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EDITORIAL PRINCIPLES

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Analytical article structure: Ideal length between 1000 and 1200 words.

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

BACKGROUND: 300-400 words of analysis about what has led up to the event or issue and why this issue is critical to the region. Include background information about the views and experiences of the local population.

IMPLICATIONS: 300-400 words of analysis of the ramifications of this event or issue, including where applicable, implications for the local people's future.

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

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KYRGYZSTAN'S REVOLUTION: WHAT WENT WRONG?

Rafis Abazov

On October 20, Kyrgyz member of parliament Tynchbek Akmatbayev was assassinated in Bishkek. Just weeks earlier, his colleague Bayaman Erkinbayev met the same fate. Supporters of ex-General Prosecutor Azimbek Beknazarov organized mass rallies protesting against his dismissal. Seven hundred protesters seized plots of public land in the outskirts of capital Bishkek. These news hardly indicate that Kyrgyzstan is on a firm track toward political stabilization. These developments do not fit well with the ideals of the March 2005 revolution in Kyrgyzstan. The political arena in the republic is fragmented as never before, and there are no political parties ready to step in to stabilize the political process. The question that arises now is: what went wrong with the revolution?

BACKGROUND: It is not the first time that Kyrgyzstan experiences a period of serious political turmoil. Back in 1990-1991, the country was on a brink of political collapse and uncertainty. There were even fears that the inter-ethnic and political conflicts that started in the southern Osh region in the Summer of 1990 would escalate into civil war. Then as now, national political leaders showed their inability to face the challenge of the country's economic and social problems, while paying lip service to the democratization process. The political agenda was increasingly dominated by a rivalry between two major regional groupings, the so-called southern and northern clans. The situation worsened further when the country's leaders badly mismanaged the situation in Osh, leading to numerous human casualties. Complete anarchy reigned and mobs ruled the streets of cities and towns in the South.

This was the situation when several political parties and organizations stepped in. They were weak and disorganized, and ridden by deep-seated regional divides. Absamat Masaliyev, the communist ruler, exploited the rivalries between them to weaken the opposition further. Nevertheless, the opposition leaders were able to overcome their differences. In 1990 they established the Democratic Movement of Kyrgyzstan (DMK), uniting several political groups and parties. The DMK came up with a viable political program, and set up convincing and realistic goals that attracted many people to its ranks. Ultimately, the political

arena was transformed from chaotic to orderly. Many political, social and community groups found their place in this process, and restored their trust in an orderly political process. The DMK facilitated the defeat of comrade Masaliyev and the election of Askar Akayev as the first president of the country.

However, President Akayev was never comfortable with the presence of the opposition. Akayev chose to weaken the very same political parties and groups that brought him to the power. Instead of supporting the emerging multiparty and pluralistic political system in Kyrgyzstan, he turned back to the practices of his predecessor, engaging in behind-the-scene bargaining with regional clans. President Akayev neither established his own party, nor did he associate himself with any. Akayev co-opted conformists into the government, but severely punished those who disagreed with him. Many political parties were intimidated and reduced to irrelevance by a never-ending chain of political and legal manipulations and intimidations.

To be fair, the opposition parties were not free of mistakes. They had great difficulties in establishing cohesive political platforms, had no organizational strategies, and rarely put their feet outside the major metropolitan areas. They also failed to recruit and promote young people into their ranks. This limited political participation to relatively small groups of comrades in their forties and fifties. This practice

excluded a large segment of the society, the youth, from the political process, especially in rural areas.

Political life at the *raion* (district) and *oblast* (province) level became increasingly dominated by the so-called *New Kyrgyz* – a symbiosis of local government officials and business people. In this environment, a new class of politicians gradually emerged: those who preferred to rely on the patronage and clan networks of kinship groups. Political competition in the country degenerated into a competition between individuals, not between political ideas. This led to what could be termed a tribalization of Kyrgyzstan's political process. Many politicians began to believe that political parties could not be a vehicle of political success in this highly fragmented society. This was especially true in the rural areas, home to two thirds of the population. Local politicians began organizing paramilitary or militia-style groups of supporters for radical actions, such as mass demonstrations and the seizure of public or government buildings. This proved to be especially effective in remote constituencies, as the government often listened only to politicians who organized private militias. This process gained strength in the South in the early 2000s, and gathered steam after the shootings of civilians in the Aksy district in 2003. Private militias, sometimes with links to the organized criminal underworld, had by early 2005 appeared in all provinces of the country, and consisted mainly of people who were largely excluded from the political process – rural youth in their twenties and thirties. For young villagers, it was the only way to end the vicious circle of political and social marginalization.

The situation was so tense, and the political environment so chaotic and uncontrollable, that even a small incident could ignite mass disturbances and riots. The political and regional confrontation and public anger over manipulation and fraud during the parliamentary election campaign in late 2004 and early 2005 proved to be the catalyzer that brought chaos to many areas in the country, in turn sparking off the March 2005 Revolution.

IMPLICATIONS: The absence of strong political institutions in Kyrgyzstan significantly undermined the political stability in the country and led to the tribalization of the political process. This became

particularly obvious in a time of social unrest and instability, with at least five implications. First, after a decade of political reforms and manipulations, Kyrgyzstan's political environment degraded into a 'grab-all' political system. Both sides – the government and the opposition – showed little respect for the rule of law or political norms. All sides strongly believed that they could and should manipulate the political system for their short term gains. Second, the opposition parties proved to be weak and ineffective. This is hardly a new phenomenon in the post-communist world, but what makes Kyrgyzstan different is that instead of strengthening political parties and building political coalitions, politicians turned to establishing and using private paramilitary and militia-style groups, based on tribal and clan loyalties. This further deepened the divide in the country, and undermined perspectives for stabilization. Third, the easiness with which these politicians recruited young supporters into such groups shows that young people are ready to actively participate in the country's politics by all means, and disproves the assertion that they are either passive or indifferent to the political process. Fourth, Kyrgyzstan's political system increasingly resembles those in Pakistan, Afghanistan, and other countries with strong tribal traditions, where regional political elites acquire great autonomy and power through the use of tribal networks and patronage rather than through free and open competition on the basis of ideas and political organizations. Fifth, the democratic channels of communication broke down and all political participants relied mainly on the intricate patronage and personal networks that excluded many segments of society from the political process.

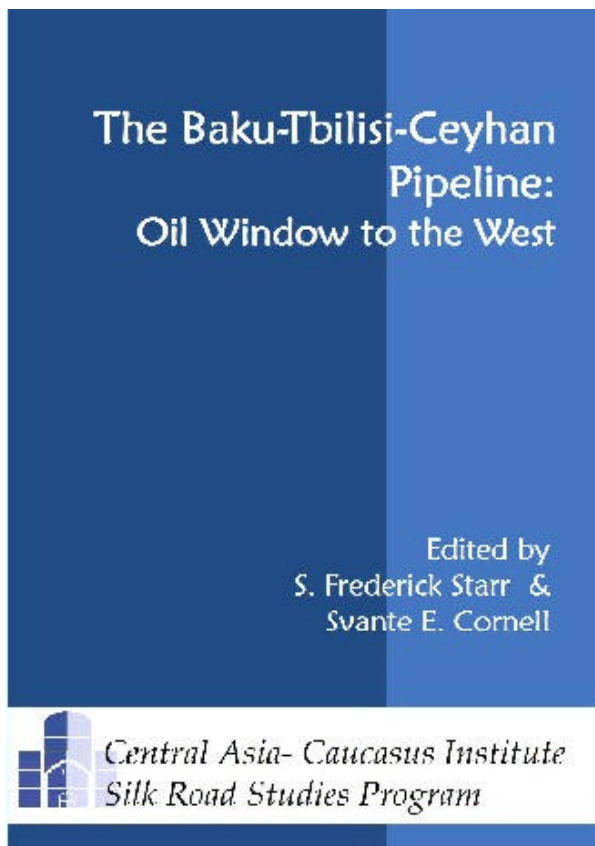
CONCLUSION: The March 2005 revolution in Kyrgyzstan cannot and will not resolve the existing problems. Society remains extremely fragmented; the political discord between the southern and northern clans runs even deeper. At the local level, the political process is being monopolized by local political leaders who frequently rely on and enforce their political demands through paramilitary groups. In order to break the vicious circle of instability and chaos, the leadership and all political forces face the task of

strengthening political institutions and reinforcing a competitive political process that is based on the participation of and competition between strong political parties, but not paramilitary groups or individual ambitious politicians.

Unfortunately there are no simple and straightforward formulas or strategies, but several conclusions can be drawn from the past. Kyrgyzstan's experience indicates that the so-called super-presidential system, which in one way or another was established in many CIS areas, tends to achieve a short term goals at the expense of long term stability and even aggravates the instability in time of power transition. Delegating more power from the presidential office to the parliament and strengthen its role in the policy-making process is one option that is currently discussed in order to achieve sustainable stability in the country. Second, the electoral system of single-member majoritarian districts for parliamentary elections has contributed to fragmentation and prevented attempts to involve major competing clans and fractions in society into the party-

based political process. Reinstating the party-list proportional elections in the parliamentary elections is one option to address this issue. Third, the present parliament shows clear tendencies of turning into the arena for regional, clan and individual completion. This can only be mitigated by enticing MPs to work intensively with political parties and ideally recruiting them into their ranks, pushing parliament members to begin competing and bargaining according to political programs and party platforms. Fourth, a main destabilizing element of Kyrgyzstan's politics so far is its failure to involve youth – something that needs acute attention of the political leadership, in order to convince people that an orderly political process, not sticks and rocks, will promote the resolution of their problems.

