

# Central Asia-Caucasus Analyst

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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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## **Svante E. Cornell**

Research Director; Editor, Central Asia-Caucasus Analyst  
Central Asia-Caucasus Institute & Silk Road Studies Program  
Paul H. Nitze School of Advanced International Studies, The Johns Hopkins University  
1619 Massachusetts Ave. N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036, USA.  
Tel. +1-202-663-5922; 1-202-663-7723; Fax. +1-202-663-7785

# WILL U.S. APPOINTMENT OF AN AMBASSADOR TO BAKU REMOVE WAR CLOUDS OVER NAGORNO-KARABAKH?

Stephen Blank

*The appointment on May 24 of Matthew Bryza to be the U.S. Ambassador to Azerbaijan not only offers an opportunity to overcome the recent chill in relations between the U.S. and Azerbaijan. It also offers a chance to reduce the possibility of a renewed war in Nagorno-Karabakh. As demonstrated by the 2008 Russo-Georgian war, so-called frozen conflicts can quickly become hot ones and Nagorno-Karabakh is no exception. There is now an opportunity for the U.S. to add its hitherto missing weight to the resolution of the interlinked issues of Nagorno-Karabakh and Armeno-Turkish normalization.*

**BACKGROUND:** This contested region of Nagorno-Karabakh has been occupied by Armenia for sixteen years. Negotiations have gotten nowhere even though the principles of a peace plan are on the table. When Turkey sought to normalize its ties with Armenia after the Russo-Georgian war in 2008, it omitted to insist on an Armenian withdrawal from Nagorno-Karabakh, thereby antagonizing Azerbaijan. Since Washington has supported the delinking of these territories from normalization issues, U.S. ties to Baku have suffered. Those relations have worsened further due to attacks on the authoritarian and corrupt nature of the Azerbaijani state (which is hardly unique to the CIS), and due to Washington's failure to invite President Ilham Aliyev to the nuclear security conference in Washington in April 2010, while it invited the presidents of Armenia, Georgia, and Turkey.

Consequently, relations between Baku and Washington deteriorated. However, equally importantly, Turkey changed its policy and now insists on a linkage between the normalization protocols and Armenia's withdrawal from the territories it conquered in 1993-94. While this has improved the ties

between Baku and Ankara, it also led Armenia to suspend the implementation of the original protocols in April 2010. What makes this situation dangerous is, first, that the appearance of political stalemate and Baku's sense of being ignored by Washington led observers to claim that the U.S. could "lose Azerbaijan" and second, that Baku might start a war to recover its lost territories.

Undoubtedly there are those in Baku, notably Defense Minister Safar Abiyev, who argue that war is the answer and that the Azerbaijani army is ready to defend the homeland. Naturally such rhetoric generates counter blasts from Armenia, as do reports that Azerbaijan is preparing a military plan of operations against Armenia. Such reports have recently proliferated, leading observers to worry that a war might come soon. Indeed, Hurriyet Daily News reported on May 10 that Turkish intelligence recently thwarted an Azerbaijani military operation immediately before Turkey and Armenia signed the normalization protocols in 2009. No reports have confirmed that story.

**IMPLICATIONS:** Experts generally believe that if Azerbaijan would attempt a war, even a



Matthew Bryza

limited military option, it would be flirting with disaster, given Armenia's military preparedness. Furthermore, Armenia would likely be able to count on Russian support given the Tashkent Treaty of 1992 and Armenia's membership in the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO). Second, only Moscow would benefit from such a war because until now Washington has clearly had little influence on Baku whereas Moscow could quickly bring all of the instruments of power that it possesses to bear on the situation.

As a sign of the tense relationship with the U.S., Azerbaijan cancelled some military drills it was supposed to conduct with the U.S. military. However, it appears that cooler heads have prevailed for now. In April, President Aliyev sent a delegation to Washington to explore ways in which the relationship could be retrieved. It was presumably pointed out that both sides needed to have strong representation in each other's capitals, leading to Bryza's nomination on May 24. If Bryza's name is sent quickly to the Senate for confirmation, he could soon take up his post in Baku and help both sides retreat from a feverish relationship that has come perilously close

to war. Now Washington will have the means to discuss with all the parties ways to bring the principles hitherto outlined as being germane to the realization of any peace process.

In fact, Nagorno-Karabakh is an area where Moscow and Washington have recently seen eye to eye and the warming of those bilateral ties could help facilitate progress here as well. Likewise, it is to be hoped that Washington will emulate Ankara and realize that the only way to strengthen overall peace and security in the Caucasus is to link the settlement of the

Nagorno-Karabakh issue to the future normalization of Turkey's relations with Armenia, even if this connection is not formally expressed in the relevant documents. The Turco-Azerbaijani rapprochement has not only led to new energy agreements between Ankara and Baku, it has also allowed Turkey to discreetly argue on behalf of Baku in Washington, e.g. pointing out the error in not inviting Aliyev to the nuclear security conference. In other words, the appointment, and hopefully confirmation of Ambassador Bryza's nomination can play an important role in reversing the drift towards war and sense of political hopelessness that has been discernible in Baku's approach to its situation. It may now have a strong advocate in Washington, and Washington may have an equally strong advocate in Baku to ensure Azerbaijan's continued orientation to the West with regard to energy issues and supplying the NATO campaign in Afghanistan.

Of course, Bryza's appointment does not guarantee a peaceful political resolution of the outstanding issues in Nagorno-Karabakh. But it does point towards a possible sequence of events that would redound to the mutual advantage of Turkey, Armenia, and Azerbaijan while achieving a common Russo-American aim of peace in the South Caucasus. Five years ago, this author observed that the normalization of Turkey's relations with Armenia, if tied (even informally) to a political settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh war, could engender a virtuous circle of events. Normalization would allow Turkey to confront more candidly its history with Armenia. It would also open up Armenia's development and physical connection to Europe, allowing it to become more economically prosperous and integrated with Europe, and it would allow Baku and

Yerevan to overcome their long-standing and unresolved antagonism. At the time it was even possible to see these processes as facilitating Turkey's membership in the EU.

**CONCLUSIONS:** The opportunities were not seized at that time. However, while it may not be possible to generate the entire chain of events that could lead to Turkey's membership in the EU at present, there clearly is an opportunity for the U.S. to add its hitherto missing weight to the resolution of the interlinked issues of Nagorno-Karabakh and Armeno-Turkish normalization. In view of the highly disturbed state of affairs in the South Caucasus due to the unresolved Nagorno-Karabakh issue, Armeno-Turkish tensions over normalization and the results of Russia's war with Georgia, progress along these lines is extremely desirable, even urgent. Failure to make political progress while the opportunity for doing so presents itself can lead desperate governments to think that a "limited" military adventure can overcome their problems or at least gain them the domestic support and foreign respect needed to move forward. Such considerations are always highly risky and could rebound back on their progenitors, making difficult situations worse. For these reasons, the appointment of a U.S. Ambassador to Azerbaijan could and hopefully will lessen the likelihood that war clouds will gather over Nagorno-Karabakh and that war rather than negotiations will be seen as the only way to overcome the present stalemate.

**AUTHOR'S BIO:** Stephen Blank is Professor at the Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College. The views expressed here do not represent those of the U.S. Army, Defense Department, or the U.S. Government.

# INGUSHETIA: PRESIDENT YEVKUROV LOOKS ASKANCE AT REPORTED ABDUCTIONS

Kevin Daniel Leahy

*When Yunas-Bek Yevkurov replaced Murat Zyazikov as president of Ingushetia in 2008 most citizens of the troubled republic were greatly relieved. Yevkurov arrived as a determined bridge-builder, a man of consensus who was expected to appeal to the disaffected citizenry of Ingushetia. He quickly won praise for pledging to put a stop to the much-maligned practice whereby young men were routinely abducted by unidentified members of the security forces. Of late, however, Yevkurov has seemingly revised his attitude toward Ingushetia's kidnapping phenomenon – and his reached some startling conclusions.*

**BACKGROUND:** Not long after assuming the presidency of Ingushetia, it became apparent to most observers that Yunas-Bek Yevkurov had been sent to his homeland as a conciliator. Yevkurov at once established a dialogue with his predecessor's main opponents: Maksharip Aushev, Magomed Khazbiyev and Musa Pliyev. These three human rights activists, the leading representatives of the anti-Zyazikov coalition, welcomed Yevkurov's appointment and expressed their shared conviction that the new president was capable of improving the situation in Ingushetia.

