asian Bank for Cooperation and Development (CABCD) in Bishkek in August 1994; and the approval of five-year integration plan during an April 1995 Bishkek summit. These were followed by meetings of Heads of States devoted to the implementation of their agreements and establishing water, food, communication and raw-



January 1993 Tashkent Summit, with a "Protocol of Five Central Asian States on a Common Market"; the January 1994 Tashkent Summit, with the creation of the Central Asian Common Economic

mineral resource consortiums like the one in December 1997 in Akmola (later re-named Astana). Although in 1998, Tajikistan's entry into Central Asian Economic Union was welcomed by all member states, they moved to replace the name of the Union with the Economic Cooperation, as if to reflect the failure of the ambitious plan for a

comprehensive Central Asian Union. This name was further replaced in 2002 by the Central Asian Cooperation Organization, further downsizing the ambitions and expectations of member states. In 2004, reflecting on the changing geopolitical environment in the region, Russia joined the CACO. A year later, with Uzbekistan's entry into Russia-led Eurasian Economic Community (Eurasec), CACO was effectively merged into Eurasec, putting the idea of a Central Asian regional community temporarily on hold. The idea forwarded by President Nazarbaev, known for his strong support in broader Eurasia and the Central Asian region, this April attempts to revive the

desired, often leading to a situation where over-excessive exercise of sovereignty of one regional state damaged the interests of others. Border delimitation and water issues serve as good examples for this. For integration to succeed in Central Asia, it is important for these states to accept that the individual sovereignty of each state should be voluntarily limited and transmuted into "regional sovereignty", under which all problematic issues (ex. inter-state water consumption, others) would become a subject for collective regional decision making. While such a decision-making process shows some signs of emerging, collective actions that deliver on promises and implement collective decisions seem to be lacking. In the longer term, regional jurisdiction over such issues would enforce and protect the individual sovereignty of each state from imbalances, one-sided decisions, and the various problems that these states encounter.

In addition to the issue of sovereignty, there is a perceived lack of economic compatibility among the economies of Central Asian states participating in the integration process. Such a view of their economies makes the leadership of these states perceive their regional counterparts as competitors

rather than partners in the international market. In many cases, these states prioritize their ties with non-regional countries as more important for developing their economies than the expansion of economic and trade ties within the region. Accordingly, frontiers are being fortified to protect individual markets from neighboring states. The outcome of such policy is a 'lose-lose' situation for all.



Nursultan Nazarbayev: Engineer of Regional Integration?

integrationist ambitions of regional states.

IMPLICATIONS: While an understanding of the high potential of integration is emerging in the Central Asian region, several issues need to be addressed in order to conceptually advance this integrationist design. One of the cornerstones of setting up effective cooperation and integration is the issue of the sovereignty of each member state. The collapse of the USSR made it possible for each state to exercise as much sovereignty as they

Many Central Asian states rely heavily on trade in raw materials, such as gas and oil, with non-regional states. While this brings much-needed revenues to their budgets and short-term impetus for their economies, it does not resolve the tasks of developing regionally-based processing industries, promoting trade in processed goods, facilitating the movement of labor and products across borders, or the task of enhancing the competitiveness of these states in the international market.

Last but not least is the fact that the economic models of these states differ significantly one from another. For instance, Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan are adopting liberal reforms; Uzbekistan, and to a lesser extent Turkmenistan, continue 'government-led' economic reforms. Tajikistan is still recovering from the shock of civil war and heavily relies on foreign assistance from Russia and other international donors.

CONCLUSIONS: The hesitation of the Central Asian countries with regard to closer policy coordination and eventual integration is mainly attributable to their perception that integration will limit their sovereignty, resulting in interference in their internal affairs. Therefore, efforts to radicalize and accelerate the level of integration, without first preparing the ground, might result in the failure of the entire process. Defining clear objectives and integration policies is crucial for any regional integration process. It is essential that these objectives are realistic and achievable. Otherwise, as in the case of the CIS or other regional schemes, implementation will lead to inefficiency. One way for the Central Asian countries to proceed is to reconvene around the concept of a Common Economic Space, defining shared economic objectives and economic security concerns and forming strategies that benefit all participating parties.

It is observed that integration among geographically, politically and economically

disparate countries is often approached with hesitation and great sensitivity on the part of all participating states, on account of the perceived ambitions and aspirations of the larger states; and the larger states' fear of offering smaller states a "free ride". In this respect, confidence-building measures are crucial for successful integration in the CA region.

The timing of the institutionalization process is of great importance as well. While it is recognized that a lack of institutional structures damages the prospects of integration, the creation of new structures, called upon to facilitate this process, should not be the final goal but rather a means of supporting integration. In the opposite case, it lends doubt to their effectiveness. Institutional support must grow with the issues of integration that this support is called upon to resolve. In this respect, constructing institutional schemes similar to the EU or ASEAN at the initial stages of Central Asian regional integration might prove unproductive, or worse, even self-defeating.

In the final analysis, regional integration, wherever it takes place, should first focus on one or two particular areas (for instance borders and water management) as proposed in the new initiative by President Nazarbaev. When success in these areas is achieved, integration can move on to additional areas and potentially to new levels of institutionalization, taking on new tasks and responsibilities. Closer integration in these areas would imply some kind of voluntary deferral of national sovereignty in favor of "regional sovereignty", through the forming of transnational consortiums and mechanisms.

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INTER-GENERATIONAL CHANGE AND THE INTEGRATION OF REGIONAL GROUPS IN THE CHECHEN RESISTANCE

Cerwyn Moore

The reaction to the death of key figures including field commanders and leaders of the Chechen separatist movement such as Ruslan (Khamzat) Gelayev, Aslan Maskhadov, Abdul Khalim Sadullayev and Shamil Basayev, has led to a further re-organization within the resistance movement, which is in part shaped by inter-generational change and an attempt to integrate regional affiliates into its control and command.

BACKGROUND: Throughout much of the nineteenth century, there was a protracted guerrilla campaign led by Imam Shamil in the Northeastern Caucasus, and anti-Russian groups successfully received support from the Ottoman Empire. More recently, throughout the latter part of the first Chechen conflict of 1994-96, a number of press releases by Russian officials pointed towards the role not of radical Islamists, but of small numbers of mercenaries, fighting alongside the Chechen separatists. Although such groups played an insignificant military role in the first war, the integration of groups based in the region itself, such as the Ingush and Dagestani jamaats, has enabled the movement to remain a significant threat.

Among other, three particular features remain largely neglected in studies of the Chechen separatist movement. First, since 2004, Russian attempts to combat terrorism stemming from Chechnya have focused on a series of 'special operations' targeting key figures in the existing separatist movement, resulting in the killing of a number of significant figures. However, this has also impacted on the war-fighting strategy of the separatists. Throughout the last three years, what are labeled as mobile Mujahideen units have been

deployed to harass pro-Kremlin Chechen units loyal to Ramzan Kadyrov, Sulim Yamadayev, and Said Magomed Kakiev. The use of ambushes, mine-laying and sabotage have become commonplace, as has the use of targeted assassinations by pro-separatist groups.

Second, a set of connections, particularly resulting from Sufi networks and the Diaspora community, has done much to influence the capacity of the Chechen separatists to maintain a military threat. More specifically, the Chechen Diaspora community in Turkey, Azerbaijan, Jordan and Kazakhstan have been principle players in the two conflicts. The Diaspora community and Sufi networks have tied into the existing social and ethnic traditions in Chechnya. As such, the history of armed resistance and martial traditions has, at least in part, shaped the military capacity of the separatist movement.

At present, however, recent press releases have indicated that mobile detachments aligned to a new generation of pro-separatist fighters are now coming to the fore in Chechnya. While it is reported that Amir Aslambek has taken over the reins of control of the Eastern Front, following the death of Suleiman Imurzayev, it is also reported that a

number of younger fighters such as Amir Ramzan have set up mobile subdivisions drawing on younger leaders, such as Tarhan, who do not have the same combat experience as the first generation of fighters, and who may well be of Turkish origin. It is reported that such groups draw upon connections with the Chechen Diaspora community in Turkey.