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PRESIDENT ALIYEV'S SHAKEUP: A CHANGING PORTRAIT

Alman Mir Ismail

President Ilham Aliyev's recent dismissals of several high-ranking ministers changed his political image. If before, Aliyev was regarded as a soft politician unable to get rid of the conservative and powerful "old guard", now he is seen as holding enough power to deal with his opponents even within the ruling party without destabilizing the country. Indeed, Aliyev's recent moves were reminiscent of his father's tactics. Whereas Aliyev prefers the institutional and gradual pace of changes inside the country, his reform agenda does not exclude harsh and determined actions when needed. Looking and acting strong has strengthened President Aliyev's position both among the general public and inside the ruling elite. The stereotype that the government is really run by powerful figures behind the scene has been crushed and the strength of these officials seemed to have been overestimated.

BACKGROUND: When President Ilham Aliyev was elected to the presidency in October 2003, many expected sweeping political and economic reforms and significant cadre changes. After all, President Aliyev was young and had extensive experience working with Western companies as well as democracy building organizations, such as the Council of Europe and OSCE. Yet the slow pace of cadre changes made many both inside and outside Azerbaijan believe that Ilham Aliyev lacked the charisma, power and determination to deal with the "old guard", implying members of the administration that had served under his father and since then grew into corrupt, powerful and well-networked power centers in the country. Among these, the chief ones were Head of Presidential Administration Ramiz Mekhtiyev, Health Minister Ali Insanov, Interior Minister Ramil Usubov, National Security Minister Namik Abbasov, Economics minister Farhad Aliyev, Customs head Kemaleddin Heydarov. Indeed, compared with his father, President Aliyev seemed rather weak. Within the two years of his presidency, he had fired only four ministers (of which only truly influential one, Namik Abbasov) and a dozen local governors.

The recent arrests of high-profile officials in Baku showed another side of President Aliyev. On October 19, the powerful Minister of Economic

Development Farhad Aliyev and his brother Rafiq were arrested in connection with an alleged 'planned coup' against the government. Farhad Aliyev, who is not related to the president, was in control of major monopolies in the country and had an extensive network of business loyalists. The next day, the very powerful minister of health Ali Insanov and a head of department at the President's office Akif Muradverdiyev were also fired and arrested. Both were known to head one of the most powerful groupings within the ruling party the so-called 'Yer-az' grouping of Azerbaijanis originally stemming from present-day Armenia ('Yer' for Yerevan, 'Az' for Azeri).

Insanov was deemed so powerful that he was thought to be untouchable. Local media and analysts have long speculated that President Aliyev cannot stand Insanov due to his independent behavior and lack of respect, but few thought that Insanov would let himself be fired without putting up a real fight. Dozens of local media outlets, political parties, businesses and high-ranking officials were said to have ties to (or be dependent on) Insanov, and his departure will mean a split within the ruling regime – something that President Aliyev was not believed to be ready to risk. It is noteworthy that Insanov's supporters, with the exception of a group of his loyalists that had held a press conference and

demanded his freedom, did not dare to oppose the President's decision and instead organized a briefing in which they condemned Insanov's actions.

To the last weeks' developments should be added the events in March this year, when the President ordered the arrest of several high-ranking officials within the Ministry of Internal Affairs, who were accused of having kidnapped and murdered several influential businessmen and politicians in the country throughout the past decade, though sparing a weakened Minister of Interior. Following that, Aliyev also sacked on charges of corruption the influential deputy minister of Justice Aydin Gasimov, who had been in charge of the penitentiary system for nearly a decade and was thought to have ties with the criminal circles. His dismissal, which even resulted in prison riots in Baku, was a very risky action for the President.

IMPLICATIONS: President Aliyev's recent actions significantly increased his credibility among ordinary people, who doubted that he could get rid of corrupt and powerful officials. The majority of the population traditionally looked at Aliyev as a soft and liberal politician, but have now turned to believe that he does possess the necessary determination to fight his opponents in his father's style. In retrospect, President Aliyev's policy in terms of cadre changes shows that in spite of prevailing stereotypes, Aliyev indeed does hold an increasingly firm command over the country and is the principal decision maker in the domestic political process. Arguments on his dependence on – or fear of – the “old guard” have proven to be overestimated, as has the power of oligarchs and influential ministers.

In many ways, the current situation in Azerbaijan is very similar to 1993, when President Heydar Aliyev came to power. At that time, the country's political spectrum was full of independent warlords, each of which had paramilitary groups and used them to fight for power. It was dangerous times for the President, who had to manage these armed groups and their leaders. But within a few years, Heydar Aliyev arrested and crushed all these groups and established his command over the country. In

Georgia, President Eduard Shevardnadze did very much the same in 1994-96.

Today's Azerbaijan is in some sense comparable, because power centers within the ruling regime possess not only large groups of loyalists, but also significant financial resources and, as widely speculated in the local media, armed gangs. To establish a strong, powerful presidency in this situation could be as difficult as it was in 1993. Most of the influential members of the old guard have a deeply entrenched systems of clan and family networks, and the entire governmental apparatus is filled with their loyalists. Sacking or fighting them is a very risky venture for President Aliyev. In spite of this, in the past months Aliyev has taken the risk of making moves that even his father did not dare to do.

CONCLUSIONS: The process of cadre changes in Azerbaijan is likely to take a different pace now. With the President's show of power and the absence of virtually any opposition to his moves on the part of the sacked officials, it is likely that the President's authority and reputation will further increase, depending in great part on the way the parliamentary elections on November 6 are held and the international reaction to it. Powerful oligarchs and ministers are likely to lower their ambitions, as their respect for the young President increases. In this situation, President Aliyev will be in a position to press further with cadre changes and political and economic reforms.

Meanwhile, it is likely that the recent dismissals will cause a long-term fragmentation inside the ruling party and the formation of a new opposition inside the country, financed and supported by the sacked officials. With the total failure of the current political opposition to produce a credible alternative to the ruling regime, the new opposition might spice up the domestic political scene in Azerbaijan.

AUTHOR'S BIO: Alman Mir-Ismael is a freelance journalist based in Baku.

GEORGIA'S SCAPEGOAT: THE OSCE IN SOUTH OSSETIA

Markus Bernath

After another summer of discontent, Georgia is now quickly moving forward to a showdown with South Ossetia, one of its two separatist provinces. Tbilisi is not only aiming at Russia, which installed a de facto protectorate over the province, but also at the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe. More than ten years of conflict resolution by the OSCE has left the conflict between Georgia and South Ossetia very much unresolved. By blaming one of the oldest and biggest field missions of the OSCE, leaders on both sides hope for gains on their respective agenda. While most observers agree the current mechanism is absurd, tensions between the West and Russia within the OSCE make a change for the better unlikely.

BACKGROUND: Georgia's French-born former Foreign minister Salome Zourabishvili, who was forced out recently, put it bluntly: "We cannot believe that this is the organization that can solve our problems", she said after a series of incidents on South Ossetia's "independence day" on September 20, referring to her year-long history of growing frustration with the OSCE. Zourabishvili several times traveled to the OSCE Permanent Council in order to plead for an increase in military observers in South Ossetia, and for the prolongation of the OSCE border observation mission on Georgia's border with Chechnya, Ingushetia and Daghestan. But Russia only conceded to some three more observers and blocked the mission.

The end of the border mission on January 1, 2005, angered Zourabishvili to the extent that she removed Georgia's ambassador to the OSCE, Giorgi Burduli, who proved unable to gather enough support from western states. The OSCE's incapacity to shed light on arms transfers to South Ossetia and to discipline the awkward joint Georgian-Ossetian peacekeeping effort under Russia's guidance exasperated Tbilisi to such an extent that nothing but a complete remake of the peace framework in the separatist province seems acceptable for the government. "The role of the OSCE has been brought to the minimum in South Ossetia", stated even Giorgi Khaindrava, the dovish Minister for Conflict Resolution. In fact, the OSCE's primary task in Georgia is to oversee the implementation of the Sochi Agreement from June 1992 between then-Russian

president Boris Yeltsin and Georgian president Eduard Shevardnadze. The Sochi agreement ended the short Georgian-Ossetian war – the latter party supported by the Russian military – and led to the installation of a Joint Control Commission (JCC) with representatives of Russia, Georgia, South Ossetia and the Russian Republic of North Ossetia. Facing a three to one majority in the JCC, Georgia always considered the OSCE as a counterbalance. For the same reason, the current Ossetian government dislikes the OSCE and wants its Head of office in Tskhinvali to be removed.