Pliyev, a lawyer by profession, was made an advisor to Yevkurov, while another well-known human rights advocate, Magomed-Sali Aushev, was made a deputy prime minister. In addition, Yevkurov appointed Rashid Gaisanov, an associate of the popular former president of the republic, Ruslan Aushev, to head his new government.

Yevkurov condemned the capricious behaviour of Ingushetia's security forces; he also insisted that no 'special operations' take place on the territory of Ingushetia without his government's knowledge. He met with representatives of local non-governmental

human rights organisations such as 'Mashr'; he proposed the establishment of an ad hoc presidential committee which would respond promptly to reported human rights violations and established a telephone 'hotline' through which citizens might report abuses by local police. This frenetic activity, in particular the president's efforts to tackle instances of kidnapping, earned him fulsome praise from Lyudmila Alexseeva, chairperson of the Moscow Helsinki Group, a Russian human rights organisation.

Speaking in December 2008, Alexseeva specifically applauded the president's habit of personally visiting the locations of reported kidnappings where he interacts with the victim's relatives, offering them personal and institutional support. Yevkurov's early hands-on approach to such cases was corroborated by a relative of Gapur Tankiyev, abducted from the settlement of Malgobek by unidentified gunmen last April. 'The president said that he was willing to support us in our search in every way. In particular, he offered assistance in providing [media] coverage...the president also promised that he would monitor the progress of our cause. He also recommended a good lawyer to us,' said Tankiyev's brother.





Yunas-Bek Yevkurov (EPA)

While Yevkurov's personal intervention in these situations may have given a degree of psychological comfort to anguished family members, it has done little to expedite the successful resolution of such cases in general. If anything, by associating himself personally with cases of abduction the president has enfeebled himself politically by virtue of the fact that neither he, nor the security forces he is responsible for, have managed to produce positive results in cases of this nature. Indeed, this uncomfortable reality was recently pointed out by the head of Mashr, Magomed Mutsolgov. Yevkurov's atypical reaction to the abduction of Mikhail Pliyev, an Ingush citizen abducted in Pyatigorsk, Stavropol Krai, in early March, may be indicative of a change of attitude on the president's part toward cases of abduction.

**IMPLICATIONS:** In August 2009, Yevkurov stated that many reported kidnappings in Ingushetia were in fact cases where young men had left their homes to join the ranks of the militants. Without saying so forthrightly, Yevkurov inferred that many young men were

vanishing of their own accord, sometimes even staging their own abductions so as to shield their families from reprisals by security forces. He called on such persons to accept his government's offer of amnesty and to return to a peaceful existence.

In January of this year Yevkurov

went further, announcing that 90% of abductees are 'members and accomplices of illegal armed groups'. Although the figure of 90% seems suspiciously rounded, there may be more than a kernel of truth in this suggestion. It is nevertheless curious that the president had not expressed this sentiment prior to August 2009; or perhaps more relevantly, prior to June 22, 2009, when he was critically injured during a suicide bomb attack on his presidential motorcade.

Yevkurov's seemingly newfound belief that a clear majority of abductees are in fact militants would appear have influenced his handling of the case of Mikhail Pliyev, missing since the beginning of March. Yevkurov's behaviour towards the Pliyev family has been peculiar. Mr. Pliyev's wife told reporters how the president said to her, almost admonishingly: 'you must know who your man is involved with'. She also protested that there appeared to be no official investigation underway. 'A lot of things have been promised, but nothing has been done,' she complained. In addition to his

curious encounter with Mrs. Pliyev, Yevkurov also prohibited a planned public demonstration organised by the Pliyev family, reportedly informing relatives that he would not permit 'illegal rallies' and telling them to 'go home'.

Even allowing for some understandable emotional embellishment in the family members' retelling of their encounter with Yevkurov, it is certain that the president disallowed the planned protest march and that police were deployed to disperse the demonstrators. Yevkurov's dispute with the Pliyev family represents the first time in his presidency that he has come into conflict with representatives of Ingush society that to our knowledge are involved neither with the state apparatus, nor with the militant underground. Yevkurov's current thinking on the abduction phenomenon is governed by the conviction that 'nothing happens of itself'; that there are reasons why people are taking up arms against Ingushetia's government, and that parents, relatives and clergy are all responsible for steering young people away from the militants.

This line of thinking is predicated on the uncertain premise that the clear majority of 'abductions' in Ingushetia are in fact a novel means of familial preservation, a supreme act of social abnegation whereby, in anticipation of taking up arms against the state, a young man wills his own disappearance for the sake of his family's safety and well-being. In a series of public statements since August 2009, President Yevkurov has confirmed his acceptance of this premise. With this in mind, the controversy surrounding the president's recent intervention in the Pliyev case might be construed as the

manifestation of this assumed premise in the government's attitude toward families of missing individuals.

**CONCLUSIONS:** We cannot be certain what exactly led President Yevkurov to accept the premise that nine out of every ten alleged abductees are actually involved with the militants. It is a fact that prior to August 2009 Yevkurov had never referenced the abduction phenomenon publicly along these lines. Is it possible that the June 2009 attack on his presidential convoy – an attack in which Yevkurov himself suffered serious injuries, his brother was seriously injured and his cousin killed – encouraged Yevkurov to adopt a less conciliatory stance toward Ingush society at large?

Perhaps this is more a question for a psychologist than a political analyst. Nevertheless, an objective analysis of the president's statements on the abduction phenomenon since his return to Ingushetia in August 2009, indicate that the attempt on his life represented a definite turning point in Yevkurov's political outlook. His apparent change of attitude toward cases of abduction also coincided with a marked deterioration in his relationship with representatives of Ingushetia's human rights community. In light of this apparent change in attitude, Yevkurov may now be disposed toward pursuing a less conciliatory policy toward segments of Ingush society whose favour he previously courted.

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

# CHINA'S DEEPENING ENGAGEMENT WITH PAKISTAN ON COUNTERTERRORISM

Ghulam Ali

*The April 2010 visit of Maulana Fazl-ur-Rahman, head of Pakistani Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam (JUI), to China at the invitation of the Communist Party of China (CPC), was yet another move on Beijing's part to tackle the challenge of terrorism emanating from Islamic fundamentalists. Starting from September 11, 2001, China has expanded its cooperation with Pakistan on counterterrorism through a wide range of activities, including engagement with the religious political parties of the country. This would certainly help China in handling its separatist problem in Xinjiang.*

**BACKGROUND:** China aptly exploited the post-9/11 environment to its own advantage and initiated counterterrorism cooperation with Pakistan with three main objectives: to ensure the security of Chinese working in Pakistan; break the network between Uyghur separatists and Pakistan-based militant groups, and gain Pakistan's support including of its religious parties on the issue of Muslim separatism in Xinjiang.

Beginning in 2004, in four separate attacks twelve Chinese lost their lives on Pakistani soil. In addition, on occasions China warned Pakistan that Xinjiang separatists in collaboration with local militants planned to kidnap Chinese diplomats in Islamabad. Such warnings were at their highest during the Beijing Olympic games in 2008 and at the 60th anniversary of the People's Republic in 2009. However, timely coordination of the intelligence agencies of the two countries and Pakistan's pre-emptive security measures prevented such plots from realization. Whether targeted attacks on Chinese in Pakistan had links with India or were collaborative efforts of local militants and Uyghurs – two convenient excuses from the Pakistani authorities – they did affect Sino-Pakistan relations. Beijing initially showed restraint, but as the attacks

continued, it left diplomatic courtesy and went public pressuring Pakistan to ensure the fullest security of its nationals. Pakistan sensed the concerns of its trusted ally and provided extraordinary armed security for most of the 10,000 Chinese invited by the Pakistani government. These measures successfully prevented further attacks since the last incident in July 2007, in which three Chinese were killed.

Similarly, the liaison between Pakistan-based militants and Uyghurs and the latter's sanctuary in Pakistani tribal areas was yet another issue on which Beijing had strong reservations. To address this issue, Pakistan intensified its crackdown against the Uyghur militants. The major breakthrough came in October 2004, when the Pakistani army shot dead Hasan Mahsum, head of the East Turkestan Islamic Movement (ETIM). Over the years, Pakistani forces have eliminated, arrested and extradited a number of Uyghurs, claiming to have broken the backbone of the militant Uyghur groups in Pakistan. The exact number of those killed or extradited is unknown, but Pakistani measures have seemingly satisfied the Chinese authorities.