Finally, the separatist movement has done much to develop a localized command and control structure, with Chechen commanders developing innovative measures to counter Russian attacks. Since the rise to power of Akhmed Kadyrov, the use of asymmetrical war-fighting tactics have become commonplace, but in more recent years, these tactics have been replaced by a more flexible mixture of terrorism and military attacks designed to maintain the monopoly of fear, and exacerbate regional tensions.

In recent years, elements in the separatist movement, particularly as a result of Shamil Basayev, sought to set up military jamaats, small village-based groups of supporters and fighters, and integrate groups from outside of Chechnya proper. At the same time, small numbers of volunteers and mercenaries appear to have been trained by groups linked to Abu Hafs al-Urdani, the Jordanian-born former Amir of the Arab fighters in Chechnya, in and around the Pankisi Gorge in northern Georgia in late 2001, and perhaps in 2002. Even though links between foreign terror organizations remain unsubstantiated, Abu Hafs did help to organize a group of Turkish fighters, who became part of a unit loyal to Ruslan (Khamzat) Gelayev.

IMPLICATIONS: Since the deaths of the rebellion's official leaders, Aslan Maskhadov and Abdul Khalim Sadullayev, questions have been raised about the coherence and effectiveness of the remaining pro-separatist Chechen groups. Indeed, some press reports have suggested that Doku Umarov, who succeeded Sadullayev as rebel leader, lacks the military or political skills needed to coordinate a guerrilla campaign across the North Caucasus. Following the death of Basayev, others have noted that the establishment of military jamaats has proved unsuccessful, indicating that the

attack on Nal'chik, the capital of Karbadino-Balkaria, was a military failure. Russian forces appear to have been forewarned about the attack on Nal'chik, and rebel groups suffered losses, including key members of the Ingush jamaat. Nonetheless, through a recent decree, formalized in September 2006, a number of field commanders have been promoted in an attempt to re-organize anti-Russian groups across the region, pointing towards inter-generational changes in the movement. These include three promotions to the rank of Brigadier General. The first was for Suleiman Imurzayev, known as Hayrulla, and formerly Basayev's second in command. The second promotion was for Rabbani Khalilov, the head of the Dagestani jamaat. And the final promotion was for Akmed Yevloyev, known as Magas, the head of the Kavkaz Front, which operates in and around Chechnya and the North West Caucasus.

Over recent years, the leadership of the Chechen separatist movement has done much to integrate other groups, and the promotion of Khalilov, a Dagestani, provides further evidence of an attempt to broaden the reach of the movement. Although he has already been killed, the promotion of others such as Tahir Batayev before his death in March 2007, is also of interest. Batayev was an ethnic Kumyk, and the head of the Nogai Battalion. Not only does the full integration of the Nogai Battalion illustrate a further attempt to strengthen the regional capacity of the movement, it also highlights the inter-generational change that is occurring throughout the movement itself. Former Nogai Battalion commanders such as Adam Khamsatkhonov and Yulubi Yelgushiev, who were killed in 2001 and 2004 respectively, were known to the Russian authorities as proficient fighters.

The rise of Batayev, who became the Naib (Deputy Commander) of Emir Kamal, commander of the Northern Front, who was killed in January 2006, provides evidence that an inter-generational change is occurring, as younger fighters take the reins of command in the separatist movement. Although Batayev was killed in March 2007, his rise to power in the Chechen separatist movement, the rise of

others such as Muhannad, the Emir of the Arab fighters in Chechnya, and Rabbani Khalilov indicates that a younger generation of combatants, who gained experience in the second Russo-Chechen War, have now become key figures in the separatist movement. As this new generation of fighters become integrated, new regional ideas are beginning to shape the tactics and ideology of the movement as a whole.

In Ingushetia, the Sharia jamaat played an important role planning and orchestrating attacks and bombings, before helping to co-ordinate the raid on Nazran in June 2004. The leader of the jamaat, Ilyas Gorchkhanov was killed in the subsequent attack on Nal'chik in October 2005. Some commentators have suggested that the Nal'chik attack may well have been part of a larger coordinated attack in Dagestan. However, the targeted killing of figures in the Dagestani jamaat, and the successful control of Chechnya itself by pro-Kremlin forces, alongside intelligence-led counter-measures to undermine the capacity of the rebel movement, has largely prevented coordinated attacks. Moreover, while the role of Salafi ideology plays an unsubstantiated role in shaping the emergence of this network, the financial support fed to the movement through Basayev may well have played a crucial role in facilitating the movement of key peoples through the region. It appears that the death of Basayev has had an impact on the financing of the movement, and the links to supporters in the Middle East are now, perhaps, being controlled by his former deputies and those linked to Commander Muhannad.

CONCLUSIONS: As Ramzan Kadyrov was sworn in as the new President of Chechnya, having had to wait until he had reached the age of thirty because of the constitution, it was reported that Suleiman Imurzeyev had been killed by pro-Kremlin forces. The death of another seasoned Chechen separatist field commander is a blow to the resistance. However, the inter-generational change of guard in the pro-Kremlin Chechen authorities, resulting from the death of Akhmed Kadyrov, is also mirrored in an inter-generational change of guard in the separatist movement. The reorganization of the Chechen separatist movement, now under the control of Doku Umarov, also illustrates a further push to promote younger fighters as field commanders. In addition, over the last three years, the movement has sought to integrate affiliated groups including the Nogai battalion; the Islamic Front of Ingushetia or Ingush jamaat; Yarmuk, the local jamaat based in Kabardino-Balkaria; and the Dagestani jamaats, in an attempt to establish a pan-Caucasian movement. Together, these two themes – the integration of regional groups and inter-generational change in the separatist movement – has led to a more decentralized threat. In the long term, this means that the threat posed by groups in the region will become even more difficult to counter, while the strategies they now deploy may lead to the outbreak of violent confrontations in other parts of the North Caucasus.

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NAZARBAYEV INCREASES KAZAKHSTAN'S ENGAGEMENT IN KYRGYZSTAN, ECLIPSING RUSSIA

Erica Marat

Kazakhstan's President Nursultan Nazarbayev's April 26 visit to Bishkek pointed at Kazakhstan's vital role in Kyrgyzstan's future economic development. Although Kazakhstan is already a leading economic investor in Kyrgyzstan, in a few years its engagement in the Kyrgyz economy is likely to surpass that of Russia. Nazarbayev's economic policies in Kyrgyzstan will clearly elevate Kazakhstan's political leverage in the country, as well as the Central Asian region in general.

BACKGROUND: During his meeting with the Kyrgyz president Kurmanbek Bakiyev, Nazarbayev noted that Kazakhstan is presently the biggest investor in Kyrgyzstan's economy, investing up to \$300 million in the past two years. Roughly 400 joint Kazakh-Kyrgyz ventures function in Kyrgyzstan and Kazakh banks dominate the Kyrgyz market. This summer up to 80 percent of tourists in Kyrgyzstan's Issyk-Kul Lake will be from Kazakhstan. Yet, Kazakhstan's investment rates and economic cooperation has a vast potential to increase. In comparison, for instance, Kazakhstan's investment in Georgia reached \$1 billion since 2005. According to Nazarbayev, Kazakhstan is mostly interested in Kyrgyzstan's hydro-energy, agriculture, and tourism. Among the key challenges to Kazakhstan's economic expansion in Kyrgyzstan, as Nazarbayev noted, are the continuous political instability and endemic corruption. Nazarbayev urged the Kyrgyz leadership to use its political power and stabilize the economic domain. Otherwise, as he warned, Kyrgyzstan's future might resemble the current situation in Afghanistan, and "extremism, terrorism and drug trafficking will all be present here." In return, Bakiyev asked

Nazarbayev for more humanitarian aid and long-term credits. Nazarbayev and Bakiyev signed a number of bilateral decrees on border control, visa regimes and economic cooperation. Both presidents agreed to establish a Central Asian Union that would increase cooperation between both states, as well in the region. The union should potentially become an umbrella organization for Kazakh-Kyrgyz cooperation.