The mission started with a fault: the OSCE's original mandate was to monitor the entire territory of South Ossetia, up to the highly strategic Roki tunnel – Ossetia's link to Russia. This mandate was never enforced – neither by the OSCE member-states in the Permanent Council, nor by the Georgia field mission. With its five observers on the ground, the OSCE claims it can report a fair picture of the military situation within the so called "area of responsibility", a corridor of ten kilometers on each side of the administrative line between Georgia proper and South Ossetia, as well as the later added concept of "the conflict zone" – a perimeter of about 15 kilometers around the provincial capital, Tskhinvali.

Georgia's recent furor against the OSCE, however, came after the breakaway region's self-proclaimed 'independence day' on September 20. Ossetians paraded heavy armor in Tskhinvali that – following JCC

decisions – was not supposed to be in the town. Georgia asserted that these weapons appeared to be newly delivered by Russia. A still unexplained mortar attack on the day of the parade in Tskhinvali, which left ten people wounded, nevertheless put the Georgian government into an embarrassing position.

Georgia's parliament drafted a resolution that called for an end to joint peacekeeping and for the withdrawal of the Russian forces from South Ossetia if by February 10, 2006, Georgia's government does not see any improvements on the security side. Tbilisi already started to boycott sessions of the JCC and calls for mediation through the EU and the United States instead of the OSCE. The same resolution set out an ultimatum for Russian troops in Abkhazia for July 2006.

IMPLICATIONS: The OSCE mission in Georgia lacks two main conditions for crisis management: a commitment to a peace agreement by all sides and the possibility to impose sanctions in case of violations of existing agreements. In fact, the OSCE mission in Georgia has failed to deliver what it was brought in for in the first place 13 years ago – i.e. to “facilitate the creation of a political framework, in which a lasting political conciliation can be achieved on the basis of CSCE principles and commitments”, as the November 1992 mandate reads. This failure appears even larger as diplomats were not able to use the opportunities of the political shake-up in the region that is taking place since Georgia's Rose Revolution in November 2003. On the contrary, from the vantage point of the OSCE mission and its way of managing the conflict, Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili and his young “reformers” have created more problems rather than opportunities for conflict management.

To the OSCE as to most western countries, Georgia's policy towards South Ossetia in the past eighteen months has appeared poorly coordinated and at times quite contradictory. For example, the OSCE did not learn about Saakashvili's peace plan for South Ossetia and his offer for the “broadest possible autonomy” until after the Georgian President presented it to the Council of Europe in January 2005. Georgia first mounted tensions in South Ossetia in 2004 by filling up its peacekeeping battalion to the legal limit of 500 soldiers,

but then subsequently dropped it to some 60 soldiers in a sign of disinterest in the Russian-led JPKF. There is evidence that U.S.-trained Georgian troops conducted reconnaissance beyond the “conflict zone” and close to the Roki tunnel in summer 2004. Tbilisi was rebuked by Washington for its demeanor in South Ossetia in Summer 2004, and the State Department called on Georgia to investigate the shelling of Tskhinvali on September 20. These moves cause doubt whether NATO and EU countries would move in and take on a greater role, or why Russia and its Ossetian proxy-regime would agree to any reform of peacekeeping that replaces a diminished but suitable OSCE.

For the moment, Tbilisi and Tskhinvali seem to think about tactics, not answers. By escalating the conflict and further sidelining the OSCE, both sides may hope for gains: Eduard Kokoity, President of the unrecognized Republic of South Ossetia, counts on Russia's harsh reply to Georgia to move closer to his declared aim – a union of South Ossetia with North Ossetia. For his part, Saakashvili and his government want to demonstrate that the Ossetian conflict is “unfrozen” and therefore needs renewed western engagement. At the same time, Georgia's Defense minister, Irakli Okruashvili – known as the most unsmiling man in Tbilisi – may indeed be considering a military reconquest.

CONCLUSIONS: A Fundamental change in the pace and format of the conflict management mechanism in South Ossetia seems long overdue. Unofficially at least, even OSCE diplomats acknowledge that peacekeeping according to the rules set forward by the 1992 Sochi Agreement is an absurd mechanism. Whether they will be allowed to speak out now is doubtful. The OSCE's security role in South Ossetia is weakened, but the context now is the renewed conflict between Russia and the West within the organization. Georgia's head-on-tactics could, at best, generate some new mutual understanding on crisis containment in the South Caucasus between Russia on the one side and the U.S. and the EU on the other. At worst, it will make Russia dig in further in South Ossetia.

AUTHOR'S BIO: Markus Bernath is foreign editor of the Austrian daily *Der Standard* in Vienna and reports on the Caucasus and Asian affairs.

KAZAKHSTAN LAYS LEGAL BASIS FOR DEEPER COOPERATION WITH NATO

Roger N. McDermott

Kazakhstan's Senate on October 12 adopted a law on the ratification of a security agreement concluded between Kazakhstan and NATO. The document has been submitted to President Nazarbayev for signing. The agreement itself, originally signed in Brussels in July 1996, aims at strengthening the mutual commitments to protect sensitive information exchanged as part of cooperation within the framework of NATO's Partnership for Peace (PfP) program. Ratification will make it possible for Kazakhstan to take full-fledged part in PfP, laying a legal foundation to deepen further cooperation between Kazakhstan and the Alliance.

BACKGROUND: On October 5, Ambassador Robert Simmons, Special Representative of the NATO Secretary-General for the Caucasus and Central Asia, held forthright talks with Army General Mukhtar Altynbayev, Kazakhstan's Defence Minister, exploring options on how best to deepen the level of Kazakhstan's existing PfP cooperation, aimed at promoting regional security and modernising the Kazakhstani armed forces. The Kazakhstani MoD plans to create a regional center based on its Peacekeeping Battalion (KAZBAT) to train bomb disposal experts for possible future service in international peace support operations. Simmons mooted the idea of utilizing the PfP Planning and Review Process (PARP) project to include setting up a team by 2007 to react to disasters, including those that resulted from the use of weapons of mass destruction or major terrorist incidents.

Bolat Utemuratov, Secretary of the Kazakhstani Security Council, believes that an individual partnership plan (IPAP), which provides for entering a higher and efficient level of cooperation with NATO, will be ready by the end of 2005. This plan will only succeed if it is suitably tailored to address Kazakhstan's security needs, and assists with its key military reform plans. Altynbayev also hopes to secure access to NATO's trust funds to organize professional retraining for its servicemen after their retirement from the army. NATO has also announced that it has appointed Tugay Tuncer as its special representative

on communication and cooperation with Central Asian countries. He will be based between Astana and Almaty, liaising with the Kazakhstani and other regional governments. By choosing Kazakhstan, NATO planners had to calculate the risk of triggering Kazakh-Uzbek regional rivalry, but given the security environment after the events in Andijan, NATO decided to ride out the storm from Tashkent. Uzbekistan's reaction to the decision was predictably hostile; but if it wants repair the damage it has undoubtedly suffered to its international reputation, it may in time lay aside such reservations.

IMPLICATIONS: Such practical cooperation initiatives, and plans to make PfP more user friendly for Kazakhstan, signals a window of opportunity for the Alliance. The ongoing deployment of elements of KAZBAT in Iraq, despite open domestic hostility to the involvement of Kazakhstani servicemen there, demonstrates the potential for Kazakhstan to supply future niche capabilities in Alliance operations. That would be of interest to Kazakhstan, since unlike its deployment in Iraq, such operations would have a greater multilateral and legal basis; less controversial options would suit the regime, as well as assuaging possible criticism from its traditional allies of being pro-American.

Recent presidential speeches emanating from Astana have placed a high premium on Kazakhstan's relations with Russia, China and the U.S. while also referring to developing ties with the EU. President Nursultan

Nazarbayev values bilateral relations with Russia to such an extent that he will clearly be most careful about public statements on cooperation with NATO. In order to secure the future success of NATO's PFP cooperation plans with Kazakhstan, determined political will on Nazarbayev's part must remain forthcoming. Should Nazarbayev waver in the face of Russian and Chinese disapproval, the whole process could be undermined.

On October 11, Kazakhstan's Foreign Minister Kasymzhomart Tokayev, addressing an international conference entitled "Strategy 'Kazakhstan-2030' in action" in Astana said that Kazakhstan would remain a reliable U.S. partner in fighting terrorism. Equally, Tokayev stressed that Kazakhstan will continue to do everything in its power to attract American investment in the country. Political analysts in Kazakhstan considered the visit of U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice to Central Asia on October 12-13 a part of Washington's efforts to reinvigorate its strategic influence within the region. America's influence has been waning, not least since the Central Asian states recently moved closer to Russia in their pursuit of enhanced security, and the general picture worsened as a result of the deterioration in U.S.-Uzbek relations since Andijan.

In this environment, Kazakhstan seems ideally situated to benefit from these factors. But rather than prioritizing bilateral security assistance from the U.S. and focusing on the U.S. as a key strategic partner, Nazarbayev's regime has chosen to avoid the backlash such a policy may bring from Russia and China, by quietly and consistently focusing on deepening ties with NATO.