In the post-9/11 period, China also openly sought Pakistan's support on the issue of



(Xinhua)

Muslim separatism in Xinjiang. Beginning in December 2001, the then Chief Executive of Pakistan, General Musharraf, visited the Grand Mosque of Xi'an at China's request and asked the Muslims to be loyal to the Chinese government. This was the first time a Pakistani leader went public to endorse China's policies on Xinjiang. Pakistan has since backed Beijing on this issue. The most significant display of this support came during the July 2009 riots in Xinjiang in which almost 200 people were killed. Pakistan not only endorsed China's measures to quell the riots but used its clout to prevent certain Islamic countries to take the issue to the Organization of Islamic Conference, thus saving Beijing from embarrassment.

Yet another Chinese move was to engage the leadership of Pakistani religious parties. In February 2009, the head of Jamaat-e-Islami (JI), Qazi Hussain Ahmed visited China at the invitation of the Communist Party of China (CPC). According to an unverified claim of *The Times of India*, during the visit China concluded an informal agreement with the JI that the latter would not support the separatists in Xinjiang. In April 2010, the CPC invited a

delegation of the Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam (JUI), an even more conservative religious party of Pakistan. The CPC has signed party-level MoUs with both these parties.

On its part, China has helped Pakistan diplomatically, economically and militarily. Beijing has supported Islamabad within the UN and various other forums. In July 2005, Pakistan became an Observer member of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization with

China's help. This is an additional platform where these two countries discuss, among other issues, the threat of terrorism. Between June 2009 and May 2010, China's aid to counterterrorism activities in Pakistan exceeded US\$ 470 million. Beijing also supplied explosives scanners which can detect vehicles carrying explosive material to be installed at the main entry points of all big cities in Pakistan, trained Pakistani police officials and provided weapons and equipment. In addition, Chinese forces conducted two anti-terror military exercises with Pakistani counterparts, with a third scheduled for summer 2010.

**IMPLICATIONS:** After 9/11, China recognized Pakistan's pivotal role in the fight against terrorism owing to Islamabad's old links with the Taliban and various Islamist groups. Beijing therefore initiated comprehensive cooperation with Pakistan on counterterrorism to address the issue of Muslim separatism in its troubled Xinjiang province. While maintaining a very low profile with a fear of backlash from militants or even of Al-Qaeda, Beijing pushed Islamabad to move on Uyghurs hiding in its lawless tribal areas. It

enhanced coordination and information sharing with its Pakistani counterparts, and signed agreements on terrorism and extradition of criminals (under which Pakistan extradited a number of Uyghurs caught during military operations in its tribal areas bordering Afghanistan, at the protest of human rights groups and Uyghur organizations). Cooperation has also developed in other non-traditional security areas.

A distinct feature of China's diplomacy on counterterrorism was that it adopted a comprehensive policy including engagement with Pakistani religious parties. China realizes the centrality of Islam in Pakistani society and the influence of these parties on Jihadi elements. The visits to China of Qazi Hussain of the JI and Maulana Fazl-ur-Rahman of the JUI are cases in point. These leaders, who express pro-Taliban and anti-U.S. opinions and whose parties hold considerable regard for and influence on certain militant groups, spoke highly of Sino-Pakistan relations during their visits. The JI even issued a statement requesting the Pakistani government to further consolidate its ties with China to free Pakistan from the "clutches" of the U.S.. Regardless of the truth in the media report about an underhand deal between these leaders and the CPC on the issue of Muslim separatism in Xinjiang, these visits would certainly convey a strong message to the Islamists that China is a friendly country whose interests should not be jeopardized, nor should Uyghur separatists be supported.

Moreover, China is well aware that a weak and unstable Pakistan prone to Islamic militants could probably damage its interests more than any other power. China therefore feels obliged to enhance the anti-terror capabilities of the law enforcement agencies of Pakistan, which have

to fight terrorism on the ground. China's implementation of three anti-terror exercises with Pakistan, out of a total of ten such exercises which Beijing has conducted with other countries and organizations, is a demonstration of China's seriousness. Though China is neither the largest, nor the only supporter of Pakistan's ongoing war on terror, Beijing's role is significant in boosting Islamabad's morale.

**CONCLUSIONS:** Beijing has swiftly and successfully availed the post-9/11 environment to its own advantage. China initiated counterterrorism cooperation with Pakistan mainly aimed at addressing the long-standing issue of Muslim separatism which also had links with Pakistan. This cooperation mutually benefited the two countries. China's support improved Pakistan's resilience against terrorism, prevented it from isolation in the international community, and enhanced the capabilities of its armed forces to fight this menace. In return, Pakistan's crackdown against Uyghurs hiding in Pakistani tribal areas as well as local militants who supported them corresponds with China's Xinjiang policy. With its own initiative of engaging the religious parties of Pakistan, Beijing gained considerable sympathies within these parties which used to be a home ground for militants. Such engagement is likely to continue. As addressing separatism in Xinjiang will continue to be a daunting challenge, cooperation with Islamabad will certainly benefit Beijing in this regard.

**AUTHOR'S BIO:** Ghulam Ali is a PhD candidate at Monash University, Australia. His research focuses on China's external relations especially with South Asian countries. He can be contacted at ghulamali74@yahoo.com.

## PROSPECTS FOR 'KYRGYZ SCENARIO' DEBATED IN TAJIKISTAN

Alexander Sodiqov

*Following the popular revolt that brought an end to President Kurmanbek Bakiyev's regime in Kyrgyzstan in April 2010, Tajikistan's government termed the crisis an "internal affair" of Kyrgyzstan and limited its official comments to the events confronting its southern neighbor. Despite the official silence, events in Kyrgyzstan have generated considerable debate among Tajik analysts and opposition leaders over whether the Kyrgyz scenario is possible in Tajikistan. Although there are ample similarities between Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan when it comes to political and socioeconomic settings, most argue that a Kyrgyz scenario is impossible in Tajikistan due to major differences between the two countries in foreign and domestic politics, and in post-independence experiences.*

**BACKGROUND:** In an effort to predict whether regime change in Kyrgyzstan could be replicated in Tajikistan, many experts have focused on similarities between the political, social and economic structures of Kurmanbek Bakiyev's Kyrgyzstan and President Emomali Rakhmon's Tajikistan. Following the Tulip Revolution that brought him to power in 2005, Bakiyev effectively marginalized major political opponents and gained full control of the country's parliament by forming a new party of power, which won the elections of December 2007 by a landslide. He then consolidated his power by creating new institutions in the presidency and downgrading the formal governmental structure. Real power in Bakiyev's Kyrgyzstan was exercised through informal networks of associates and relatives who used state control of the economy as a source of personal enrichment. In late 2009, Bakiyev put his son Maxim in charge of foreign investment flows and economic development in the country, prompting speculations that the former president was preparing for his son to succeed him in office.

Shokirjon Khakimov, deputy head of Tajikistan's Social-Democratic Party, argues

that the Tajik political system confronts markedly higher levels of authoritarianism, nepotism and corruption than Bakiyev-era Kyrgyzstan. President Emomali Rakhmon, who has been in office since 1994, consolidated his power by restricting political freedom, persecuting opposition leaders, marginalizing the parliament, and putting his relatives and associates from his home region in charge of the country's key governmental posts and economic enterprises. According to Khakimov, Tajikistan's political system breeds corruption and nepotism, strains economic growth, and generates considerable resentment among the business community and population at large, thus undermining the country's stability. Tajik political analyst Rustam Samiyev suggests that President Rakhmon's recent efforts aimed at awarding governmental posts to his children and promoting their political careers can have a particularly destabilizing effect on Tajikistan's political system. In 2009, Rakhmon appointed his daughter as deputy minister of foreign affairs, and his 22-year-old son Rustam became deputy chief of Tajikistan's youth union. Early this year, Rustam was also elected to the Dushanbe city council.

