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BIWEEKLY BRIEFING

Wednesday/May 5, 2004

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2002-2003 witnessed an increase in the foreign troop presence in Kyrgyzstan. The U.S. gained a foothold at Manas airport. In October 2003, Russia opened an airbase of its own in Kant. China for the first time conducted joint military maneuvers with Kyrgyz troops in 2003. This intensive geopolitical dynamic in and around Kyrgyzstan led to significant changes in the policies of Kyrgyz authorities. Flooding in southern Kazakhstan this February as a result of economic contracts with foreign company to export Kyrgyz electricity to Russia, permanent conflicts with neighboring Kazakhstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan over a number of issues, created an atmosphere of regional distrust and pose a threat to security of Kyrgyzstan. Key reasons for this situation are Kyrgyzstan’s over-reliance on foreign powers, ignorance of its real interests and overestimation of its available options in regional Realpolitik in Central Asia.

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EDITORIAL PRINCIPLES

The Analyst is an English language global Web journal devoted to analysis of the current issues facing the Central Asia-Caucasus region. It serves to link the business, governmental, journalistic and scholarly communities and is the global voice of the Central Asia-Caucasus Institute, The Johns Hopkins University-The Nitze School of Advanced International Studies. The Editor of the Analyst solicits most articles and field reports however authors may suggest topics for future issues or submit articles and field reports for consideration. Such articles and field reports cannot have been previously published in any form, must be written in English, and must correspond precisely to the format and style of articles and field reports published in *The Analyst* (www.cacianalyst.org) and described below.

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Analytical Articles:

Analytical articles require a three to four sentence introduction to the article based on a news hook. Rather than a general, overarching analysis, the article must offer considered and careful judgment supported with concrete examples.

Analytical article structure:

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

BACKGROUND: 200-300 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: 200-300 words of analysis of the ramifications of this event or issue, including where applicable, implications for the local people's future.

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

Specifications for Field Reports:

Field Reports focus on a particular news event and what local people think about the event, or about the work of an NGO. Field Reports address the implications the event or activity analyzed has for peoples' lives and their communities. Field Reports do not have the rigid structure of Analytical Articles, and are shorter in length, averaging ca. 500-700 words.

Those interested in joining *The Analyst's* pool of authors to contribute articles, field reports, or contacts of potential writers, please send your CV to: svante.cornell@pcr.uu.se and suggest some topics on which you would like to write.

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GEORGIA'S REVOLUTION TAKES A DANGEROUS TURN

Nino Tetelashvili

Georgia's charismatic young president, Mikhail Saakashvili, commands widespread popularity in Georgia but is poised to make a disastrous mistake if he employs force against the president of Ajaria, Aslan Abashidze. There are few checks on Saakashvili's power in Georgia – all television channels are currently pro-government; the parliament whose powers were severely curtailed by recent constitutional amendments is dominated by the president's party, convened only two weeks ago, and endorsed a strongly worded resolution on Ajaria. To safeguard the attainments of the rose revolution, and the development of Georgian society over the last decade Saakashvili would be well-advised to use only peaceful, diplomatic, and electoral mechanisms in his conflict with Abashidze.

BACKGROUND: Abashidze has until recently prohibited the activities of opposition political parties, journalists and civil society activists; brazenly manipulated electoral processes; and refused to share customs and taxes with the federal government or even to visit Tbilisi. Since his election as Georgia's president in January, Mikhail Saakashvili has consistently applied ever greater degrees of pressure against Abashidze and has obtained significant concessions. Presently, Georgian media, opposition parties, and civil society leaders operate freely in Ajaria and are not harassed in their activities. The March parliamentary elections were monitored fully in Ajaria by domestic and international observers who detected only a minimal degree of fraud. Georgian Prime Minister Zurab Zhvania, who monitored the conduct of elections in Ajaria and has been a key negotiator with Abashidze said that the "March 28 elections in Adjara were a great success." However, the most significant concession that Abashidze has made is to share customs revenues with federal authorities. The first such payment was received in March and the Georgian president has appointed a representative to oversee customs collection at the Batumi port who has started to carry out his duties.