CONCLUSIONS: The ratification of the agreement between NATO and Kazakhstan, which paves the way for greater levels of defense and security cooperation, may appear a small step, however it is nonetheless a highly significant one. Many Kazakhstani political statements since 9/11 have promised deeper relations with NATO, but all too often serious attempts to work out the practicalities of this stance have been severely hampered by the legislative restrictions in sharing sensitive security information with foreign powers. The committee on

international affairs, defence and security of the parliament's Majlis (the lower chamber) now decided that the law on state secrets also provides for giving information that is regarded as a state secret to those foreign countries with which international agreements have been signed. Since NATO is a multilateral security body and cannot be considered as a foreign country, the law does not apply to information requested by NATO within the PFP program. But it is a breakthrough that after many years a way around this problem has been found, opening up the prospect of Kazakhstan's PFP participation becoming a real engine of change. The timing is also interesting, since Astana may regard the recent problems suffered by Uzbekistan as providing an opportunity to eclipse its regional rival.

NATO must be cautious not to inadvertently promote such rivalry, but also to avoid specifically concentrating on the issue of improving Kazakhstan's defense forces; attention must be given to developing a regional component to NATO's involvement in Central Asia. The idea of developing a regional center based on KAZBAT, for instance, is one that could be furthered by NATO's assistance, cultivating carefully the participation in such regional centers of servicemen from all other Central Asian states. If these initiatives get off the ground, Tashkent will have to calculate the risk in isolating itself from regional security plans. Kazakhstan will also remain cautious and require much reassurance that the Alliance is not simply functioning as an umbrella for U.S. strategic advancement in the region. All this, of course, will be scrutinized in Beijing and Moscow. By ratifying this security agreement, the initiative has been placed in the hands of NATO: it is now up to Brussels to follow through with meaningful dialogue with the Kazakhstani security structures and conflate its programs accordingly.

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FIELD REPORTS

BATKEN'S BORDER PROBLEMS

Zoya Pylenko

If you have to go to Batken, the capital of Kyrgyzstan's southernmost Batken province that borders Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, you could be in for a long ride. Along the main road in this Kyrgyz province lie two Uzbek enclaves – Sokh and Shokhimardon. Most people need a visa to get through them. But Uzbek visas are hard to get after the unrest and violence in the Uzbek city of Andijan last May, when 200 people – and more according to human rights groups – were killed. Those left without a visa, or unwilling to face the harassment of border guards, will have to take the long, dusty road around the enclaves. This is a dangerous task over a bumpy road alongside a canal with fast-flowing water and over bridges in a ruinous state.

This is where Central Asia's border problems are most visible. Although in the first half of October, negotiations between the Uzbek and Kyrgyz commissions on demarcation of the border came to an end, there is no end in sight for these problems. During the October meeting, the two countries submitted documents asserting their respective claim to disputed territories. A next meeting is supposed to bring the sides to a compromise after each commission has drawn its conclusions about the submitted documents. The head of Kyrgyzstan's commission, Salamat Alamanov, said that Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan still have 50 disputed spots and that more than 1,000 km of the 1295 km border is still not demarcated.

A compromise between the two countries is badly needed. Unfortunately for Kyrgyzstan, it has does not only have problems with Uzbekistan. About 30 spots on the Kyrgyz-Tajik border are also disputed.

Vorukh, a big Tajik enclave in Batken, cuts Kyrgyz infrastructure in the province into yet more pieces.

These so strangely marked borders of Central Asian countries were inherited from the Soviet period, and they do not make much sense. The Uzbek enclave of Sokh, for example, is almost completely inhabited by ethnic Tajiks. And before Soviet times, the now Kyrgyz town of Osh was indivisible from other mainly Uzbek-inhabited areas. Causing more problems is the fact that inter-republican borders were of little importance in Soviet times. They were not properly demarcated, and existed only on the map. Sometimes the borders cut villages into two parts, and this did not pose a problem. Now it does.

After independence, commissions for border demarcation were established in the Central Asian states. Though many borders have been demarcated, they have not done much in subsequent years as regards the Ferghana valley and its enclaves. Rival commissions were unable to even decide which map should be used for demarcation: every country uses its own map, drawn in the most profitable way for itself. The question of border demarcation gained in importance after the armed incursions (via Batken) by the radical Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) into Uzbekistan in 1999-2000. Following this, Uzbekistan introduced a visa regime and established checkpoints along its borders. Kyrgyzstan responded by doing the same. After this, traveling in the region became difficult. Friends and relatives on the other side of the border became effectively separated. People in border areas do have permission to stay in the immediate border area of the neighboring country without a visa up to five days. But for longer stays, or trips to for

example Tashkent, a visa is required that can only be received in far-away Bishkek.

Border guards seem to show little understanding of their task. The speed with which one can cross the border depends on the mood of the soldiers: sometimes they don't look at documents at all, and sometimes it takes excruciatingly long. Sometimes they don't understand what is written in documents, as they often don't know the neighboring state's language or even Russian, and hence mistakes are made. Some incidents are fatal for locals, as when soldiers mistake farmers (who let their cattle graze on the other side of the border) for terrorists or robbers and shoot them.

Sokh was believed to shelter members of the IMU during 1999-2001. The Uzbek authorities therefore mined the enclave (as well as other parts of the disputed Uzbek-Kyrgyz and Uzbek-Tajik border) to prevent the IMU from entering the main territory of Uzbekistan, despite protests by Kyrgyz authorities. Sokh was de-mined only after the almost complete destruction of the IMU during the U.S. campaign against the Taliban in Afghanistan in 2001. Nevertheless, even now people and livestock still occasionally become the victims of undiscovered and forgotten mines.

Extremists could still be around. The Vorukh enclave is believed to be full with armed extremists

as well as drug smugglers. The region is inhabited by very religious people, who prefer not to speak with foreigners. Locals deny there is a problem with extremism. But the appearance of the village speaks volumes: there are several huge villas with satellite television, surprisingly mixed with the general poverty. And this in spite of an almost complete absence of opportunities to work and earn money. Trade is not developed in the region at all, and access to the village is difficult.

Many Kyrgyz experts think that Uzbekistan is on purpose avoiding a definite demarcation of the border. According to them, Uzbekistan does not want to risk losing control over natural resources in the area, such as water, gas and oil. (Much of the oil is currently turned into diesel by locals in self-made refineries along the dusty road around the enclaves, lying in beds next to the road and waiting for rare customers.)

But while it takes a long time for the Uzbek, Tajik and Kyrgyz commissions to come to a compromise over the demarcation of disputed territories, the people of the enclaves and of Batken are getting more and more isolated. For the end of October, a conference is scheduled about the problems in Batken and adjoining Tajik and Uzbek areas. But if history is of guidance, talks are unlikely to resolve much.

TURKMENBASHI TIGHTENS HIS GRIP OVER SHORTFALLS IN COTTON PRODUCTION

Chemen Durdiyeva

It is more than a month since the nationwide annual cotton-picking process started in Turkmenistan. Usually, the whole process lasts until mid-November each year. As the President gave his personal directives and set the cotton plan earlier this year, all of the five velayats (region) of the country are expected to jointly gather over 2,2 million tons of cotton until October 27, when the

country celebrates the 14th anniversary of its Independence. However, this goal of the cotton plan is far from being reached due to the major shortfalls of regional leaders directly leading the work in cotton production.

Myrat Atagarryev, the former Governor of Akhal velayat, of which Ashgabat is the central city, is one

of the dozens of state officials currently falling short of efforts to reach the cotton plan. On September 27, President Niyazov held a plenary session of Cabinet members and particularly addressed Mr. Atagarryev's case regarding underperformance in ongoing cotton production. As a result of the session, President Niyazov sacked Atagarryev citing numerous charges against him, and highly criticized a list of other personnel.

Mr. Atagarryev was appointed as Governor of Akhal velayat in October 2004. Despite his short tenure in the office and entrusted high government position, Atagarryev appears to have committed types of crime that other officials of his rank would find it hard to fathom. President Niyazov deeply deplored the fact that instead of carrying out the cotton plan in the fields, Atagarryev with his deputy Governor on agricultural issues had been drinking vodka in their office. Moreover, the former Governor is also accused of being a large-scale drug addict. According to the report given by the Prosecutor General, Gurbanbibi Atajanova, Mr. Atagarryev made one of the heads of the law enforcement agencies buy heroin and deliver it to him for regular usage. Besides, the former Governor is charged for spreading nepotism and massive corruption. During the ongoing investigations of the prosecutor's office and the Ministry of Interior, it was revealed that Atagarryev took bribes in the amount of \$100,000 and later \$10,000 monthly from multiple sub-regional mayors in Akhal as well as in Lebap velayats. While working as a Governor, Atagarryev reportedly brought in many of his relatives and appointed several of them to well-paid positions in Akhal.

Amongst the major flaws during his time in office, Mr. Atagarryev personally bought a \$15,000 luxury car to a lady at his reception, said President Niyazov. "Just yesterday, you [also] gave \$100,000 to your deputy Governor and offered him to open a studio. [Atagarryev] opened a beauty salon in his girlfriend's name. It is no joke what he has been doing so far. ... it is impossible to forgive this" said

Niyazov. In a televised appearance, Mr. Atagarryev confessed and confirmed that he personally takes a responsibility for all the charges made. Up until this moment, Atagarryev was the youngest Governor during his time in the government.