Another major similarity between Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan stems from similar levels of economic and social development in the two countries. An estimated 40 percent of the Kyrgyz population lives below the poverty line, with unemployment standing at 18 percent. The global financial crisis affected living standards in the country by reducing remittances that accounted for 19 percent of Kyrgyzstan's GDP in 2007. To make things worse, Bakiyev's administration in late 2009 sharply raised taxes for small and medium businesses, and doubled the electricity prices and increased heating costs by an enormous 500 to 1,000 percent in January 2010. Sayfullo Safarov, deputy director of the government-run Strategic research Center in Tajikistan, argues that the sharp price rises, degrading living standards, and popular indignation at corruption and despotic excesses of Bakiyev's clan were among the major factors behind the uprising in Kyrgyzstan.

Tajikistan has long been facing even higher levels of poverty and underdevelopment. According to the World Bank estimates, 54 percent of Tajikistan's population lived below the poverty line in 2007. The crisis reduced the flow of remittances to Tajikistan by about 30 percent and led to a 48 percent decrease in export revenues in 2008. As a result, the share of people living below the poverty line reached about 60 percent, according to Hojimahmad Umarov, a professor at the Institute of Economic Studies in Dushanbe. The living standards of Tajik families have further diminished as many of them were forced to contribute to the Rogun project in a massive government-led campaign aimed at raising public funds for the construction of the controversial dam. Thus, if political, social and economic structures precipitated regime change

in Kyrgyzstan, the situation in Tajikistan is even more conducive to a popular upheaval.

**IMPLICATIONS:** However, despite ample similarities between Bakiyev's Kyrgyzstan and Rakhmon's Tajikistan, most experts suggest that the Kyrgyz scenario is impossible in Tajikistan due to major differences between the two countries' foreign policies, political settings and historical experiences. Independent Tajik analyst Rashid Abdullo argues that the ousting of Kurmanbek Bakiyev in Kyrgyzstan was prompted by his strategy aimed at earning political and economic dividends by playing Russia and the U.S. against each other in their competition for dominance in Central Asia. An important part of Moscow's "Near Abroad" and home to a major Russian military base at Kant, Kyrgyzstan has also long been strategic for the U.S., which uses the air base at Manas to support NATO operations in Afghanistan. Using the opportunity provided by Russia's increasingly assertive policy of countering U.S. influence in Central Asia, Bakiyev secured about US\$ 2 billion in aid and loans from Moscow in 2008 in exchange for the expulsion of American forces from the Manas air base. In 2009, however, Bakiyev negotiated higher annual fees for leasing rights with the U.S. and agreed to extend the lease on the base. This double game infuriated Moscow, which, according to both Kyrgyz and Tajik analysts, played a key role in fomenting and guiding the revolt in Kyrgyzstan. Consequently, Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin was the first international leader who congratulated and recognized the legitimacy of the new government in Bishkek.

Rashid Abdullo holds that the Kyrgyz scenario cannot be replicated in Tajikistan unless Dushanbe follows in Bakiyev's footsteps and abandons its strategic ally, Moscow. This is



very unlikely, according to Viktor Dubovicky, an expert in Russian-Tajik relations. Dobovicky argues that despite some difficulties in the relationships between the two countries, Russia will remain Tajikistan's preferred international partner and the only country with a military base on Tajik soil.

Another major reason why a Kyrgyz scenario is impossible in Tajikistan has to do with the differences in the political settings of the two countries. Kyrgyzstan experienced a period of democratization in the 1990s and, in the early years of Akayev's presidency, was promoted as a model of democratic development for Central Asia. Even after Akayev's slide toward authoritarianism and during Bakiyev's rule, Kyrgyzstan's political system was more liberal than that of Tajikistan.

In Tajikistan, in contrast to Kyrgyzstan, opposition parties have only been marginally represented in the parliament, without enough seats to form a faction or influence the legislative process. In addition, according to Tajik political expert Sabur Vakhob, Tajikistan lacks strong opposition leaders who could mobilize people and challenge President Rakhmon. Finally, Kyrgyzstan has a history of a relatively violence-free regime change in 2005, while Tajikistan's experience, a civil war that cost an estimated 50,000-100,000 lives and displaced almost 700,000 people in the early post-independence years, made the country virtually "immune" to popular revolts, according to Muhiddin Kabiri, leader of Tajikistan's Islamic Revival Party.

**CONCLUSIONS:** Although there are many similarities between political and socioeconomic structures in today's Tajikistan



Emomali Rakhmon

and Bakiyev-era Kyrgyzstan, these structures alone cannot bring about a political upheaval and regime change in Tajikistan. Tajikistan's balanced and strategic relations with Russia, a lack of both strong opposition and experience in democratic development, as well as the memory of bloodshed in the early post-independence years all make a Kyrgyz scenario virtually impossible in the country. Whether the latest Kyrgyz revolution will have any carryover effect on Tajikistan and the rest of Central Asia will to a large extent depend on how successful the regime change will be at bringing about real democratic transition in Kyrgyzstan.

**AUTHOR'S BIO:** Alexander Sodiqov is a lecturer at the International Relations Department, Russian-Tajik Slavonic University in Dushanbe, Tajikistan.



## FIELD REPORTS

### FIRST LIVE DEBATE OF TBILISI MAYORAL CANDIDATES

*Maka Gurgenidze*

The Georgian Public Broadcaster, with financial support from the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) hosted the first pre-electoral two-day live TV debates of the Tbilisi mayoral candidates three weeks ahead of the May 30 local elections.

The five major mayoral candidates met on the first round of debates on May 8. Gigi Ugulava, the ruling party's candidate and incumbent Tbilisi mayor (political slogan: "A Lot Remains to Be Done"), Zviad Dzidziguri, leader of the Conservative Party and candidate of the National Council coalition (political slogan: "Struggle Today"), Irakli Alasania, leader of Alliance for Georgia, (political slogan: "We Will Change"), Giorgi Chanturia, Candidate of the Christian-Democratic Movement (CDM) (Political slogan: "Low tariffs and Employment"), and Gogi Topadze, leader of the Industrialists Party (political slogan: "With deeds I come, deeds I promise") sought to back their election promises and presented their visions on the most important issues defined through opinion polls: employment, social issues, city infrastructure and communal tariffs.

The 90-minute debate revealed that three of the five major candidates, Zviad Dzidziguri, Gogi Topadze and Giorgi Chanturia, were keen on a protectionist economic policy to deal with growing unemployment in the capital city. In their speeches, they promoted nurturing local enterprises through imposing higher taxes on imported goods that can be produced domestically. If, in addition, foreign markets could be found for Georgian products, the

problem of unemployment would be gradually overcome, they claimed.

Through dialogue, the "[Russian] market will reopen for Georgian products; railway, sea and air communication will resume and people will be employed," Dzidziguri said. However, Chanturia also advocated a state-led economy. He explained that low production costs would enhance commerce and push the creation of new jobs. He therefore promised to reduce gas fees by nearly five times, electricity fees by about three times, and provide water consumption for free.

Alasania took a less protectionist approach, highlighting the necessity to exempt businesses from government pressure. He proclaimed that the allocation of 120 million GEL for municipal funds would employ 50,000 Tbilisi residents in a year. His pre-election agenda also includes the development of healthcare projects involving the formation of municipal drug stores that will cost 117 million GEL. Likewise, Dzidziguri pledged to cover a full health insurance package for pensioners and provide free textbooks for public school students by allotting 150 million GEL from the city budget annually.

In contrast to the opposition leaders, Ugulava outlined the efficiency of a neo-liberal policy in fighting unemployment. He admitted that social assistance programs should be improved but only for those people who need it most. Ugulava listed several projects launched by the Tbilisi municipality last year, such as free computer and English-language courses for Tbilisi inhabitants and soft loans for small businesses. In this way, he said, the

local government aimed to increase peoples' skills to make them more qualified for new jobs. He also promised to fill legislation gaps to facilitate a smooth functioning of small businesses. Ugulava criticized Chanturia's proposals and called them unrealistic. The implementation of such proposals would require 400 million GEL and would hamper funding for other services, Ugulava said.

Apart from social problems, the debate also focused on problems related to infrastructure in Tbilisi. Topadze accused the Tbilisi municipality of implementing "inappropriate and costly projects". Alasania even stated that "what is now happening in Tbilisi is violence on the capital city and urban chaos". In the same vein, Dzidziguri lamented that "there is no strategic vision on how the city should develop". Chanturia underscored the need for transparency and public scrutiny of municipal projects. Ugulava advocated Tbilisi municipality projects, recapitulating that the construction of new roads would ease city traffic and develop business.