After Russia, Kazakhstan has been emerging as the second largest host country for Central Asian labor migrants. According to French scholar Marlene Laruelle, Kazakhstan today hosts as many Kyrgyz labor migrants as Russia, nearly 200,000. About 20-30 percent of Tajik and Uzbek migrants also choose Kazakhstan instead of Russia. Kazakhstan hosts migrants from other Asian states as well, including India, Sri Lanka and China. Kazakhstan's GDP growth in 2006 reached 8.5 percent, compared to 6.6 percent in Russia. Kazakhstan's GDP per capita has been growing rapidly as well, comprising \$9,000 in 2006 compared to Russia's \$12,100. Dozens of large-scale Kyrgyz businessmen found refuge in

Kazakhstan to escape persecution or harassment under Bakiyev and former president Askar Akayev.

IMPLICATIONS: In the near future, Kazakhstan's economic leverage in Kyrgyzstan is likely to overshadow Russia's influence. In effect, Kazakhstan is already becoming a partner to Kyrgyzstan as significant as the U.S., China, and Russia. The Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) led by Russia and China act as the leading organizations in the region able to exercise political influence in the Central Asian states, including Kazakhstan. However, Nazarbayev's wish to launch a specific Central Asian Union could represent an attempt to counterweigh Russia and China's influence in the region. Being a strategic partner both with Russia and China, Kazakhstan is unlikely to face any direct opposition from either of them. On the contrary, Kazakhstan's growing influence in Central Asia will elevate its leverage within the SCO and CSTO.

Nazarbayev's visit illustrated that Kazakhstan is interested in Kyrgyzstan's key economic sectors and is concerned with its political climate. Kazakhstan is adopting a mix of economic strategies in Kyrgyzstan such as direct investment, long-term credits and humanitarian aid. Most likely economic strategies will necessitate political ones as well. For instance, Nazarbayev mentioned that Kazakhstan is interested in investing into Kyrgyzstan's two largest hydropower stations, the 1,900 MW Kambarata-1 and 240 MW Kambarata-2, with annual generation capacity of 5,100 million kWh and 1,100 million kWh, respectively. The president stressed the fact that although Kazakhstan presently produces its own electricity in sufficient amounts, Astana wants to use the possibility of expanding bilateral cooperation with Kyrgyzstan in the energy sector. However, neither hydropower plant is economically attractive for Kazakhstan largely because of endemic corruption and ineffective management in Kyrgyzstan's energy sector. If Kazakhstan decides to get involved in the sector, it might do so along with extra economic and political conditions. Today, Kyrgyzstan collects only 30 percent of

payments from its hydropower production, while rough estimates indicate that more than \$40 million of profit is embezzled by top officials every year. Furthermore, energy production in Kambarata-1 amounts to more than 7.0 cents per kWh, compared to Kazakhstan's domestic power tariff of 2.5 cents per kWh. Previously, Kyrgyzstan held similar negotiations with the Russian government and RusAl on the possibility of investment in hydropower plants. After pledging to invest into the hydropower sector, Anatoly Chubais, head of Russia's Unified Energy Systems, did not follow up with any real investment projects.

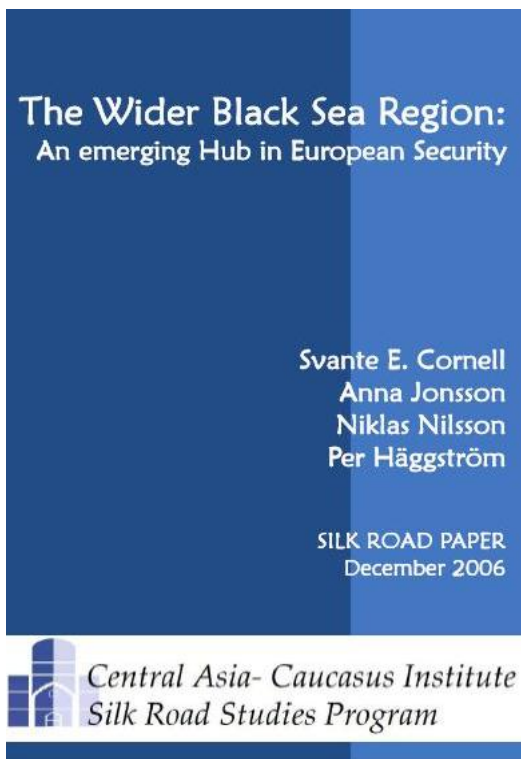
Before Nazarbayev's arrival to Bishkek, several Kyrgyz mass media outlets questioned whether the president's main goal was to calm the government-opposition confrontation that erupted as a result of mass protests during April 11-19. As Bakiyev violently suppressed protests on April 19 and arrested three opposition members, Nazarbayev emerged as a possible leader capable of mediating the political crisis in the country. Nazarbayev was among the loudest critics of the Tulip Revolution in Kyrgyzstan on March 24, 2005, and never openly supported Bakiyev's government. But Nazarbayev was also the only high official to attend Bakiyev's presidential inauguration in August 2005. In his address to the Kyrgyz parliament, Nazarbayev slammed the continuous political turmoil in Kyrgyzstan. He argued that unlike in Kazakhstan, where real economic reforms have been implemented in the past 15 years, Kyrgyzstan's political actors have been busy fighting for power. As a result, as the president concluded, "we have what we have", hinting that Kazakhstan's economy is in a far better shape compared to Kyrgyzstan. As political confrontations continue in Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan might play a significant role in changing the political leadership in the country. According to unofficial records, after joining the opposition camp in January, former prime minister Felix Kulov sought political support among his Russian, as well as Kazakh connections.

CONCLUSIONS: As Kazakhstan's economy soared in the 2000s, Kyrgyzstan reliance on its

bigger neighbor has been intensifying on various levels: from labor migration and tourism, to cooperation between both states' respective opposition and government members. Kazakh investors are interested in Kyrgyzstan's market that in spite of being small, is geographically convenient. During his visit to Bishkek, Nazarbayev pledged to increase investment into the Kyrgyz economy on the condition that Kyrgyzstan becomes politically more stable. In the future, the Kazakh government will likely combine some of its economic

investment and humanitarian aid with political engagement in Kyrgyzstan. Although Nazarbayev's April 26 trip to Bishkek lasted only few hours, it suggested that Kazakhstan's economy is ready to compete and, eventually, overshadow Russia's influence in Kyrgyzstan and the Central Asian region.

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New Silk Road Paper!

The Wider Black Sea Region: An Emerging Hub in European Security

by Svante Cornell, Anna Jonsson, Niklas Nilsson, and Per Häggström

This 120-page paper analyzes emerging role of the Wider Black Sea Region in European Security, and European interests there. It provides concise analysis of major challenges in the region, and policy recommendations for Europe's future policies there.

This 120-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.

FIELD REPORTS

TAJIKISTAN'S INNOVATIVE POVERTY REDUCTION STRATEGY

Firuza Ganieva

On April 24, President Emomali Rahmon held a plenary session aimed at discussing the regulation of traditions and religious rituals practiced by people in Tajikistan. The session was conducted in preparation for the pan-Tajik meeting in May, when representatives of all the republic's regions will convene in order to discuss legislation on this matter. The session presided over by Mr. Rahmon included state advisers, ministers, representatives of the Islamic Center and Islamic University, as well as specialists in such fields as social science, law and religious studies. The main objective relates to preventing the population's excessive and unnecessary expenses for traditional and religious celebrations, in order to reduce poverty in the country. Mr. Rahmon expressed the necessity of drafting legal documents on these issues and at the same time noted that new legislation should not contradict the Constitution, existing laws, or the Qur'an. Finally, he expressed the need for a more comprehensive study and examination of opinions, wishes and propositions at all levels of society.