In February of 2005, Turkmenbashi banned the exploitation of child labor in the cotton-picking process in the country. Prior to signing this decree, students of the fifth and higher years at secondary schools and all university students nationwide except the ones in Ashgabat would be officially released from school and spend the next two months in the fields picking cotton. The whole burden of organizing cotton picking on time now remains on the shoulders of velayat Governors. According to this year's cotton plan, Turkmenistan expects to gather 2,2 million tons of cotton by October 27. As of October 18, the country managed to gather 663,830 tns or only barely 30 percent of the expected total amount.

This failure to meet the cotton plan made that president remove the Governor of Lebap, Geday Ahmedovich (another holder of the "Hero" status), the Governor of Mary and many other sub-regional mayors in Akhal velayat. Some of those sub-regional mayors who had been working with Mr. Atagarryev have also been jailed under the charges of corruption.

All in all, Mr. Atagarryev's case and the massive removal of other regional Governors not only shows an ongoing cadre problem in Turkmenistan, but also indicates again an element of widespread and unending corruption among state officials. Whether and when this dynamic problem can be solved remains to be seen as the young generation of the Golden Age of the Turkmen grows up with new education inspired by *Ruhnama* and replaces the old mentality cadres in the country.

DRY LANDS MANAGEMENT PROJECT BOOSTS KAZAKHSTAN'S AGRICULTURE

Marat Yermukanov

The desiccation of the Aral Sea, dramatic pollution of Lake Balkhash and dwindling crop yields are only the visible part of the looming environmental disaster which threatens the livelihood of Kazakhstan's rural population. In quest of a solution to the problem, the Ministry of environmental protection of Kazakhstan, the Global Environment Fund and the World Bank launched a joint project aimed at giving new life to dry lands.

One of the many paradoxes of Kazakhstan's agriculture is that the country which possesses immeasurably vast areas of arable land chronically faces crop failure even in good years. Hundreds of farmers end up in bankruptcy due to low crop yields and snowballing debts for fuel, pesticides and fertilizers. Grain producers in the North Kazakhstan, Kostanay and Akmola regions are desperately struggling to sell their wheat for as low as \$85 dollars a ton. The worst forecasts of market experts warn that grain prices may plummet to \$60 in the domestic market in coming months which would mean inevitable ruin of financially vulnerable farms. Rich wheat harvests in Ukraine and Russia, the main consumers of Kazakh grain, reduce Kazakhstan's export potential this year. The landlocked country will have to use railway routes to bring its grain to world markets, paying exorbitantly high shipment costs. Theoretically, Kazakhstan could export up to six million tons of grain this year, but in reality the demand for wheat is much lower. The reason is not only fierce competition from Ukrainian and Russian grain producers, but also the low protein content of wheat. It is forecasted that two million tons of wheat will remain unsold in grain storages.

The root cause of the deplorable situation lies in the dwindling fertility of agricultural lands caused by mismanagement, wind and water erosion, and depletion of the humus layer of the soil. Traditional methods of crop management based on extensive

tillage and uncontrolled application of herbicides resulted in green pastures and fertile crop areas being turned into wilderness within a decade. Thousands of farmers abandoned their barren land plots. World Bank sources say that since 1990, the cultivated area of arable lands in Kazakhstan declined by 37%. Within the same period, pasture lands decreased by 60%.

Alarmed at the impending agricultural and environmental disaster, the Ministry of Environmental Protection of Kazakhstan joined forces with the Global Environment Fund and the World Bank. The dry lands management project currently being implemented and jointly funded by these organizations in the Shett district of Qaraghandy region (Central Kazakhstan) is part of this endeavor to restore the soil fertility in dry areas with low rainfall. The project was launched in March last year. The project manager, Sadyk Baktiyar, says 41 species of plants in the steppe area of Kazakhstan are listed as endangered. In the Shett district, the abandoned dry lands cover an area of 90,000 hectares. Cultivated areas yield as low as 5 quintals of wheat per hectare. The situation is aggravated by the advance of sands in the wind-swept Central Kazakhstan.

Since the launch of the project, much has been achieved in Qaraghandy region. Encouraged by financial aid from the World Bank, the Global Environment Fund and the government, local farmers in the Shett district made a remarkable breakthrough introducing people-centered and environmentally friendly agricultural production. The technology recommended by the project is simple. Dry lands are planted with perennial herbs tolerant of droughts and traditional cereal plants like wheat, rye, oats and canola. The deep roots of perennial grass stunt and kill the weeds. A year ago, it would sound incredible to farmers of the Shett district that a good crop could be grown without

deep plowing and extensive tillage. Methods applied to restore dry lands in Central Kazakhstan are similar to no-till technologies used in Brazil, Canada and other countries. The earlier land cultivation system inherited from socialist agricultural management consisted in plowing up the whole area, exposing the soil to erosion. New technology ushers in entirely new approaches to land use. After the crop is harvested, remaining stubbles of cereal crops are disked down and left to decompose in the soil to provide nutrition for the new crop.

Another encouraging sign of the growing environmental consciousness among farmers of the Shett district are wind-powered electricity

generators installed to produce electricity and pump water from the wells in cattle farms in remote areas. The principal agriculturalist of the World Bank, Jitendra P. Srivastava, believes that it is important to spread knowledge on management of dry lands accumulated in Kazakhstan to all countries of Central Asia. Project managers are planning to hold an international conference next summer. The joint efforts of Central Asian governments and international organizations revive hopes to win back dry lands from the wilderness, and turn them into a vital source of sustainable development.

RASUL GULIYEV FAILED TO RETURN TO AZERBAIJAN

Gulnara Ismailova

The former speaker of the Azerbaijani parliament and exiled leader of the Democratic Party, Rasul Guliyev, was detained by Ukrainian law enforcement bodies at Simferopol airport on October 17, on an Azerbaijani arrest warrant. He was later released.

The run-up to the November 6 parliamentary elections was supposed to see the homecoming of Rasul Guliyev. Guliyev was a vice-premier in the government in the early 1990s, and later became the Speaker of Parliament. Having left the post in 1996 after allegations of large-scale graft, Guliyev departed to self-imposed exile in the United States. During the past few years, Guliyev has become one of the most radical critics of the Azerbaijani government.

Azerbaijani authorities have long been seeking Guliyev's arrest and extradition, accusing him of large scale plundering of state property while occupying positions including heading oil refineries in Baku in the early 1990s. In September, during a press conference, Minister of Internal Affairs Ramil

Usubov declared that Guliyev had plundered state property worth US\$120 million.

Official Baku also stated that while living abroad, Guliyev had conducted subversive activities against the country. In May 2003, Dutch authorities detained Guliyev at Amsterdam airport based on an Interpol arrest warrant. But he was released the next day. Guliyev's lawyer, Fuad Agaev, alleges that the criminal case against his client is baseless.

The present brawl surrounding the former speaker began with his unexpected registration as a candidate for the parliamentary elections in the 36-IV Khatai electoral district of Baku city – a Guliyev stronghold in the oil districts of the city. Two hours later, the Public Prosecutor decided to deprive Guliyev of candidate immunity and charged the Ministry of Internal Affairs to execute the decision of the Sabail regional court, i.e. to arrest Guliyev upon return to the country.

In response, the Azerbaijani opposition established a national committee on Guliyev's return. Guliyev then decided to return to Baku by a chartered flight

on October 17. The chief of staff of the 'Azadliq' opposition block Panah Huseyn declared that as an officially registered candidate, Guliyev has the right to return home and take part in the election campaign. The deputy chairman of the Democratic Party, Sardar Jalaloglu, argued that Guliyev's decision to return was in response to popular demands. "Nothing can prevent his arrival. He is aware of the threat of arrest. Only his death can prevent his homecoming", Jalaloglu said.

The authorities' reaction followed almost immediately. Public prosecutor Zakir Garalov declared to media representatives that if Guliyev would return to Azerbaijan, he would be arrested – adding that a separate chamber in the Bayil jail had been allocated for him: "Rasul Guliyev will be arrested at the moment he steps on Azerbaijani soil. The court decision is in force and will be implemented upon his return to Azerbaijan", Interior Minister Usubov declared.

The opposition even postponed a meeting of 'Azadliq' activists planned for October 16, asking supporters to gather and welcome Guliyev at Baku's international airport. Nevertheless, Baku's mayor Hajibala Abutalibov declared this meeting, planned for October 17, illegal as organizers had not applied for a permission to hold such an event. On the night of October 17, law enforcement bodies conducted a series of raids, targeting persons connected with Guliyev. Among the arrested was former Minister of Finance Fikret Yusifov. In his possession were found firearms, 100,000 Euro and % 60,000 in cash, as well as receipts of money for financing Guliyev's return. The former Head of Ganja city's police department, Natig Efendiyev, and over 30 members of ADP were also arrested.

Starting from the morning of October 17, security in the area adjoining Baku's international airport was strengthened. The highway connecting Baku with the airport was controlled by Interior troops in armored vehicles. The Ministry of Internal Affairs released a statement saying that secret arms and ammunition caches had been discovered.