Undoubtedly, the first live TV debate is a significant step toward refining the culture of political debates in Georgia. Though leaders' pre-electoral promises are more detailed than previously, they still lack a profound understanding of presented proposals. For example, the protection

of local business or imposition of new taxes on imports inevitably require a shift in the country's economic policy and cannot be formulated at the local level. Moreover, protectionism would contradict Georgia's international obligations as a member of the WTO and would decline the benefits offered by the organization. Furthermore, whereas low communal tariffs may promote business activity, it would also reduce the mayoral budget and limit the municipal agenda.

Interestingly, article 9 of the "Georgian Law on the Georgian Capital city Tbilisi" lists a range of spheres in which the central government and Tbilisi city Hall do have common competences and need a coordinated policy. Thus, a mayor with an economic and social vision differing from that of the government would constrain such cooperation and would more likely use the mayoral chair as a political lever. Whereas Ugulava's success in local elections would rule out such tensions, his victory will depend on to what extent the urgent social problems will be met. Attracting investment and developing infrastructure are necessary but not enough to counter the overwhelming unemployment. There is a clear need for more comprehensive social and business development programs.

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## KYRGYZ INTERIM GOVERNMENT OFFERS OTUNBAEVA AS PRESIDENT DURING TRANSITIONAL PERIOD

*Joldosh Osmonov*

The Kyrgyz Interim Government has appointed Roza Otunbaeva as a transitional President for a 1.5-year term to ensure stability in the country and provide free and fair parliamentary elections in October this year. However, the appointment has to be approved in an upcoming referendum. If approved, the country will have a legitimate state institution; otherwise, it will face an even more serious political crisis.

On May 19, Kyrgyzstan's Interim Government issued a special decree on the appointment of its head, Roza Otunbaeva, as President during the transitional period until December 31, 2011. According to the document, Otunbaeva will also fulfill the responsibilities of Prime Minister until the new head of government is approved by the new parliament. The parliamentary election is scheduled for October 10, 2010, followed by the presidential election one year later.

However, the appointment has to be approved at the nationwide constitutional referendum to be held in late June. The question of Otunbaeva's candidacy, with no alternative candidates offered, is included as an additional provision in the draft constitution. It signifies that a disapproval of the draft constitution in the referendum will automatically mean disapproval of Otunbaeva's candidacy and vice-versa. The linkage between these two issues may expose greater risks for the authorities, political analysts claim.

The decree stipulates that the transitional president will fulfill his or her duties according to the current constitution until the first session of the newly-elected parliament is held; at that time the new constitution will take effect. After parliament approves the new Prime Minister, Otunbaeva is to fulfill only the presidential duties, whose powers will be significantly cut in the main legal document. Moreover, the transitional president, as head of the only legitimate institution in the country, is responsible for providing free and fair elections; thus, her neutrality is a requirement according to the decree. Roza Otunbaeva announced her resignation from the Social Democratic Party last week.

As the document states, Roza Otunbaeva has no right to run for president in the 2011 presidential election. Omurbek Tekebaev, Deputy Head of the Interim Government, praised Otunbaeva's decision: "She is sacrificing her political future for the sake of stability in the country and a smooth transition to a truly democratic state. It is a historic act", Tekebaev concluded.

Before heading the Interim Government, Otunbaeva led the parliamentary opposition group of the Social Democrats in a Parliament dominated by the pro-governmental party. She was one of the key players during the 2005 Tulip Revolution, which brought her to the post of Foreign Minister for a short term. After the 2005 presidential election, her candidacy was not confirmed by parliament, bringing Otunbaeva back to the ranks of the opposition. From the early 1990s to present, she has been the first Kyrgyz Foreign Minister, first Kyrgyz

Ambassador to both the United States and the United Kingdom, and the United Nations mission deputy head to Georgia.

After the decree was signed, Roza Otunbaeva addressed the public, assuring the people that she would meet the expectations of Kyrgyz citizens and expressing her commitment to democratic principles. She emphasized security and stability in the country as her top priorities. Otunbaeva also promised salary increases for law enforcement bodies and military servicemen.

The necessity of legitimate leadership was dictated by continuous instability in the country, particularly in the southern region. On May 14, supporters of Bakiyev seized the administration buildings of Osh, Jalalabad and Batken oblasts, seeking to bring the ousted President back to power. Nevertheless, the Interim Government successfully averted violence by arresting the alleged organizers of these riots, the former head of the Presidential Administration, Usen Sydykov, and the leader of the pro-Bakiyev Party of Communists, Iskhak Masaliyev.

A few days later, inter-ethnic clashes between Kyrgyz and Uzbek residents took place in Jalalabad, leaving three dead and more than 70 injured. In order to curb the escalation of this highly undesired scenario, the Interim Government imposed a curfew until June 1, 2010. However, despite the cessation of "street confrontation" between Kyrgyz and Uzbeks, the possibility of new conflicts is still high.

Many experts agree that in light of the instability in the country, the decision to appoint the transitional president was right and timely. According to political analyst Mars Sariev, the decree is the optimal alternative, since it will partially solve the issue of legitimacy for the current authorities. "The decision was agreed upon with special envoys of Russia and Kazakhstan to Kyrgyzstan. Right after signing the decree, Kazakhstan opened its borders", he stated.

Others claim that this decision will undermine democratic principles. The presidential appointment by the Interim Government, subjecting

Otunbaeva's candidacy to a referendum with no alternatives, directly undermines democratic electoral principles. Experts warn that it will

eventually lead to questioning the President's legitimacy.

## SEVERE FLOODING IN TAJIKISTAN

*Suhrob Majidov*

On the night of May 7, a terrible natural disaster occurred in the Kulyab region of Khatlon province in the south of Tajikistan. A flash flood took tens of lives and left thousands homeless. The Government reports that at least forty people were killed in the disaster. The mudflow and flooding continued in other districts of Tajikistan. In total the disaster destroyed houses and belongings of 4,500 people in the town of Kulyab.

In the surrounding rural areas, 16,000 people were also directly affected by the disaster: some had their houses destroyed; others suffered significant losses in their livelihoods when their crops and agricultural land were buried under mud and rocks or their livestock were killed. Of these, 3,000 people are currently living with host families or in their damaged houses. Furthermore, some 70,000 people were unable to access safe drinking water. Authorities report that eight schools were damaged. One of these, hosting 365 pupils, is totally destroyed.

The spring of 2010 is characterized by abnormally heavy rainfall in Tajikistan which trigger avalanches, floods, mud and rock flows, and landslides in many of the country's districts. Local hazards, sometimes with human casualties, were recorded in more than twenty districts all over Tajikistan. These natural disasters destroyed and damaged houses and infrastructure and had a negative effect on people's livelihoods, killing their livestock, and damaging crops and agricultural land.

It should be noted that Tajikistan is a disaster-prone country, 93 percent of its territory consisting of mountains. Thus, it frequently suffers from recurrent natural hazards like floods, mudflows and

landslides. In addition, it is situated in a seismic high-risk zone; for instance in 2006 an earthquake in Qumsangir district in the south of the country destroyed 2,600 houses. According to the data of the Committee on Emergency Situations and Civil Defense (CoES) of Tajikistan, during the period between 2000 and 2009 at least 2,000 people were affected by disasters each year, with a peak in 2008 when 2 million people severely suffered from an extremely cold winter.

From the beginning of the current year, the Government reports and rapid assessments conducted by international organizations report that as a result of natural disasters, 4,104 houses were already damaged, of which 683 were fully destroyed by this and previous disasters caused by spring rainfall. In addition, 19 health centers and 78 schools and pre-schools were affected. Other significant infrastructure damages include 424 kilometers of roads, 130 bridges, 59 kilometers of dikes and river embankments, and 48 kilometers of water supply lines and sewage pipes. About 3,100 livestock perished and tens of thousands hectares of agricultural land and pastures were covered with mud or stones or otherwise rendered unusable. The government estimates the total damage in Kulyab town and all other districts affected by disasters in 2010 at US \$600 million.

When torrential rains hit the town of Kulyab and the surrounding districts of Baljuvon, Khovaling, Kulyab, Muminabad, Shurabad, Temurmaliq and Vose on May 7, the Tebalay mudflow canal in Kulyab town and the Surkhob and Yakhsu rivers burst their banks. The resulting flash floods accompanied by rock flows and debris killed 40

people and another 33 remain missing. Over 300 people were injured, with at least 85 sustaining grave injuries and being hospitalized. This is the highest number of casualties caused by a single disaster in Tajikistan in over a decade. In fact, the expected death toll of this single event surpasses the total number of deaths caused by disasters in any one year since 2000.