The working group was also instructed to take into account measures of punishment for disobeying the law, which could include firing of governmental officials for disobeying the established norms of conduct regarding national and religious rituals, and the usage of state cars for attending these celebrations during office hours. While the government is tangled with such problems in the process of figuring out what legislation to promote

sometime in the future, the wedding season already began at then end of March, and will last until the beginning of October, which should give officials enough time to pass legislation and start enforcing it.

In Tajikistan, the number of different traditional and religious celebrations has increased after the fall of the USSR. Given that the Tajik *family* extends far beyond the nuclear unit, celebrations casually include hundreds of participants, thus burdening the whole community immensely, one host family at a time. Such gatherings involve copious quantities of food, usually served with at least two main dishes, and, obviously, beverages of various kinds – provided by the grooms' families; on the side of bride, the *kit* (dowry) is gradually collected, starting years before the wedding; finally, the presents received at the several ceremonies that make up the calendar of one such marriage constitute significant expenditure. Thus, social pressure gradually drives people who are already poor to financial ruin, bankruptcy – and beyond, in high debts, all so they may respect traditions. President Rahmon has spoken out about such lavish expenditure on several occasions; moreover, in the past, on the president's initiative, the Ministry of Labor together with the Iranian "Imam Khomeini" charity Committee organized collective weddings. In such ceremonies, one thousand people would come together, giving young couples from incomplete, poor or very large

families traditional weddings, with all rituals observed.

Last November, the former governor of the Sogd region in northern Tajikistan, Kasym Kasymov, issued rules on wedding logistics, from the number of guests to be invited, to the number of dresses the groom's family should give the bride. The law had all the qualities to be successful and thus embraced by society: so long as the government of Tajikistan adopts the law, people will be able to overcome social pressure on the level of kin groups, and thus not spend every available penny on keeping up with tradition. This kind of outside pressure helps poor families bypass the kin group's stigma and the disapproval of the rest of the community. However, there is still room for corruption and ways are devised to avoid the law, especially in the rich strata of society. Several instances of corruption were detected by the Hakimiyat (local government) of Khujand city; however, the penalty was so small that people continued to have those lavish weddings.

In order to keep up with tradition, a lot of people borrow from relatives for all such expenditure. Unable to earn much in the country, they are forced to leave Tajikistan and become seasonal workers in Russia. However, upon their return, they will spend

the earned money to repay the debts incurred. One woman who recently came back from such a year's work in Russia said she went there to prepare one of the daughters' wedding, as they did not have the substantial amounts of money thus necessary. Although she did not want to spend all her earnings, she said that it would be a shame not to celebrate in a proper manner, following tradition. She expects at least three hundred people will be attending.

As a measure to fight poverty, the government hence sets limits on these traditions, thus discouraging people from driving themselves bankrupt. While some may say that this constitutes government interference in personal life and liberties, and disrespect for private property, it seems that such measures are almost necessary to free people from social pressure. This is confirmed in the still singular case of Khujand city, by the much higher – and completely voluntary – compliance with such legislation in the lower social strata than in the higher. In the lower classes, people cannot afford the rigors of tradition and use any plausible means of saving themselves from even greater poverty and debt; by contrast, the higher classes use tradition, fueled by their riches, as a sign of social distinction, even to the point of breaking the new laws.

ORGANIZATION AND MOBILIZATION IN THE STREETS OF BISHKEK

Michael Coffey

Politicians in Kyrgyzstan are experienced hands at conducting protests in the center of Bishkek, with spring and fall demonstrations on Ala-Too square becoming as much a Kyrgyz tradition as genuine mass political expression. While opposition leaders, and especially the administration of Kurmanbek Bakiyev, are loathe to repeat the chaos that resulted in the overthrow of Askar Akayev in March 2005, tension continues to surround this April "meeting," despite increased organization on both sides.

The spring opposition protest that began April 11th on Ala-Too square in the Kyrgyzstan's capital was in fact preceded by several days of hunger protests in front of the Zhogorku Kenesh, or parliament. During the pre-demonstration hunger strike, opposition elements exhibited far greater organization than during last November's meeting.

This early wave of protesters constructed half a dozen yurts in front of parliament, including a headquarters, they pitched green military tents,

brought in medical personnel to oversee the health of the hunger strikers and set up another tent with communications equipment to rally supporters. By contrast, thousands of demonstrators waited days last November before they were supplied with just one port-o-let.

The start of the main demonstration on April 11 on the central square exhibited significant preparation as well, attributed by some to Felix Kulov's leadership, as he is a former Minister of National Security and a KGB general. Within hours, opposition supporters erected dozens of yurts and military tents on Ala-Too, suggesting they were prepared for a lengthy stay. The opposition also passed out thousands of bandanas reading "United Front" (the opposition umbrella group), allowing students to hide their identities and giving all protesters a militant air.

Organizers kept a tight reign on their supporters, keeping them away from prohibited areas such as the White House driveway and surrounding sidewalk, so that they remain concentrated on the square during the night. The opposition has even fielded its own security force, arrayed in camouflage and short-brim hats. While Saturday, April 14th was marred by a small fight, reportedly brought on by government "provocateurs," the city center was generally peaceful and stores and shops just blocks away from the demonstration remained open throughout the protest's duration.

The Kyrgyz government, wary of a repetition of March 2005, this April marshaled considerably more strength than usual. Faced with up to 8,000 demonstrators at their height, the ministries of National Security and Internal Affairs mobilized a reported 3,000 security personnel, drawn from various government organs – including prison guards, police from Osh and Jalal-Abad, Spetsnaz (special forces) and dog handlers.

Under the command of the Ministry of National Security, National Guard troops were positioned on the White House grounds, along with sniper teams on the roof of the executive building. Two armored personnel carriers could also be seen stationed at the

rear of the building. In addition, a half dozen fire trucks with water cannons were placed at key points, both on and off the White House grounds, for crowd control.

Recognizing the somewhat relaxed attitude toward security and officialdom in the Kyrgyz Republic, officials have for the first time (just days prior to the launch of this April's meeting) posted placards around the White House fence warning that "unsanctioned entry" onto the grounds would result in the "use of deadly force."

Other measures undertaken to maintain order in the capital have included the use of nighttime patrol buses with embarked police detachments. These roving patrols have enabled police to round up drunken demonstrators that have wandered – accidentally or not – away from Ala-Too square, perhaps heading off possible looting or vandalism downtown.

Instead of motley equipment in evidence during previous call-ups, police this year fielded uniform urban fatigues, radios, body armor, combat boots, riot shields and helmets – mostly thanks to American funding, according to many of the soldiers this author spoke with. Soviet-era accoutrement has been discarded in favor of new equipment that gives local security forces the appearance of Moscow's battle-ready OMON, rather than poorly-equipped Kyrgyz police.

As a further warning to the opposition, the chairman of the State Committee for National Security and National Security Service chief Murat Satalinov oversaw a parade of perhaps 1,500 troops. This "provocation," as it was termed by the opposition, was held on Bishkek's main thoroughfare, cutting through Ala-Too square and the opposition's gathering point of tents and yurts.

The security apparatus' show of power on Friday the 13th exemplified the increased organizational capabilities of the government, but it also highlighted the risks that opposition and government sides faced as their standoffs become concurrently more militarized. As the parade concluded, a police vehicle that broke down became

the source of derision and angry chanting for protesters; in just a few moments youths waving opposition party flags broke through a line of prison guards and stormed toward the White House gates.

Organizers quickly pulled their protesters back to the central square, but National Guard forces and rooftop snipers had already mobilized for action in those few moments. Precinct-type leaders quickly corralled the demonstrators, but increased

organization and the concurrent militarization of government and opposition forces means that the consequences of any unintended clash between the two sides could be significantly greater than during previous "meetings."

The decisive April 19 crackdown may have averted such unrest for the time being, but the fate of the future protests that are certain to take place remain an open question.