By 4.00 PM, the time of Guliyev's planned arrival, it became known that an airplane belonging to London Executive Airways airline (LEA) was in Simferopol and had officially requested permission to land in Azerbaijan. According to the Head of the Azerbaijani Airlines Jahangir Askerov, a fax was sent to LEA and to the dispatching service at Simferopol airport, granting landing permission for the plane with six passengers.

However, at the last moment, Guliyev refused to return home and according to the head of the Azerbaijan national bureau of Interpol Madat Guliyev, he had been detained in Simferopol by Ukrainian law enforcement bodies. Hence the former speaker disappointed his supporters for the second time. The first had been before the 2003 presidential elections, when Guliyev had promised to return but failed to do so.

Mubariz Gurbanly, a spokesman of the ruling Yeni Azerbaijan Party, stated that "on October 17, the Azerbaijan people became witness of the destruction of the myth created by the supporters of Rasul Guliyev. They thought the people would rise to protect Guliev upon his return. But this failed to happen."

NEWS DIGEST

SOUTH OSSETIAN LEADER EXPECTING
GEORGIAN PROVOCATIONS

18 October

South Ossetian President Eduard Kokoity said he thinks Georgia will step up what he described as provocative acts aimed at ending the Russian peacekeeping mission in the region. "The latest steps taken by Tbilisi on South Ossetian territory, including mortar strikes at Tskhinvali, are aimed at escalating tensions and changing the format of the peacekeeping mission in the Georgian-South Ossetian conflict zone," Kokoity told Interfax on Tuesday. "Provocative acts will intensify as we approach February - the Georgian Parliament's date for the beginning of the final stage of the Russian peacekeeping mission," he said. "We need to understand that the withdrawal of Russian peacekeepers will lead to a sharp escalation in tension in the conflict zone, however, South Ossetia is ready to use its army to assume control of the border with Georgia and protect its independence should Russian peacekeepers leave," Kokoity said. (Interfax)

BAN ON MASKS IN CHECHNYA LEGALLY
FLAWED - POLICE SOURCE

18 October

Chechen Interior Minister Ruslan Alkhanov's order to shoot anyone wearing a mask in Chechnya is "a legally flawed decision," said a highly-placed source in the Russian Interior Ministry. "This subjective decision and its consequences should have been carefully calculated from the legal point of view," the source told Interfax on Tuesday. "Masks are part of riot policemen's uniform," he added. Russian Interior Forces spokesman Vasily Panchenkov told Interfax that "some riot policemen are required to wear masks, given the tasks assigned to them, and their rights in this area are guaranteed by law, including federal laws on the Interior Forces and the police." (Interfax)

GEORGIAN PM FIRES FM AFTER TALKS WITH
PRESIDENT, PARLIAMENT

19 October

Georgian Prime Minister Zurab Nogaideli said he had decided to dismiss Foreign Minister Salome Zurbishvili after consultations with President Mikhail Saakashvili and parliament. "Georgia has a rather successful foreign policy. We owe it to the president, the government, the parliament, to our

entire political team. Of late, the parliament had many concrete complaints about the foreign minister, concerning appointment violations and untimely implementation of some of the decisions," the prime minister told a briefing on Wednesday. "We held consultations the whole day in order to find a way out of the situation. The parliament was critical of the foreign minister, but Salome Zurbishvili's tone with regard to the parliament was unacceptable in democratic society. This and other factors led to the decision on her dismissal," Nogaideli said. (Itar-Tass)

UZBEK 'INCITER' SHOWN CONFESSING

19 October

The court trying 15 alleged Muslim extremists for starting an uprising in Uzbekistan has been shown a video of the alleged ringleader confessing. The presiding judge said the court wanted to call Akram Yuldashev to give evidence in person. But he has had tuberculosis for the past two years and cannot leave a prison hospital in Tashkent. Instead, the prosecution showed a video of Mr Yuldashev being interrogated in July after the violence in Andijan. In the 30-minute video Mr Yuldashev explained how he gave orders to his followers from prison by mobile phone, telling them to organise a prison breakout to free a group of businessmen on trial for religious extremism. Mr Yuldashev was the inspiration behind a popular group of pious Muslims in Andijan who set up businesses and did charity work. He is serving a 17-year jail sentence for alleged religious extremism. A former employee of the Uzbek interior ministry has told the BBC that confessions in Uzbekistan are often forced by beatings or the use of drugs. The interior ministry denies this. Meanwhile, the leader of an opposition group, Sunshine Uzbekistan, has written an open letter to the Uzbek parliament calling on deputies to begin talks with them. The letter says the violence in Andijan was only possible because of the explosive political and economic situation. It says people no longer believe the government of President Islam Karimov, which was engaged in what it called "an hysterical search for enemies". (BBC)

TURKMENISTAN WANTS TO RAISE PRICE OF
NATURAL GAS IT SELLS TO RUSSIA

20 October

Turkmenistan wants to raise the price of the natural gas it sells to Russia, Turkmen President Saparmurat Niyazov told Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov. Niyazov said he wanted to raise the price per thousand cubic meters to US\$50 (euro42) as of 2006, and to US\$60 (euro50) per 1,000 cubic meters thereafter. Russian gas monopoly Gazprom needs long-term supplies of Turkmen gas to ensure that it can meet rising domestic and export demand in future. Turkmenistan struck a 25-year deal with Russia in 2003 at a basic price of US\$44 (euro37) a thousand cubic meters. "We are selling gas at US\$44, but you are raising your export prices," Niyazov said in reference to the fact that prices on Gazprom's oil-linked export contracts to Western Europe have now breached US\$180 (euro150) per 1,000 cubic meters.

"We have an agreement until 2007 on prices, but metal prices have gone up, and prices for your pipes -- which we are buying -- have trebled, so in 2006, give us US\$50, not US\$44, and give us US\$60 for the 25-year deal," Niyazov said. (AP)

MP KILLED IN KYRGYZ JAIL UNREST

20 October

A member of Kyrgyzstan's parliament and at least two others have been killed by inmates during a prison visit. Tynchbek Akmatbayev was shot dead after being taken hostage during a visit to Moldavanovka prison, about 25km (15 miles) outside the capital, Bishkek. The others who died are said to have been members of his entourage. The head of the prisons service, Imatulla Polotov, was critically injured. The killings come after two days of unrest at nearby Novopokrovka prison. Inmates there have been protesting about bad food, damp accommodation, inadequate clothing and a lack of hot water. Mr Akmatbayev, a prominent MP, was chairman of a parliamentary committee on security and policing. He had been involved in negotiations with prisoners at Novopokrovka, about 20km (12 miles) east of Bishkek, where inmates were said to have forced prison officers outside the building. He and his entourage were in the tuberculosis hospital attached to Moldavanovka prison on a visit to assess living conditions when they were taken hostage. "Akmatbayev was shot dead," said Sergei Sidorov, spokesman for the sentencing board. Mr Polotov was severely beaten but survived. Prime Minister Felix Kulov is reported to have gone to the prison and successfully negotiated the release of Mr Akmatbayev's body. A prison official told a news agency that the guards had vacated the prison, leaving it in full control of the approximately 450 inmates. He could not say how the prisoners acquired weapons. An

official said the situation at the other prison in Novopokrovka was now calm. Kyrgyzstan has witnessed several violent incidents since the overthrow of ex-President Askar Akayev in March. (BBC)

KARIMOV APPROVES OF IDEA OF UZBEKISTAN'S MEMBERSHIP OF EURASEC

22 October

Uzbekistan's President Islam Karimov has approved of the proposal made by the Uzbek and Russian foreign ministers Uzbekistan should join the Eurasian Economic Community, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov has said. Currently the EURASEC has five members - Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. "We have confirmed our unanimity in the intention to seek stability in Central Asia," Lavrov said. "This is in the interests of our countries and of all other countries of the region." The Russian and Uzbek foreign ministers reiterated commitment to all-round strategic partnership. "We confirmed the readiness to advance cooperation in all spheres, including politics, the economy and humanitarian relations," Lavrov said. (Itar-Tass)

KYRGYZSTAN PROTESTS PRESSURE PM

24 October

Hundreds of protesters rallied on Monday for a third day in Kyrgyzstan's capital Bishkek to call for the resignation of PM Felix Kulov. They said he was indirectly responsible for the death of an MP who was shot by inmates as he visited a jail last week. The demonstrators, who have set up traditional felt tents in front of parliament, are led by the victim's brother, Ruspek Akmatbayev. Popular protests drove President Askar Akayev from power in March. Parliament was due to discuss the murder in an emergency session on Monday, but failed to reach a quorum. "If the parliament does not vote to dismiss Kulov [on Tuesday], we will demand that it be dissolved," AFP news agency quoted Mr Akmatbayev as saying. He has accused the prime minister of having ties to a criminal detained in the prison. The prime minister denies this. Mr Akmatbayev himself is accused of involvement in the murder of a top anti-corruption official. He is awaiting trial. The circumstances surrounding the prison shooting are still not clear. According to a government report, the MP was armed when he entered Moldavanovka prison about 25km (15 miles) outside the capital. Mr Akmatbayev and his entourage had gone to inspect living conditions at the prison following a wave of protests by inmates. Some reports say he had been rude to some of them, and this

might have sparked a violent reaction. Tynychbek Akmatbayev is the third MP to be killed since March. Two other deputies were shot dead in killings that may have been related to business rivalries. Kyrgyzstan has witnessed several violent incidents since the overthrow of President Akayev. (BBC)