In the aftermath of the crisis, the Tajik Government and aid agencies delivered life-saving assistance to the 4,500 displaced, who are currently staying in tent camps. Besides, local communities and authorities, supported by CoES and one or two international organizations, were so far able to respond to the disaster by supporting the victims with primary relief assistance. However, the majority of the affected population remains in very

poor conditions with little support from the Government or the international community. "Government and humanitarian partners in Tajikistan provided immediate relief from existing stocks. Now we count on the assistance of the international community to support the displaced people and the affected communities", said Michael Jones, United Nations Resident Coordinator in Tajikistan.

All in all, the Government of Tajikistan found itself unable to provide help to the affected population. Therefore, the Government together with the humanitarian community launched an appeal on May 19 for US\$ 5.3 million to provide relief and recovery assistance to thousands of people affected by the flashfloods in Kulyab and the surrounding districts in the south of Tajikistan.

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## UZBEKISTAN REINFORCES ITS BORDER WITH KYRGYZSTAN

*Erkin Akhmadov*

On May 17, inhabitants of the Uzbek-Kyrgyz border areas reported increasing protection of the border from the Uzbek side. In turn, the head of Kyrgyzstan's border service reported that Uzbekistan strengthened the protection of its border in response to recent events in the south of Kyrgyzstan, patrolling certain areas in military vehicles. It should be recalled that Uzbekistan closed its checkpoints with Kyrgyzstan in the beginning of April in the immediate aftermath of the revolutionary events in the country and the following riots. On May 13-14, an armed conflict between supporters of the current interim government and proponents of former president Kurmanbek Bakiev occurred in the immediate vicinity of the Uzbek border, in the cities of Jalal-Abad and Osh. While closing and strengthening the protection of the border is a matter of national security for Uzbekistan, prolonged border closure poses a serious threat of economic crisis to Kyrgyzstan.

Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan closed their borders with Kyrgyzstan in early April as a response to the revolution and massive unrest in the country. It should be noted that this was done in response to the events that were taking place in the north of Kyrgyzstan, in the cities of Naryn and Bishkek. Once the conflict moved to the south, to the areas close to the border with Uzbekistan, the latter immediately started to reinforce its border. The strengthening of the border protection was mainly done through the delivery of additional military equipment as reported by inhabitants of the Kyrgyz border villages of Aravanskiy and Karasu.

Some local observers note that the Uzbek-Kyrgyz border is often closed or restricted. For instance, in February Uzbek authorities without any notice introduced a regulation restricting the number of visits Kyrgyz citizens can make to Uzbekistan. Specifically, the regulation stipulated that Kyrgyz citizens can cross the border to Uzbekistan no more than once every three months, i.e. four times a year.

The regulation was explained by “a change of the internal legislation” of Uzbekistan. Further, in the beginning of March Uzbekistan unilaterally closed the second biggest checkpoint with Kyrgyzstan, “Kara-Suu-Avtodorozhniy”. This time, the Kyrgyz guard service was notified about the closing of the checkpoint, which was supposedly closed for renovation. All these developments were accompanied by frequent clashes between border guards of the two states.

It should be recalled that in 2007, Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan signed an intergovernmental agreement on a visa-free regime, so that citizens of each state can stay on the territory of another without visa up for sixty calendar days. According to the Kyrgyz border guard service, the flights from Kyrgyzstan to Uzbekistan are still operating. Therefore, only those who travel by car, bus or train are affected by the current situation.

Beyond doubt, Kyrgyzstan suffers significant economic losses from the continued border closure with the neighbors. For instance, some Bishkek-based analysts state that the current situation on the border has devastating repercussions for trade. Temir Sariyev, one of the leading figures in the interim government, said “Kyrgyzstan cannot live in economic isolation. The negative economic

situation will also have an adverse effect on the situation in society”.

Perhaps in response to concerns of the Kyrgyz authorities over their continued isolation and aggravated economic situation, the authorities of Kazakhstan reopened the border with Kyrgyzstan on May 20. In the note of the Internal Affairs Ministry of Kazakhstan, the decision was explained by “consideration of the complicated socio-economic situation in Kyrgyzstan and numerous appeals by the citizens of this friendly country”. Thus, at the moment Uzbekistan is the only country that keeps closed borders with Kyrgyzstan.

In light of the above-mentioned developments in bilateral relations between Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan, the current situation on the border between the two states is quite expectant. In addition, several local observers say that some of the countries neighboring Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan among them, are not eager to accept Kyrgyzstan’s interim government if it succeeds in orienting the country in a more democratic direction. In any case, it seems that even if Uzbekistan will decide to open the border with Kyrgyzstan in the nearest future, there is still a number of issues that will need to be addressed.



New Book:

*The Guns of August 2008*

Edited By Svante E. Cornell and S.  
Frederick Starr

M.E. Sharpe, New York, June 2009,  
290pp

This book is designed to present the facts about the events of August 2008 along with comprehensive coverage of the background to those events. It brings together a wealth of expertise on the South Caucasus and Russian foreign policy, with contributions by Russian, Georgian, European, and American experts on the region.

## NEWS DIGEST

### **INTERIM GOVERNMENT OPPONENTS REINSTATE PREVIOUS OSH GOVERNOR**

**13 May**

Supporters of former Osh region governor Mamasadyk Bakirov have occupied the local administration building in the city in southern Kyrgyzstan and have reinstated him as governor, an Interfax correspondent reported from the scene.

"We are not loyalists of the previous government," Bakirov told the media. "We draw support from the people, who oppose the interim government and the current hectic reshuffling," he said. Police, deployed on the central square, are not intervening, according to the Interfax correspondent. Several thousand Bakirov supporters have gathered on the city's central square. Sooronbai Zheyenbekov, the current governor, who was appointed by the interim government, is not inside the local government headquarters. He managed to leave the building, according to unofficial reports. (Interfax)

### **BAKIYEV'S SUPPORTERS TO RALLY 25,000 SOUTHERNERS AGAINST INTERIM GOVERNMENT**

**13 May**

Supporters of former Kyrgyz President Kurmanbek Bakiyev have taken control over the regional administration buildings in the Osh, Jalal-Abad and Batken regions on Thursday evening. Currently, they are supported by 25,000 southern Kyrgyz residents, who are prepared to get together in Jalal-Abad and to head north so as to "confront the interim government," Bakiyev's support committee said. The interim Kyrgyz government is illegitimate, and Bakiyev's supporters are going to restore the previous government in power, the committee's spokesperson said. The building of the Jalal-Abad administration building has been taken over by Bakiyev's supporters, with 2,000-2,500 people staying on central square and inside the building. Governor Bektur Asanov, appointed by the interim government, is not in the building. Previous governor Faizulla Rakhmanov, who is wanted by the interim government, is expected to arrive there shortly, Bakiyev's support committee's

spokesperson said. In Osh, the building of the regional administration and the town's center are controlled by around 1,500 people. Local police officers are also on the square, trying to keep the situation under control. Meanwhile, the leader of the Uzbek community in Osh, Kadyrzhan Batyrov, has demanded that his community members show support for the interim government. (Interfax)

### **THREE REPORTERS ROBBED, ONE BEATEN IN SOUTHERN KYRGYZSTAN**

**14 May**

Two reporters were robbed and another beaten in the southern Kyrgyz city of Jalal-Abad on Friday. Egamberdy Kabulov, a Russian journalist with the newspaper MK v Kyrgyzstane, told Interfax he and two American reporters working for the Eurasianet.org website, had been robbed by gunmen in Jalal-Abad. "Several men armed with firearms, threatening to murder us, took our money and mobile phones away from us," Kabulov said. The three journalists thought the robbers were looters who had taken advantage of chaos in the city and were neither supporters nor opponents of ousted Kyrgyz President Kurmanbek Bakiyev. The 24.kg news agency said a reporter for television and radio company Mezon TV had fallen victim to an attack in Jalal-Abad in which he received multiple bruises and had his television camera broken. Mezon TV said it believed the attackers were opponents of the current interim government. (Interfax)