KAZAKH OPPOSITION FORCES PRESS GOVERNMENT FOR GENUINE DEMOCRACY

Marat Yermukanov

Following the major setback in last year's presidential election, disillusioned opposition forces in Kazakhstan seemed to fall into total depression. But in anticipation of parliamentary elections, opponents of the regime are making yet futile attempts to win the hearts and minds of potential supporters. The challenge from the opposition puts the stated intention of the ruling elite to democratize the society to test.

On April 12, dozens of opposition activists picketed the Almaty justice department's office demanding the immediate registration of Alga (Forward) opposition party, conceived as a successor of the banned Democratic Choice of Kazakhstan. Police forces watched calmly and did not interfere as protesters shouted slogans and unfolded banners accusing the Ministry of Justice of deviating from democratic norms. A small group of demonstrators broke through police lines into the ministry building to hand down a petition with a list of demands to justice minister, but the minister refused to talk to them, leaving it to his office manager to receive the petition. No one was detained and police authorities carefully avoided an escalation of the conflict. The chief prosecutor of Almaty, speaking into a loudspeaker, urged protesters to disperse, saying

that the rally was not authorized by the city's mayor. Protesters ignored his demands, but the rally ended peacefully. Opposition leaders fear the whole scene was videotaped by plain-clothes police officers and that some protesters are likely to be questioned by law enforcement bodies.

The opposition rally members was organized in protest against the reluctance of the Ministry of Justice to register the Alga movement as a political party. The decision to apply for registration of the Alga People's Party was adopted at the founding conference of the newly born movement, which took place on September 10, 2006. But since then, the Ministry of Justice repeatedly declined to register the party under various pretexts. Opposition leaders capitalized on the delayed registration of Alga to win back public sympathy, albeit with little success. Similar protest actions in support of Alga were simultaneously organized by opposition activists in some regions, but failed to gain popular support.

But the salient feature of the standoff between opposition forces and authorities is the deep contempt for basic civic rights to hold street rallies that is displayed by the government. Article 32 of Kazakhstan's Constitution safeguards citizens' rights to hold peaceful rallies, and street

manifestations. On the other hand, the same Article of the Constitution stipulates that these rights may be curtailed to ensure the state security and public order. This constitutional loophole was effectively used by authorities in the run-up to the last presidential election to ban street manifestations and rallies, and the tight control over opposition activities has not been relaxed since then. Yevgeni Zhovtis, the director of the International Human Rights Bureau in Kazakhstan, said the supporters of Alga party did not violate the law and acted within their constitutional rights. At the same time, he believes the existing Constitution should be improved to grant citizens more civic liberties and to remove legal obstacles to street manifestations. According to Zhovtis, human rights activists have drafted a set of legislative packages concerning peaceful rallies and freedom of expression, including amendments to the Constitution.

However, very few people hope the opposition will succeed in pushing the proposed draft law through parliament. There are many reasons for skepticism. Kazakhstan's opposition is too weak and the rifts between numerous factions are too wide to work out a single comprehensive strategy. Political parties are hopelessly alienated from wide sections of the population and do not enjoy genuine public sympathy. Most of the seats in parliament are held by the pro-presidential Nur Otan party.

At the same time, Kazakhstan's bid for the presidency of the OSCE in 2009 can accelerate the process of political reforms in the country, including the introduction of amendments to the Constitution, the adoption of an improved media law, the election of executive power structures at regional and district levels, financial transparency in government offices, and accountability of governing bodies before the people. Some political observers from the opposition camp hope Kazakhstan's OSCE presidency would tie the ruling regime to its commitments to observe civic rights and carry out all-encompassing political reforms.

Excessive optimism about the pace of political reforms in Kazakhstan may nevertheless not be warranted. The political establishment has considerably consolidated its position after the ill-fated revolution in neighboring Kyrgyzstan, offering a blend of presidential and parliamentary type of governance as a democratic model for Kazakhstan. In his recent interview to national TV channels, President Nursultan Nazarbayev said Europe did not abandon its attempt to mentor Kazakhstan, advancing almost exclusively political demands while Kazakhstan tries to maintain good relations with Europe. This comment is not difficult to interpret.

FORUM REPORT: DOES JAPAN MATTER IN CENTRAL ASIA?

Michael Leung

On April 25, 2007, the Central Asia-Caucasus Institute (CACI) and the Sasakawa Peace Foundation co-hosted Akio Kawato, Visiting Professor from Waseda University and former Ambassador of Japan to Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, who discussed "Japan's Policy toward Central Asia." Evan Feigenbaum, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State in the Bureau of South and

Central Asian Affairs, was present to provide comment, and CACI Chairman Frederick Starr moderated the event.

Dr. Kawato began his presentation by pointing out the importance of Central Asia in understanding the history of other civilizations. Chinese history, ancient Greek history, and Indian history all have linkages with Central Asia. On Japan's intentions

and role in international politics, Kawato stated that Japan had no selfish objectives in Central Asia and was mainly interested in peace and security for the region.

Kawato presented “Central Asia Plus Japan,” the framework by which Japan was looking to pursue its policies in Central Asia. “Central Asia Plus Japan” pursued a regional approach, using ASEAN as a model. Its main goal was independence and stability in the region. Human welfare and human rights was also an objective. The framework followed three principles: respect for the diversity of the five countries, awareness of the competition among the states and the potential for conflict, and emphasis on open cooperation which Kawato did not believe exists in the China-led Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO).

Japan’s main tool in Central Asia has been economic assistance, consisting of loans and grants. Loans for construction of infrastructure in Central Asia have so far amounted to US\$2 billion. Grants have totaled \$600 million, of which \$260 million is for technical assistance for capacity building. Japan preferred loans because it motivated the borrower to generate a return on projects for loan repayment.

Japan had been the top donor in several Central Asian countries prior to the recent involvement of the United States. Kawato marveled at the speed and level of U.S. influence in the region, and criticized Japanese policy-making as unnecessarily bureaucratic. Kawato also warned that the recent wave of generous lending by China could adversely affect the long-run capability of the Central Asian countries for loan repayment.

Therefore, Kawato noted, Japan’s economic assistance was becoming less effective. He identified trade, investment, and energy resources as other avenues to promote Japanese relations in Central Asia. Japan’s trade with Central Asia, however, remained small (\$620 million annually compared to Japan’s global trade of \$1.227 trillion annually). Investment has totaled \$900 million to-date in Kazakhstan, mainly in oil fields.

On energy, Japan and its private companies remained limited in their interests – only Kazakhstan had enough oil to export in significant quantities. Also, the transportation distance and lack of transparency remained obstacles for doing business. Uranium remains the greatest possibility. Kazakhstan has the second largest deposit of iron ore in the world and Japan had been proactive in ore import. Uranium import from Central Asia would, however, ultimately require cooperation with Russia in the nuclear field—uranium ore required initial processing and enriching, which are usually performed in Russia. Japan will conclude an agreement for cooperation with Russia by the end of 2007.

Kawato ended his presentation by stating that a “great game” was not needed in Central Asia, and that stability and independence of the region were the most important goals. He cited four mid-term objectives of Japan for the region:

- stability in Afghanistan;
- assurance of the status-quo to eliminate the incentive for a “great game” (i.e. maintenance of present border lines);
- patient assistance for the reform of the socialist societies; and,
- respect for Central Asia’s deep history and culture

In his comments, Evan Feigenbaum declared that many states seemed to be interested in Central Asia and outlined a framework that examines four categories of interest to evaluate a country’s sustainability of involvement in the region: strategic, commercial, economic assistance, and project finance.

He gauged that Japan was active in all four categories: strategic as exemplified by former Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi’s visit to the region and the “Central Asia Plus Japan” Dialogue; commercial, particularly in uranium development; economic assistance through Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA); and, project finance through Japan Bank for Cooperation (JBC). Feigenbaum further stated that the presence of

Japanese embassies in all five Central Asian capitals and its level of political interest, attention, and money suggested that Japan would have a sustained and increasing role in Central Asia.

Feigenbaum remarked that Japanese involvement suited Central Asia's priority needs of infrastructure and economic development. He remarked that activity in the region was increasingly multinational. The U.S. will be inaugurating a bridge this summer that connects Dushanbe with Afghanistan; this will link to the Afghanistan ring road, which is a multinational project, and to several Tajikistan projects being undertaken by China, Japan, and the Asian Development Bank (ADB).