'HARASSED' BBC SHUTS UZBEK OFFICE

26 October

The BBC is suspending its newsgathering operations in the Central Asian state of Uzbekistan due to security concerns. All local staff are being withdrawn and the office in the capital Tashkent will close for at least six months pending a decision on its long term future. Regional Head Behrouz Afagh said the staff had been harassed and intimidated in recent months, making it difficult for them to do their job. But he said the BBC remained committed to covering events in Uzbekistan. "Over the past four months since the unrest in Andijan, BBC staff in Uzbekistan have been subjected to a campaign of harassment and intimidation which has made it very difficult for them to report on events in the country," Mr Afagh said. "BBC World Service remains committed to covering events in Uzbekistan, and its English language correspondents will continue to seek access to the country and to report on events there as and when they are granted visas." In June, the World Service correspondent, Monica Whitlock, was forced to leave Tashkent under pressure from the government. Two local members of staff have since been granted refugee status by the United Nations. The Uzbek Ambassador to London has declined an invitation to discuss the issue with the BBC. (BBC)

AZERIS HELD IN PRE-POLL CRACKDOWN

26 October

Azerbaijan has arrested a former aide to President Ilham Aliyev and the head of a major company on coup charges, weeks before parliamentary polls. The men are accused of planning a coup with opposition leader Rasul Guliyev. Mr Guliyev, who had been living in the US, says he was stopped last week from returning to Azerbaijan to contest the election - a charge Baku has denied. More than 20 Azeri officials have been arrested or sacked in recent weeks on suspicion of supporting Mr Guliyev. The government has strengthened its position by acting against people it accuses of having links to the opposition. It has also sent a clear warning to those who might have considered switching sides before the election, Azerbaijan's first since Mr Aliyev took over the presidency from his father in 2003. Akif

Muradverdiyev, a former presidential chief of staff, and Fikret Sadigov, the head of chemical giant Azerkimya, were arrested for plotting a coup, Azeri officials said. They join at least a dozen other Azeri officials arrested over the last few weeks, including a former finance minister, a former Baku police chief and a former health minister. All are accused of involvement in Mr Guliyev's alleged plan to overthrow the government. Mr Guliyev is a former ally of Azerbaijan's Soviet-era strongman, the late President Heidar Aliyev. He moved to the US in the mid-1990s after being accused of embezzlement, a charge he denies. His announcement that he planned to contest parliamentary elections in early November prompted a fresh warning from the Azeri authorities that he will be arrested if he attempts a return. Mr Guliyev said last week that his aircraft was prevented from landing at Baku airport. The Azeris say he had abandoned plans to return. When the plane stopped to refuel in Ukraine, Mr Guliyev was briefly arrested, continuing to London after his release. In a conference call with supporters on Tuesday, he said: "The authorities won't be able to prevent my return." (BBC)

UZBEK OPPOSITION LEADER 'DRUGGED'

26 October

Uzbek opposition group Sunshine Uzbekistan fears its leader, Sanjar Umarov, has been drugged in custody. Mr Umarov's lawyer said he visited his client on Tuesday and found him naked in his cell and in an incoherent state. Mr Umarov was arrested on Saturday, charged with stealing an undisclosed sum of money. Sunshine Uzbekistan, a vocal critic of President Islam Karimov's repressive regime, says the charges have been fabricated. The lawyer, Valery Krasilovsky, said his client had no clothes on, was covering his face with his hands, and mumbling, according to a statement carried on Sunshine Uzbekistan's website. "He needs immediate medical attention and expertise concerning his current condition and illness," he said. Following his arrest, Mr Umarov passed a message from jail to his supporters, saying the authorities had exerted pressure on him and threatened to inject him with drugs. Family members have said they are very worried. "He is definitely being drugged, because my father never acted this way," his oldest son, Gulam Umarov, told the New York Times. Sunshine Uzbekistan is calling for free market reforms in the authoritarian Central Asian republic. The offices of the group were searched on Saturday by dozens of men in plain clothes, and a large number of documents were taken away. Two

other members of the group have also been arrested. Sunshine Uzbekistan officials said Mr Umarov no longer had any business interests in Uzbekistan, though he has business contacts in America. He had recently returned from visits to the United States and Russia seeking support for his group's reform proposals for Uzbekistan and last week wrote an open letter to the Uzbek parliament calling on deputies to begin talks with the opposition. The letter said people no longer believed the government, which was engaged in what it called a hysterical search for enemies. President Karimov's government has banned most opposition parties and rarely tolerates public criticism. (BBC)

COUNCIL OF EUROPE DOES NOT APPLY DOUBLE STANDARDS IN CHECHNYA - ALKHANOV

27 October

Chechen President Alu Alkhanov thinks that the Council of Europe's general attitude to Chechnya is positive. "I have an impression that they do not apply double standards. I also have an impression that the Council of Europe truly wants to help in solving our problems," he told a Thursday press conference at the Interfax main office. "The Council of Europe feels positive about the settlement efforts of the federal authorities and the Chechen administration," he said. "They did not even ask me questions about the former Ichkeria administration at the Strasbourg meeting, so I decided that things had changed for the better in the issue of Chechnya," he said. (Interfax)

BASAYEV IS SOMEWHERE IN NORTH CAUCASUS - ALKHANOV

27 October

Shamil Basayev, a leader of Chechen militants, is hiding somewhere in the North Caucasus, Chechen President Alu Alkhanov told a Thursday press conference at Interfax's main office. "The whereabouts of Basayev are an interesting question which should be addressed to law enforcement agencies. According to me, Basayev is somewhere in the North Caucasus," he said. "Solution to this problem and the neutralization of a number of his abettors and himself will help stabilize Chechnya and the North Caucasus at large," Alkhanov said. Asked whether Basayev may be outside Chechnya, he said, "absolutely." "Basayev and his abettors do not respect administrative borders. They have far-reaching plans," he said. "This is what we keep saying: dear colleagues, friends, the situation is overwhelming the Chechen Republic, we should

intensify our fight in all North Caucasian republics," he said. (Interfax)

TAJIK PARTY CONDEMNS SCHOOL HIJAB BAN, AGE LIMITS FOR MOSQUE ATTENDANCE

28 October

Tajikistan's Islamic Renaissance Party (IRP) condemned on 28 October a recent decision by the country's Education Ministry forbidding female students from attending educational institutions while wearing a head scarf and a government ban at mosques for children under the age of 16. The authorities have justified the decisions as necessary steps to safeguard education in a secular society. But the IRP blasted the moves as an infringement on religious freedom and an attempt to foist the views of a single group on all of Tajik society. In a statement, the IRP said: "At a time when thousands of children and teenagers are, instead of attending school, occupied with hard physical labor such as harvesting cotton, pushing carts, and washing cars, another segment spends most of its time in dance clubs and bars. It seems that the Education Ministry wants to blame its deficiencies on others, which suggests incompetence on the part of ministry officials." (Avesta)

GEORGIA ASKS UN FOR FULL-FLEDGED PEACEKEEPING FORCE

29 October

Revaz Adamia, who is Georgia's ambassador to the UN, has written to the UN Security Council to request a full-fledged UN peacekeeping mission for Abkhazia. Adamia argued that the Russian peacekeeping force deployed under the auspices of the CIS is ineffective, and he accused Russia of the "military annexation" of a part of Georgia's territory. Adamia further deplored as "cultural genocide" the Abkhaz authorities' refusal to condone the use of Georgian as the language of instruction in schools in Abkhazia's predominantly Georgian-populated Gali Raion. UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan expressed concern over that refusal in his most recent letter to the Security Council reviewing the situation in Abkhazia. (Caucasus Press)

U.S. SUPPORTS GEORGIA-S.OSSETIA SETTLEMENT PLAN - NOGAIDELI

29 October

Georgian Prime Minister Zurab Nougaideli said that the U.S. is ready to support a plan for the peaceful settlement of the South Ossetia problem, proposed by

President Mikheil Saakashvili in the UN. "The U.S. administration and Congress have expressed their readiness to support Georgia in implementing the plan, proposed by the Georgian president in the UN," Nogaideli told the press on Saturday. He said he hopes for early talks with South Ossetian President Eduard Kokoity on details of the peaceful settlement plan. Nogaideli also said that, "the parties could then move forward to demilitarization talks." (Interfax)

TBILISI WELCOMES U.S. FUTURE ROLE IN S.OSSETIA SETTLEMENT

30 October

The Georgian authorities welcomed the U.S. State Department's readiness to play a role in implementing the plan for a peaceful settlement of the conflict in South Ossetia. "It is an extremely important step. We expect Russia to take similar positive steps," Georgian Foreign Minister Gela Bezhuashvili told the press on Sunday. Bezhuashvili said that the plan for the peaceful settlement of the conflict in South Ossetia, proposed by the Georgian leadership and approved by the U.S., ultimately leads to South Ossetia's autonomy in an integrated Georgian state. "We are determined to implement this plan actively and consistently," Bezhuashvili said. He announced that Minister for Separatist Conflicts Giorgy Khaindrava on Monday will acquaint South Ossetian officials with details of the plan. "Our ambassador in Moscow has acquainted Russia with the plan already and we are expecting a positive reaction," the Georgian foreign minister said. (Interfax)