### **SUPPORTERS OF NEW KYRGYZ GOVT TAKE OVER JALAL-ABAD**

**14 May**

Supporters of the interim Kyrgyz government have taken control of the Jalal-Abad administration building and one supporter of ex-President Bakiyev has been detained, eyewitnesses told Interfax. The building has been freed from Bakiyev's supporters and is now occupied by representatives from the Ata-Meken Party and other organizations supporting the interim government, eyewitnesses said. Also, one of the men who shot at the supporters of the interim government has been

detained. He was wounded, which made it easier to detain him, eyewitnesses said. The man has been hospitalized. The gunman wore a dark uniform and a balaclava. Currently, the situation in Jalal-Abad is under the control of the supporters of the interim government, sources in the interim government said. (Interfax)

### **BAKIYEV'S SUPPORTERS USE GUNS TO SEIZE ADMINISTRATIVE CENTERS IN SOUTHERN KYRGYZSTAN – OFFICIAL**

**14 May**

Supporters of ex-President Kurmanbek Bakiyev used firearms in Jalal-Abad, Keneshbek Dushebayev said, acting chairman of the State National Security Committee. Bakiyev's supporters used firearms to seize administrative buildings in Jalal-Abad," he said. "Law enforcement agencies will soon take all the necessary steps to stabilize the situation in southern parts of the country," Dushebayev said. Thirty people have been hurt as a result of clashes between supporters of the Kyrgyz interim government and those of ex-President Kurmanbek Bakiyev in the southern Kyrgyz town of Jalal-Abad, the Kyrgyz Health Care Ministry told Interfax on Friday. "Preliminary reports suggest that the majority of them suffered from gunshot wounds. Three of the injured are in a very critical condition," the ministry said. Clashes in Jalal-Abad occurred on Friday a day after the supporters of ex-President Bakiyev seized the regional administration building and ousted the governor appointed by the interim government. (Interfax)

### **ATTEMPTED 'COUP' IN SOUTH KYRGYZSTAN FOILED**

**17 May**

Kyrgyzstan's state security service has detained former state officials and lawmakers, who, it claimed, were plotting regime change in southern Kyrgyzstan. "An investigation established that Usen Sadykov colluded with Iskhak Masaliyev, with more than 40 former lawmakers of the Ak Zhol faction and with others to overthrow the regime in the Osh, Jalal-Abad and Batken regions, to instigate mass unrest, to organize abductions and to advance political demands," the State National Security Service told Interfax on Monday. Sadykov is the leader of the New Kyrgyzstan party and Masaliyev heads the Communist Party and is an ex-parliamentary deputy. "They planned to make use of the current unstable situation to get ex-parliamentary deputy Masaliyev elected to the post

of parliamentary speaker and acting president," the State National Security Service said. "On May 13, 2010, at Sadykov's orders, his supporters in the Osh, Jalal-Abad and Batken regions incited mass disturbances. Organized and armed groups made attempts to seize administrative buildings, overthrow the local authorities and replace them with their own people. They were also plotting the abduction of Osh regional governor Sooronbai Zheyenbekov and members of the interim government Azimbek Beknazarov and Ismail Isakov, and also interim Emergency Situations Minister Duishenkul Chotonov," it said. "But special services have frustrated Sadykov, Masaliyev and others' plot. On May 14, 2010, they were arrested as suspects and placed in a detention facility on charges of forced seizure of power and organization of mass disturbances," the State National Security Service said. (Interfax)

### **AZERBAIJANI-TURKISH GAS DEAL SIGNING POSTPONED**

**17 May**

Azerbaijan and Turkey today said they will sign a deal on Azerbaijani natural gas exports to Turkey during President Ilham Aliyev's visit to Ankara on June 7-8, RFE/RL's Azerbaijani Service reports. Azerbaijani officials said earlier the agreement regulating the amount and price of the exports would be signed today during Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan's visit to Baku. At a press conference with Erdogan following their talks, Aliyev said the agreement is ready to be signed. Erdogan said the two leaders also agreed on establishing a Strategic Partnership Council. He added that it will also be signed when Aliyev visits Ankara. Erdogan said Aliyev updated him on the state of the Nagorno-Karabakh peace process. Aliyev said Azerbaijan has accepted -- with minor exceptions -- the updated peace proposal from the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe's Minsk Group, and expects Armenia to do the same. He said if Armenia withdraws from the Azerbaijani territory that it occupies, then Baku will open its border and establish relations with Armenia. During his one-day visit to Baku, Erdogan inaugurated a monument to Turkey's first president, Mustafa Kemal Ataturk. (RFE/RL)

### **SEARCHERS FIND WRECKAGE OF CRASHED AFGHAN PLANE**

**21 May**

Afghan officials say searchers have found the wreckage of an Afghan plane that went down while



flying over the Hindu Kush Mountains. The acting transport and civil aviation minister, Mohammadullah Batash, said there was no sign of survivors. The wreckage was spotted by a search plane on a 4,100-meter-high mountain in the Shakar Darah district north of Kabul. The plane was flying from the northern city of Konduz to Kabul with 44 people on board when it went down on May 17. It was operated by Pamir Airways, a private Afghan airline. There were six foreigners, including three Britons, and one American on board the plane when it went down. (RFE/RL)

### **EU'S ASHTON SAYS NAGORNO-KARABAKH ELECTIONS ILLEGAL**

**21 May**

The European Union's foreign policy chief, Catherine Ashton, has warned that planned parliamentary elections in the disputed Caucasus enclave of Nagorno-Karabakh on May 23 will not be legal. Ashton said in a statement that the vote "should not prejudice the peaceful settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict" and urged all parties to redouble efforts to find a negotiated solution to the conflict. Backed by Armenia, ethnic Armenian separatists seized control of Nagorno-Karabakh from Azerbaijan in the early 1990s in a war that left around 30,000 people dead. Armenia and Azerbaijan signed a cease-fire in their conflict over the region more than a decade ago, but the enclave remains a disputed territory. (RFE/RL)

### **AZERI GAS SAFE FROM DAGESTAN'S UNREST**

**21 May**

An explosion in the southern Russian region of Dagestan at a gas pipeline in January did not affect the overall gas supply to Russia, Azeri officials said. Russian TV channel RT reported last week that militants attacked a convoy in Russia's Dagestan republic, killing eight civilians and wounding four police escorts. More than 200,000 people in the North Caucasus republic of Dagestan were left without gas supplies following the bombing of a section of a gas pipeline in January. The State Oil Co. of Azerbaijan Republic said the January explosion near the Russian section of a natural gas pipeline running through Dagestan had no impact on Azeri gas supplies to Russia, the Trend news agency reported Friday. The Mozdok-Makhachkala-Kazi Magomed pipeline travels to Azerbaijan from North Ossetia through Chechnya and Dagestan. Chechen rebels in the region have targeted several

natural gas installations in recent months. Azerbaijan in April transported about 3 billion cubic feet of natural gas to Russia. The pipeline has a capacity of 176 billion cubic feet per year. (UPI)

### **UZBEKISTAN, CHINA PLEDGE TO BOOST PRAGMATIC COOPERATION**

**23 May**

Uzbek President Islam Karimov on Friday met with visiting Chinese Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi, with both sides pledging to step up pragmatic cooperation between the two nations.

Uzbekistan has always regarded China as a reliable friend and important partner, Karimov said during their meeting at the Presidential Palace in Tashkent, the capital of Uzbekistan.