Feigenbaum remarked that the Japan-U.S. bilateral relationship was becoming global as challenges became global in scope. Countries, including the U.S., are realizing that the common agenda for stability, security, democracy, and market reform cannot be pursued alone. He stated that Japan is one of the best and promising partners. Consequently, the U.S. and Japan have inaugurated policy talks on an inter-agency basis to discuss strategy, policy, and assistance priorities.

Feigenbaum posed several questions concerning Japan's involvement in Central Asia:

Can Japan sustain the level of interest?

Can Japanese private companies develop interest?

Can Japan sustain relations with Russia and China to facilitate a greater role in region?

Can Japan work with international financial institutions (IFIs) to create more robust mechanisms?

With respect to values-based diplomacy, what is the role of democracy, rule of law, and good governance?

In the question period, Kawato affirmed the importance of relations with Russia and China. Despite remaining territorial issues with Russia and anti-Japanese demonstrations in China, there have been recent improvements in the relationships. Kawato stated that Central Asia is a balancing factor that discouraged Japan from antagonizing Russia and China.

In conclusion, Kawato noted the importance of relations with Uzbekistan for Japan's Central Asia policy. Uzbekistan shares common borders with each of the other Central Asian states, it has the region's largest population, and it potentially has the region's largest economy. He said that investment is one solution to increasing relations with Central Asia, but that profitability in the region was still limited and local government regulation remained arbitrary and strict. Kawato stressed that more patience was needed on human rights issues and remarked that the culture of the people rather than the specific leader may be the more important factor when attempting to change the region's mentality with respect to authoritarian rule. He saw this as a difficult and gradual process, requiring time and economic development.



NEWS DIGEST

GEORGIAN PRESIDENT LOOKS AHEAD TO NATO MAP

19 April

Addressing a NATO seminar in Tbilisi on April 19, Mikheil Saakashvili predicted that by autumn of 2007 Georgia will have successfully implemented the measures outlined in its Intensified Dialogue with NATO and will advance to receiving a Membership Action Plan, the final stage of preparation before a formal invitation is extended to join the alliance. At the same time, Saakashvili warned unnamed European states that they should not retreat from their expressed support for Georgia's accession to NATO for fear that Russia might retaliate by raising the price of natural gas for European customers. In the course of his address, Saakashvili affirmed that ethnic minorities are being willingly integrated into Georgian society and learning the Georgian language. Saakashvili said the international community is beginning to understand that the status quo with regard to unresolved conflicts on Georgian territory is untenable, and that new approaches to resolving those conflicts are called for. He condemned the mass flight of Georgians from Abkhazia during the 1992-93 war as "a clear example" of ethnic cleansing. (Caucasus Press)

ARMENIAN FOREIGN MINISTER COMMENTS ON BELGRADE TALKS

20 April

Vartan Oskanian told RFE/RL's Armenian Service by telephone on April 19 that his talks the previous day in Belgrade with his Azerbaijani counterpart Elmar Mammadyarov under the aegis of the OSCE Minsk Group proceeded normally, "in a constructive environment," and that the atmosphere was "more relaxed" than during the previous meeting in Geneva in mid-March. Oskanian told RFE/RL after the Geneva meeting that the two sides failed to make any progress and still had "deep

differences" over unspecified key details of the draft agreement on resolving the Karabakh conflict draft. Oskanian said on April 19 that during the Belgrade meeting, which lasted almost five hours, the Minsk Group co-chairmen unveiled "views as to how those differences can be addressed." He did not elaborate. He said the co-chairs will "most probably" travel to Armenia and Azerbaijan after the May 12 Armenian parliamentary elections and meet with the two countries' presidents. Responding to a query from RFE/RL, Oskanian said that it is up to President Robert Kocharian to decide whether he should remain as foreign minister in the government to be formed after the May 12 elections. He dismissed as premature the question whether he will participate in the 2008 presidential ballot in which Kocharian is barred by the constitution from seeking a third term. (RFE/RL)

TENSION MOUNTS IN KYRGYZSTAN AS OPPOSITION DEMONSTRATORS CLASH WITH POLICE

20 April

Some 2,000 Kyrgyz demonstrators gathered outside the Kyrgyz government building in Bishkek on April 19, the ninth day of rallies demanding the resignation of Kyrgyz President Kurmanbek Bakiev and the introduction of constitutional reforms, RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service reported. After a small group of demonstrators began to throw stones at the building, nearby detachments of riot police moved in to disperse the protesters using tear gas, percussion grenades, and wielding batons. As the demonstrators regrouped, they joined a separate rally of 8,000 protesters in Bishkek's central Alatau Square. Reacting to the incident, opposition leaders from the United Front For A Worthy Future for Kyrgyzstan and the For Reforms movement, including parliamentarian Temir Sariev, urged the crowd to refrain from violence. Following the clash with demonstrators, Kyrgyz Prime Minister Almaz

Atambaev issued urgent orders to senior police officers to immediately cease any confrontation with the protesters. (RFE/RL)

THERE IS MORE DEMOCRACY IN TBILISI THAN MOSCOW – GEORGIAN MINISTER

22 April

Georgian Interior Minister Vano Merabishvili has advised Russia to speak more respectfully of Georgia. Commenting on Sunday on a recent interview of Russian First Deputy Prime Minister Sergei Ivanov with The Financial Times criticizing the state of democracy in Ukraine and Georgia Merabishvili said to reporters: "There is more of it in Tbilisi than in Moscow." Expanding on the idea he said that unlike Tbilisi in Moscow "skinheads are roaming the streets and brutally treating representatives of ethnic minorities." "The Georgian police unlike Russian are not extorting money everywhere from Georgians and other arrivals, and unlike the Russian army Georgian army is free from hazing." "Journalists and political opponents are not assassinated or poisoned in Georgia," Merabishvili said. In a lengthy interview with The Financial Times Ivanov spoke on a wide range of home and foreign policy issues, including the ownership of natural resources, defense and upcoming elections. Among other things he spoke of democracy saying that Russia will be a democracy but should be allowed to find its own particular form as others have done. The article in The Financial Times said: "As for western-backed 'beacons of democracy' around Russia's borders - Iraq, Georgia, or Ukraine, where parliament is engaged in a stand-off with the winner in the 2004 revolution - the tightened lips become almost a sneer. Ukraine "completely undermines democracy. Because people, having seen this total mess, will say, 'We don't need your democracy. Appoint us a tsar, give us our wages and stop bothering us with your democracy' ". (Interfax)

MILITANT GROUP SURROUNDED IN DAGESTAN – INTERIOR MINISTRY

23 April

A group of militants has been surrounded by law enforcers in a village in Dagestan. The press service of the Dagestani Interior Ministry told Interfax that law enforcers are conducting a sweep operation in the village of Pervomaiskoye in Khasavyurt district. "There are two to four militants in the

group. They are barricaded in a private home which law enforcers have surrounded. So far there have been no reports of casualties," a spokesman said. (Interfax)

ARMENIA, RUSSIA DISCUSS COOPERATION IN NUCLEAR ENERGY

24 April

Russian Atomic Energy Agency (Rosatom) head Sergei Kiriyeenko met in Yerevan on April 23 with Armenian President Robert Kocharian and Prime Minister Serzh Sarkisian, Noyan Tapan and RFE/RL's Armenian Service reported. The talks focused on possible Russian assistance in building a new nuclear power plant in Armenia to replace the existing one at Medzamor, which the EU wants shut down as potentially unsafe. Kiriyeenko also signed an agreement with Sarkisian on joint prospecting for and exploitation of uranium deposits in Armenia. Kiriyeenko pointed out that Armenia could use that uranium to create nuclear fuel for Medzamor. (RFE/RL)