AZERI PRESIDENT WARNS ARMENIA IT WILL BE BYPASSED BY REGIONAL PROJECTS

30 October

Armenia will not take part in any large-scale regional projects in the energy sector or transport unless its forces pull out of Azerbaijani lands, President Ilham Aliyev of Azerbaijan said in an interview with Turkish mass media, the text of which was released Saturday night by the official news agency Azertac. He said it in the context of peace settlement of the dragged out conflict in Karabakh, a mostly Armenian-populated enclave of Azerbaijan where tensions have been flaring with a variable degree of intensity from the end of the 1980's. This country views settlement of that conflict only in the light of maintaining its own territorial integrity, Aliyev said. "The issue can't be discussed in any way outside that context," he indicated. "But Karabakh will never be incorporated into Armenia and will never become an independent country." He said however that the enclave might

have the status of a broad autonomy within the Azerbaijani Republic. Aliyev made reference to a number of European countries that have such autonomies, adding that the Azerbaijani government is scrutinizing their experience and it can definitely be used here. He believes peace settlement of that conflict is a feasible target if all the sides observe international norms of law and if mediators add more energy to mediating activity. Aliyev indicated that the Karabakh conflict poses a problem for Armenia, too, since that country has found itself isolated from all major regional projects like the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil pipeline, the Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum gas pipeline, and the Kars-Tbilisi-Baku railway, the construction of which may begin soon. (Itar-Tass)

BRITISH SOLDIER KILLED, FIVE WOUNDED IN AMBUSH IN AFGHANISTAN

30 October

Gunmen opened fire on British soldiers in Afghanistan's main northern city of Mazar-i-Sharif, killing one and wounding five, witnesses and the ISAF peacekeeping force told AFP. Attackers on a motorbike and in a car opened fire on an unmarked vehicle of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) near a junction in front of the city's famous Blue Mosque, witnesses said Saturday. The gunmen tried to flee on foot and four of them were detained by onlookers and handed over to police, they said. "One is dead and five were wounded," ISAF spokesman Warrant Officer Cosimo Argentieri said in the capital Kabul. The defence ministry in London said the troops had been attacked as they were moving between two bases. Head of security for the police in Mazar-i-Sharif, Emam Udin, confirmed the attack saying four people had been arrested. The city has seen relatively few of the regular attacks in southern and eastern Afghanistan that are blamed on fighters allied to the ousted Taliban regime and other militant groups. Taliban loyalists vowed to overthrow the US-backed government of President Hamid Karzai after the fundamentalist regime was ousted in a US-led campaign in late 2001. ISAF has been based in Afghanistan since 2001 and came under the command of NATO in 2003. The force numbers more than 11,000 troops from 26 NATO and 11 non-NATO nations who provide security assistance in Kabul and the northern and western regions of Afghanistan. There are about 300 British soldiers in the force, an ISAF official said. Officials could not immediately say if Saturday's fatality was the deployment's first in Afghanistan. (AFP)

KOKOITY SAYS GEORGIA SHOULD
RECOGNIZE INDEPENDENCE OF SOUTH
OSSETIA, ABKHAZIA

31 October

Georgia's recognition of the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia is the easiest way to settle the Georgian-Ossetian and Georgian-Abkhaz conflicts, President of the unrecognized republic of South Ossetia Eduard Kokoity told Interfax on Monday. "I make an official offer to Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili to recognize the independence of South Ossetia and Abkhazia. This is the easiest and quickest way to settle the Georgian-Ossetian and Georgian-Abkhaz conflicts," he said. (Interfax)

THREE ASSOCIATES OF DUDAYEV,
MASKHADOV TO RUN IN CHECHEN
PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS

31 OCTOBER

At least three former associates of Dzhokhar Dudayev and Aslan Maskhadov will take part in Chechen parliamentary elections on November 27. Russian Central Elections Commission chief Alexander Veshnyakov told journalists that former member of the Dudaev's Ichkerian parliament Salambek Kunchalov (Grozny's Leninsky single-candidate constituency), former Chechen security service head under Maskhadov Ibragim Khultygov (the Vedensky district), and former Defense Minister under Maskhadov Makhmat Khambiyev (No 2 on the Union of the Right Forces' list) will run in the elections. (Interfax)

US MILITARY CONDEMNS ABUSE AFTER
LATEST AFGHANISTAN CLAIMS

31 October

The US military said it would not tolerate abuse by its soldiers after new claims against American troops in Afghanistan, where they were this month accused of burning the bodies of Taliban suspects. The US-led coalition announced late Sunday that two US soldiers had been charged with allegedly assaulting two detainees in their custody in southern Uruzgan province, including by punching them in chest, shoulders and stomach. "These alleged offences do not reflect the values of the members of this command," coalition spokesman Colonel Jim Yonts told reporters on Monday. "We will not tolerate the kind of behaviour that is alleged against these soldiers," he said. He said the US military was conducting three investigations into television footage broadcast this month showing US soldiers burning the bodies of suspected Taliban fighters in contravention of

international law and the tenets of Islam, which says the bodies of Muslims must be buried. The Australian report said the soldiers had burned the bodies because they had been left in the open for more than 24 hours. They used the incident to taunt other Taliban fighters in an attempt to goad them into battle, it said. Coalition soldiers in Afghanistan have also been accused of abusing Afghan detainees, at least eight of whom have died in US custody since 2001, when the coalition entered the country to help topple the hardline Taliban government. Two US soldiers were this year sentenced to up to three months in jail for the abuse, terms Afghan government officials said were "unexpectedly lenient." Reacting to the latest allegations involving US soldiers, the government reiterated it was against all acts that were in violation of the Geneva Convention. "Any step which intends to curb such abuses in Afghanistan is welcomed," foreign ministry spokesman Naveed Ahmad Moez said. (AFP)

OFFICIAL SAYS U.S. 'ACTIVELY REVIEWING'
POSSIBILITY OF SANCTIONS AGAINST
UZBEKISTAN

31 October

31 October Daniel Fried, U.S. assistant secretary of state for Europe and Eurasia, told a congressional committee in Washington on 27 October that the United States is still considering imposing sanctions on Uzbekistan, Reuters reported. EU foreign ministers resolved on 3 October to reduce aid and ban arms sales to Uzbekistan in response to the Uzbek government's refusal to allow an independent investigation into the violent suppression of an uprising in the eastern city of Andijon in Ma. While stressing that no decision has yet been made, Fried said that the United States "will consult with our European friends and evaluate whether what we are doing is sufficient." (RFE/RL)

KAZAKHSTAN AIMS AT RANKING AMONG
50 MOST DEVELOPED STATES

31 October

Kazakhstan is setting the aim of being put on the list of 50 most developed countries, President Nursultan Nazarbayev said on Monday. According to the president, "time is coming when the growth of the Kazakh economy makes it possible to set principally new tasks for the modernization of the society and the state". Over the past seven years economy has been growing nine to ten percent a year on the average. GDP per capita has grown three times, from 1,130 dollars in 1999 to 3,400 dollars in 2005. Average

monthly salaries, pensions and scholarships have also grown almost threefold. Healthcare expenditures have increased four times, while expenditures on science and education have grown threefold. "We are now setting new aims and tasks," Nazarbayev said at a congress of the federation of the Kazakh trade unions. "Our aim is to rank among 50 most developed countries with high living standards," the president emphasized. According to the Kazakh leader "the oil and gas sector, as well as all extractive industries" are the main donors in the implementation of that task. By 2012, Kazakhstan seeks to join the list of ten world exporters of oil. "The total amount of industrial production should grow more than twofold," the president believes. "By the early 2010s, its share in the structure of GDP will grow by 40 percent as compared with 2005," the Kazakh leader said. In the early 1990s, Kazakhstan had a modest 109th place as concerns competitiveness among the U.N. member-states. (Itar-Tass)

**KYRGYZ PRESIDENT ASKS NEW HEAD OF
PENAL SYSTEM TO ESTABLISH ORDER**
1 November

At a meeting with newly appointed prison-system head Kapar Mukeev in Bishkek on 31 October, President Kurmanbek Bakiev charged him with restoring order in the penal system, RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service reported. The murder of parliamentary deputy Tynychbek Akmatbaev at a penal colony outside Bishkek on 20 September sparked demonstrations recently in the capital; the former head of the prison system, Ikmatullo Polotov, later died from wounds sustained during the incident that resulted in Akmatbaev's death. Mukeev told the president that work is under way to stabilize the situation. Bakiev warned Mukeev that he will hold him personally responsible for ensuring that funds budgeted to maintain the prison system are properly spent. Also on 31 October, prison-system deputy director Batyr Saparbaev announced that 5 million soms (\$122,000) have been allocated to corrective-labor colonies to improve conditions, RFE/RL reported. According to official data, 56 soms (\$1.37) per inmate are supposed to be spent on food each day, but the actual sum allotted is only 17 soms. (RFE/RL)