Uzbekistan attaches great importance to developing long-term and stable relations with China, the president said. Uzbekistan is willing to expand trade and boost cooperation with China in such areas as energy, non-resources and high and new technology, he said. Uzbekistan is also ready to accelerate the implementation of cooperation projects on telecommunication and infrastructure construction, he added. Yang said that China highly values its relations of friendly cooperation and partnership with Uzbekistan. He said that the two countries should strengthen political mutual trust, continue to deepen mutually beneficial cooperation in various fields, and fully bring into play their economic complements. Yang also met with Foreign Minister Vladimir Norov on Friday. Yang, who arrived here Thursday, is on an official visit to Uzbekistan. He attended a Council of Foreign Ministers meeting of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization earlier Saturday. (Xinhua)

### **OSCE MONITORING NAGORNO-KARABAKH TRUCE**

**24 May**

European officials arrived Monday to survey a cease-fire along the Azeri border with Armenia following elections in a breakaway region, Azeri officials said. The Azerbaijan Defense Ministry said a monitoring group from the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe arrived Monday in the region. Azerbaijan and Armenia have complained of violations to a 1994 cease-fire agreement related to conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh, an area of dispute between Azerbaijan and Armenia. Nagorno-Karabakh, which declared independence in 1991, lies inside Azerbaijan but has

a population that is predominantly ethnic Armenian. The United States, Russia and France have been trying to mediate the territorial dispute between Azerbaijan and Armenia that has resulted in the deaths of some 30,000 people. The last OSCE monitoring May 13 found no cease-fire violations, Russia's state news agency RIA Novosti reports. The breakaway region, meanwhile, had elections for its 33-seat Parliament during the weekend. More than 70 international observers monitored the election. (UPI)

### **AFGHANISTAN'S PEACE JIRGA PUSHED BACK UNTIL JUNE**

**25 May**

Afghanistan has pushed back a national conference aimed at reaching a peace deal with militants who are willing to stop fighting. The government says "technicalities" have forced it to delay the start of the so-called peace jirga until June 2 -- the second postponement announced within the past month. The gathering would bring together lawmakers, provincial council chiefs, tribal and religious leaders, and members of civil society -- a total of some 1,600 Afghans -- to talk about a political resolution to Afghanistan's ongoing insurgency. A spokesman for the peace jirga, Gul Agha Ahmadi Wardak, tells RFE/RL's Radio Free Afghanistan that it has been difficult trying to arrange the logistics for bringing so many local and regional delegates to Kabul from across Afghanistan for the event. "The only reason the peace jirga was postponed for three days was to give delegates time to arrive safely, to get registered, and to familiarize themselves with the procedures," Wardak says. But European diplomats say the delay also may be linked to Afghan President Hamid Karzai's domestic political confrontations. About 45 of Afghanistan's 249 lawmakers have threatened to boycott the peace jirga unless Karzai responds to their demand that he submit names of new cabinet nominees to replace those rejected by the parliament in January. "This is a step made in the interests of the Afghan people, as well as to give the government a direction, and a measure that will ensure the national sovereignty and the will of the Afghan people," Abdul Satar Khawasi, a secretary of Afghanistan's Wolesi Jirga, or lower house of parliament, says to explain the call for a boycott. "That is the direction we want to lead the government." The size of the peace jirga is expected to be comparable to the two loya jirgas, or grand councils, that have been held in Kabul since the collapse of the Taliban regime -- one to confirm

Karzai as a transitional leader and another to approve Afghanistan's constitution. But the peace jirga differs from the loya jirgas in at least one major respect: Any decisions made by the peace jirga are considered "consultative" and nonbinding. Many Afghans voice optimism that the peace jirga can establish a framework for negotiations with armed militants and bring the country a step closer to a regional settlement. But considering that the jirga is merely consultative, others are skeptical. (RFE/RL)

### **SECURITY TIGHTENING AROUND KANDAHAR**

**26 May**

U.S. and NATO forces are tightening the ring around the southern Afghan city of Kandahar ahead of a major military offensive, generals say. International forces are pressing ahead with a counterinsurgency operation in Afghanistan meant to support the government in Kabul. Washington in December announced a major surge of U.S. military forces into Afghanistan as part of a revised war strategy. U.S. Army Maj. Gen. James Terry, who takes control of U.S. military forces in southern Afghanistan later this year, told the troops in Kandahar he was ready for battle, the Voice of America news agency reports. "You are going to see an uplift of forces come in and I think you'll start to see this tightening ring of security in and around Kandahar city that I think will then provide the security bubble for governance to start to take in and development to start to take root in Kandahar city," he said. Military planners say Afghan security forces will play a major role in the operation with the help of their international counterparts. Afghan security officials told VOA, however, they have received death threats from Taliban members ahead of the offensive. U.S., Afghan and international forces in February pushed into the Marja district in southern Helmand province, installing a Western-friendly interim government in the Taliban heartland. Stability there, however, is fluid as Taliban forces move back into the region. (UPI)

### **CENTRAL ASIA DISPUTE DISRUPTS NATO AFGHAN SUPPLIES**

**26 May**

A dispute between Tajikistan and Uzbekistan has left hundreds of railway carriages with supplies for NATO troops in Afghanistan stranded in Central

Asia, a Tajik railway official told Reuters. NATO uses Central Asia, an ex-Soviet Muslim region north of Afghanistan, to transport non-military cargo such as fuel and food to support its military operations against the Taliban. It was the second time in Central Asia that supplies for NATO forces were disrupted. Last month Washington suspended some operations at its military air base in Kyrgyzstan for two days after violent riots toppled the country's president. Tajikistan and Uzbekistan have long been at odds over cross-border water use, and Uzbekistan sometimes blocks trains from entering Tajikistan as a way of putting pressure on its smaller neighbor. "As of May 24, 2,500 carriages bound for Tajikistan are being held on the territory of the Uzbek railways," Usmon Kalandarov, deputy head of Tajikistan's state railway company, told Reuters late on Tuesday. "Out of those carriages, more than 300 are NATO cargo for Afghanistan." The supply route through Central Asia has become important in past years as traditional NATO supply lines through Pakistan came under increasingly fierce attack from Taliban insurgents. As for the U.S. air base, its operations have returned to normal following the Kyrgyz uprising. Yet, its longer-term status is unclear as Kyrgyzstan's interim government has hinted the U.S. lease agreement may be reviewed. A spokesman for the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force in Kabul confirmed the latest disruptions. "We are aware there are some tensions in the area and that some carriages carrying NATO supplies are being held up," said Lieutenant-Colonel Goetz Hasske. "We don't know anything about numbers but it is not affecting logistics in the area. We have several border crossing points that we can use and we may have to re-route some shipments. These are ongoing political tensions in the area." Once in Central Asia, trains bound for Afghanistan travel through Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan before reaching northern Afghanistan. Uzbekistan, Central Asia's most populous country, is angry at impoverished Tajikistan's plans to build a new hydroelectric power plant, Rogun, which Uzbekistan says would disrupt the flow of water it needs for irrigation. Tajikistan, for its part, has accused Uzbekistan of blocking transit trains loaded with building materials in an attempt to put pressure on it and prevent Rogun's construction. (Reuters)

### **WORLD BANK APPROVES 1 BILLION DEVELOPMENT LOAN FOR KAZAKHSTAN** **26 May**

The World Bank approved a \$1 billion development policy loan for Kazakhstan to provide budgetary support to the country, according to a statement from the Washington-based lender. The World Bank has provided 35 loans to Kazakhstan worth more than \$5.2 billion since July 1992, the statement said. (Bloomberg)

### **EMBATTLED NORTH OSSETIAN MUFTI STEPS DOWN** **26 May**

The Spiritual Board of Muslims of North Ossetia (DUMSO) accepted late on May 24 after a prolonged discussion the letter of resignation submitted by the republic's mufti, Ali-haji Yevteyev, four days earlier. Yevteyev had been subjected to repeated criticism since the publication on May 2 of what the news agency Regnum billed as an interview he gave to one of its journalists. Yevteyev subsequently said that the "discussion," in which he made disparaging comments about the Russian Orthodox clergy and admitted to having studied in Nalchik with two young theologians who subsequently became leading figures in the North Caucasus resistance, was never intended for publication. Leading DUMSO member Khajimurat Gatsalov said that body expressed its support for Yevteyev the day before he submitted his resignation. Gatsalov noted that the DUMSO is not empowered to name a successor to Yevteyev; a congress of the republic's Muslims must be convened to do so. It is not clear why the DUMSO decided belatedly to accept Yevteyev's resignation. Writing on May 26 in the Russian daily "Vremya novostei," Ivan Sukhov pointed out that the appointment of Yevteyev, an ethnic Russian sympathetic to the Salafi school of Islam espoused by the North Caucasus Muslim insurgency, was a "unique experiment" that might have resulted in a broad dialogue between Salafis and adherents of the Shafii legal school of Sunni Islam officially approved and promoted by the Russian leadership. "The idea of drawing Salafis into a civilized dialogue without the use of force has been floated ever more frequently in recent years by politicians whose responsibilities encompass the North Caucasus," Sukhov wrote. According to official statistics, some 15 percent of North Ossetia's population of 700,000+ are Muslims; Yevteyev cited the higher figure of 30 percent. (RFE/RL)