AZERBAIJAN PROTESTS REVISION OF U.S. STATE DEPARTMENT REPORT

24 April

The Azerbaijani government has cancelled the planned visit to Washington of a high-level delegation that was to have held bilateral talks on security issues on April 23-24, Azerbaijani media reported, quoting the Azerbaijani Foreign Ministry. That decision was made to protest the rewording of a section of the State Department annual report on human rights in Armenia. The original text noted that "Armenia continues to occupy the Azerbaijani territory of Nagorno-Karabakh and seven surrounding Azerbaijani territories." As a result of protests from the Armenian government and lobbying by Armenian organizations in the United States, that wording was changed to read "Armenian forces have occupied large sections of Azerbaijani territory adjacent to Nagorno-Karabakh. Armenian officials claim they have not 'occupied' Nagorno-Karabakh proper." According to the Azerbaijani Foreign Ministry, the State Department revision distorts the essence of the conflict and calls into question Washington's objectivity as a mediator in the conflict. On April 24, the online daily echo-az.com quoted Azerbaijani Foreign Ministry press spokesman Khazar Ibrahim as saying that the new wording is at odds with the

official U.S. position on the Karabakh conflict. (RFE/RL)

GEORGIAN PRESIDENT UNVEILS SOUTH OSSETIAN PEACE PLAN

24 April

Before leaving on April 23 on an official visit to the United Kingdom, President Mikheil Saakashvili unveiled at a session of the National Security Council a five-point peace plan for resolving the South Ossetian conflict, RFE/RL's Georgian Service reported. The plan envisages the creation of a temporary administration for South Ossetia that would designate its representatives to a number of central ministries, including the interior, finance, and justice ministries. The temporary administration would receive an unspecified amount of funds from the central budget to finance reconstruction. At some unspecified future date, and under conditions that Saakashvili did not spell out, the temporary administration would rule on the restoration of South Ossetia's autonomous status within Georgia, which the Georgian SSR Supreme Soviet abolished in late 1990. Meanwhile, Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Grigory Karasin said on Moscow would not participate in any negotiations involving the "alternative" pro-Tbilisi South Ossetian administration headed by Dmitry Sanakoyev. Also on April 23, speaker Nino Burdjanadze said the Georgian parliament would approve the funds designated by Saakashvili for postconflict reconstruction in South Ossetia, Caucasus Press reported. (RFE/RL)

TWO SERVICEMEN WOUNDED, CIVILIAN KILLED IN MINE INCIDENTS IN CHECHNYA

25 April

A Defense Ministry serviceman suffered wounds when he tripped on a mine in Chechnya, sources in law enforcement services informed Interfax on Wednesday. No further details of the incident were provided. Another contract serviceman sustained injuries in a similar incident on the outskirts of Staraya Sunzha in Groznensky district on Tuesday. He was hospitalized, they said. A local resident was killed when an anti-tank mine blew up under his tractor outside Serzhen-Yurt in Chechnya's Shali district, the sources said. (Interfax-AVN)

INGUSH LAUNCH NEW CAMPAIGN TO FORCE PRESIDENT'S RESIGNATION

26 April

An initiative group named Justice and Dignity has released an open letter to the population of Ingushetia calling for coordinated protests and legal action to expedite the dismissal of republican President Murat Zyazikov. The appeal, which was posted on April 24 on the website ingushetiya.ru, accuses Zyazikov of lying egregiously, including in audiences with President Putin, about the political and economic situation in Ingushetia, exaggerating the volume of foreign investment and housing construction and depicting the overall situation in utopian terms at a time when "nine out of 10 people do not have enough to eat and unemployment stands at 60 percent." The appeal further accuses Zyazikov of turning a blind eye to corruption among his subordinates and of undermining national dignity. The appeal notes that there are numerous factions within the Russian leadership, of which only one -- the "party of war" - supports Zyazikov. It predicts that, regardless who succeeds Putin as Russian president in 2008, Zyazikov will lose his post and, in all likelihood, be named Russian ambassador to Jordan. The appeal calls for legal action against Zyazikov for lies and disinformation, and encourages Ingush to sign the electronic petition (zyazikov.ru) calling for his dismissal. (That action was launched three years ago, and to date almost 2,000 people, of a population of some 468,000, have signed it.) Meanwhile, "Nezavisimaya gazeta" on April 26 commented that Ingushetia's economic successes "do not cease to amaze even skeptics." The paper further quoted unidentified opinion polls as demonstrating a high rate of popular support for Zyazikov, who was first elected president in late April 2002, and who appealed successfully to President Putin in June 2005 to be renominated for a second term in the wake of the first wave of popular protests against his failure to expedite the return to their homes in North Ossetia's disputed Prigorodny Raion of Ingush forced to flee during the October-November 1992 fighting. (RFE/RL)

CONFUSION SURROUNDS KYRGYZ PARLIAMENTARY BID BY EX-PRESIDENT'S DAUGHTER

26 April

The status of a parliamentary bid by Bermet Akaeva, daughter of former Kyrgyz President Askar Akaev, remained unclear on April 25 amid

conflicting reports about court rulings, news agencies reported. In an interview with akipress.org, Myktarbek Alymkulov, a regional court judge in Kemin, said that he ruled to annul her candidacy in the April 29 by-election. He also alleged that Akaeva's supporters pressured him and threatened him physically. But the news agency ferghana.ru reported that the court decision rests on a residency requirement that was removed from the country's constitution on December 30. For her part, Akaeva told ferghana.ru that she expects the Supreme Court to rule on the case. Akaeva's supporters briefly blocked the Bishkek-Torugart highway on April 24 to protest the court ruling to remove her from the running in the April 29 by-election. (RFE/RL)

KAZAKH PRESIDENT VISITS KYRGYZSTAN 26 April

Nursultan Nazarbaev met with Kyrgyz President Kurmanbek Bakiev in Bishkek on April 26 to discuss bilateral relations. The two agreed to form a council to deepen cooperation between the two countries. Nazarbaev told a press conference that Kazakhstan is "ready to inject \$100 million in economic aid into the Kyrgyz economy," Interfax reported. Nazarbaev said that Kazakhstan has already invested \$300 million in Kyrgyzstan, including \$100 million in 2006, the news agency 24.kg reported. Kazakhstan will also provide humanitarian aid, including 1,500 tons of grain. In connection with recent political demonstrations in Kyrgyzstan, Nazarbaev said, "those are your internal affairs. We support any decision, but we are sincerely concerned for Kyrgyzstan." (akipress.org)

TAJIKISTAN TO BREAK \$1 BILLION CONTRACT

26 April

Tajikistan will break a US\$1 billion (euro735 million) contract with Russian aluminum giant OAO Rusal for a hydroelectric plant, after continuing problems with the project, a top Tajik energy official said Thursday. Tajikistan will break a US\$1 billion (euro735 million) contract with Russian aluminum giant OAO Rusal for a hydroelectric plant, after continuing problems with the project, a top Tajik energy official said Thursday. The Rogun dam, crucial for the impoverished Central Asian nation, has been stalled from the outset by disputes between the government and Rusal. In January, the Tajik

government accused the company of failing to fulfill the contract signed in 2004. Sharifkhon Samiyev, head of the Tajik national energy company, said the government now intends to create an international consortium to complete the project. Russian companies, except Rusal, would be welcome to join, he added. "There is a (government) decision to bar Rusal from working in the country," Samiyev said. But, Rusal's office in Tajikistan said the company remained committed to the dam. "We don't know of any changes from the Russian side in relation to our participation in this project," a company statement said. Tajikistan has long sought an investor to complete the dam on the Vakhsh River, 120 kilometers (75 miles) east of the capital, Dushanbe. Construction was interrupted by the 1992-97 civil war. The country's fast-flowing mountain rivers have a potential hydropower capacity of 527 billion kilowatt hours a year, among the largest in the world, according to international experts. Energy sales would bring a substantial boon to the former Soviet republic, racked by rampant unemployment and problems caused by increasing amounts of drugs being smuggled from neighboring Afghanistan. The plant's completion would substantially increase sales of electricity to neighboring China, as well as to Pakistan and Afghanistan. Russia's RAO Unified Energy Systems is involved in a US\$480 million (euro363 million) project to complete another major hydroelectric plant in the country. (AP)

ARMENIA 'BEWILDERED' BY U.S. VOLTE FACE ON HUMAN RIGHTS REPORT

27 April

The U.S. State Department amended for the second time on April 25 the wording of a controversial paragraph of its annual report on human rights in Armenia, restoring the initial wording that caused consternation and protest in Yerevan and among Armenian organizations in the United States. That wording, affirming that "Armenia continues to occupy the Azerbaijani territory of Nagorno-Karabakh and seven surrounding Azerbaijani territories," was changed in the wake of Armenian protests to read "Armenian forces have occupied large sections of Azerbaijani territory adjacent to Nagorno-Karabakh. Armenian officials claim they have not 'occupied' Nagorno-Karabakh proper." Angered by that change, Baku cancelled the planned visit to Washington of a high-level delegation that was to

have held bilateral talks on security issues on April 23-24, whereupon U.S. Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Matthew Bryza telephoned Azerbaijani Foreign Minister Elmar Mammadyarov in an attempt to reassure him that the new wording did not imply a retreat from Washington's policy of respect for Azerbaijan's territorial integrity. Armenian Foreign Ministry spokesman Vladimir Karapetian told RFE/RL's Armenian Service on April 26 that "we thought the mistake was corrected and are bewildered by such an unserious approach." Mammadyarov for his part was quoted by day.az on April 26 as saying the reversion to the original wording of the report is "very important news." (RFE/RL)

17 DIE IN HELICOPTER CRASH IN CHECHNYA

27 April

According to preliminary information, 17 people were killed in a crash of an Mi-8 helicopter carrying a landing party in southern Chechnya, a source in the headquarters of the joint group of forces in the North Caucasus told Interfax-AVN on Friday. "Three crewmembers and 14 soldiers died. According to preliminary information, the helicopter was hit from the ground," the source said. A special operation to eliminate an illegal armed group has been under way to the south from the Shatoi town. Three Mi-8 helicopters with landing parties were sent to the district. One of them was brought down. (Interfax-AVN)

TAJIKISTAN IN \$1 BN HYDROPOWER BID

30 April

Tajikistan has announced a \$1bn (£500m) plan to become one of the world's leading hydropower producers. President Emomali Rakhmon said the former Soviet republic hoped to attract foreign investment over the next three years to help build 80 power plants. Tajikistan sees potential energy sales as a key way of lifting the economy, which was battered by civil war during the 1990s. The central Asian state is one of the poorest in the region. But experts believe Tajikistan's mountainous rivers have a hydropower capacity of 527 billion kilowatt hours a year - potentially one of the largest in the world. The government said recently it would break a \$1bn deal with Russian aluminium firm OAO Rusal for Tajikistan's largest hydropower project, because of ongoing disagreements. (BBC)

UZBEKISTAN, CHINA SIGN MAJOR GASPIPELINE DEAL

30 April

Uzbekistan plans to build a gas pipeline to China with a capacity of 30 billion cubic metres a year, equivalent to half the Central Asian state's gas production, the Uzbek government said in a statement. The statement said Ma Kai, the head of China's top state planning body, and Uzbek Deputy Prime Minister Rustam Azimov signed an agreement in Tashkent on Monday about the principles of building and running a pipeline along the route. "It would be 530 km long and have a throughput capacity of 30 billion cubic metres of the resource every year. The project includes a plan to bring two compressor stations on stream," the statement said. The statement did not give a time frame or name participants in the project. Earlier this month an Uzbek government source said China's Sinopec Corp. had pulled out of a project to explore new Uzbek projects and revitalise stalled projects with state energy firm Uzbekneftegas. The source said Uzbekistan would focus instead on cooperation with another Chinese oil major, China National Petroleum Corp. Uzbekistan has traditionally supplied gas not to China but to Russia, where pipeline monopoly Gazprom controls pipeline networks threading into the lucrative European market. Although the European Union would love to tap the growing supplies of gas in Central Asia, Gazprom's control of the intervening pipelines stops European buyers doing deals directly and allows Russia to control the market for Central Asian gas. Despite its vast size, Gazprom is itself keen to buy the region's gas to shore up its own reserves. The European Union has further distanced itself by criticising Uzbek human rights, while Russia and China, desperate to find more fuel for their roaring economies, openly courted Uzbekistan and its gas-rich neighbour Turkmenistan. However, neither country shares a border with China, and it was not clear whether the pipeline would traverse Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan or Kazakhstan to reach its destination. Although there are also huge physical obstacles -- mountains and deserts -- a pipeline could diversify China's energy supplies while allowing Uzbekistan to break free of Gazprom's control and play China and Russia off against each other. Gazprom is already moving fast to enter the Asian market, building pipelines with a capacity of 60-80 bcm to China. It has also just bought 50 percent of the huge Sakhalin-2 liquefied natural gas project, previously controlled by Shell ,

which will mainly supply South Korea and Japan. Its export monopoly also means it holds sway over several other big potential China supply projects, including the Kovykta gas field operated by BP's joint venture TNK-BP. (Reuters)

U.S. RADAR IN GEORGIA WOULD BE ABLE TO MONITOR RUSSIAN ICBM TEST-FIRES - EXPERT

2 May

The deployment of a missile defense radar in Georgia would enable the U.S. to monitor test-fires of Russian intercontinental ballistic missiles, Col. Gen. Viktor Yesin, a former chief of staff of the Russian Strategic Rocket Forces, told Interfax on Wednesday. "The Americans have long been trying to have the chance to monitor test-fires of missiles conducted at the Kapustin Yar range in the Astrakhan region, which is used to test the combat equipment of intercontinental ballistic missiles," Yesin said. (Interfax-AVN)

AZERBAIJAN GIVES UP OIL TRANSIT VIA RUSSIAN TERRITORY

2 May

Azerbaijan has given up oil transit via Russia's territory, the Prime-Tass news agency quoted Transneft as saying on Wednesday. According to Transneft, Azerbaijan gave up oil transit via Russia's territory till the end of the year. In April Azerbaijan stopped oil export via Russia's territory, the company said. In the first quarter of 2007 oil transit from Azerbaijan reached 1.023 million tonnes. (Itar-Tass)

STUDENTS DEMAND US TROOPS LEAVE AFGHANISTAN AFTER CIVILIAN DEATHS

2 May

More than 1,000 Afghan students took to the streets Wednesday in a fourth day of anti-American

protests over civilians allegedly killed by coalition troops, witnesses said. The angry protestors shouted "Death to (George W.) Bush, death to (President Hamid) Karzai" in Jalalabad, the capital of eastern Nangarhar province, where six people were killed in a US-led raid at the weekend. They called on the 14,000-strong US-led coalition, based in Afghanistan to root out Taliban remnants, to leave the war-torn country. "The Americans must leave Afghanistan because they don't respect Afghanistan," said one protester. The protest comes a day after Afghan authorities said that some 30 civilians were among scores of Taliban-linked militants killed during operations by US-led and Afghan forces in the western province of Herat. Hundreds of people demonstrated in Herat's Shindand district on Monday, saying scores of civilians were killed in the US-led operation on Friday and Sunday. The Jalalabad demonstration follows similar protests in the town since Sunday when US-led forces killed six people. The coalition has said four were militants and that a woman and a teenager were killed in crossfire. "Why are they (Karzai and Bush) not accounting for the blood of innocent people who are being killed by the Americans on our soil," said one student who declined to be named. "The Americans have invaded our country. They have made themselves the owners and us their slaves," shouted another one, cheered by others. The students from Nangarhar University burned an effigy of President Bush in similar demonstrations they staged on Tuesday. The interior ministry has appointed a commission to investigate the civilian deaths in Shindand. Parliamentarians also expressed anger this week at mounting civilian deaths in military operations against insurgents, including by the US-led coalition that invaded Afghanistan and toppled the Taliban regime in late 2001. (AFP)