These concessions are significant steps toward regulating relations between central and republican authorities. If present trends persist and political parties are permitted to operate openly and freely, they will have the opportunity to remove Abashidze through the normal functioning of the electoral process in little more than a year. In the March 28 parliamentary elections, which were regarded as free and fair by international observers, Abashidze's Revival Party obtained a small majority in Adjara (51% to 55% by different counts). In the coming months, as the mystique of the rose revolution wanes, Abashidze's slim majority may grow. Hence federal authorities are disinclined to wait for elections and continually raise new demands and accusations suggesting that nothing short of Abashidze's immediate removal will satisfy them. At present, the federal government demands that Abashidze disband and disarm the Ajarian Interior Ministry. Thrice in two months the Ajar leader has been presented with an ultimatum and a deadline for disarmament. A new element has been added recently, accusing Abashidze of drug smuggling.

While Abashidze has demonstrated a willingness to make concessions, there is no reason to suppose that he will resign. If Georgia's former president Eduard Shevardnadze resigned after the defection of his force structures to the opposition, Abashidze does not find himself in a similar predicament. On the contrary, according to eye witnesses, when tensions heated up in mid-March, Russian tanks manned by Ajar crews took up positions around Batumi and volunteers gathered at the administrative border. In the first days of May the sides were poised on the brink of war as Georgian federal troops held massive exercises on the Adjar administrative border and in response Abashidze's force blew up two bridges. Rumors spread quickly that a Russian general Yury Netkachev came from Moscow to oversee the demolition of the bridges.

IMPLICATIONS: After his visit to Moscow in February, Saakashvili stated that terrorism and Wahhabism are the most serious threats to Georgian security and promised that Georgian force structures would cooperate fully with Russia. Subsequently, two Chechens from Georgia were handed over to Russian border guards, without normal extradition procedures. They disappeared from Tbilisi and reappeared at the border in the custody of Russian border guards. Five more Chechens disappeared from Georgia in recent weeks. The second major change, one that Shevardnadze steadfastly refused to grant for four years, is the introduction of joint Russian-Georgian patrols at the Ingush and Chechen segments of the Russian-Georgian border. As refugee camps are being forcibly closed in Ingushetia one of the possible escape routes, to Georgia's Pankisi Gorge, has in effect been closed. Chechens in Georgia view these changes with alarm and fears are mounting that the next stage will be Russian patrols going into the Pankisi Gorge to conduct "cleansings" and kidnappings as they do in Chechnya and Ingushetia.

Analysts in Tbilisi suppose that in return for these concessions, Saakashvili has been given assurances by Putin of Russian non-interference in Ajaria. Of course, over the last ten years, Russia has failed to keep any of the promises it has made to Georgia, the removal of the three remaining Russian military bases on Georgian territory which was promised in 1999 being the most obvious such case. However, Saakashvili has earned an enormous reservoir of public trust by obtaining through force of will, oratory,

strong organizational capacity, and peaceful protest the resignation of former President Shevardnadze. Saakashvili's campaign slogan was "a united Georgia," and his constituents hope that he can restore federal authority first to Ajaria and then to Abkhazia.

Georgians who are frustrated by ten years of fruitless negotiations with separatist republics want to believe that Saakashvili knows something that the rest of society can not see, that the new popular young leader can make another miracle. The segment of Georgian society that is least likely to believe in miracles and most concerned about the escalation in tensions with Ajaria are the ethnic Georgian refugees from Abkhazia. From their vantage point, Saakashvili is proving to the separatists in Abkhazia that the federal center can not be trusted to respect the right of Autonomous Republics to self government. "With each day, as the confrontation with Abashidze deepens, my prospects for ever returning to Sukhumi become more and more remote," says a woman from Abkhazia.

CONCLUSIONS: Post-revolutionary Georgia is risking to turn into a less pluralist society than it was under

Shevardnadze. The restraints on the popular and ambitious, but somewhat emotional and inexperienced new president have to come from outside the country. Georgia derives a substantial portion of its budget, by some counts up to 40%, from the United States and Saakashvili worked closely with American advisors during his election campaign and continues to rely on them as president. However, the standoff with Ajaria plays into Russian strategic goals and ambitions. Russia can now use its leverage over Abashidze to bargain for advantageous terms with respect to the presence of Russian military bases, Georgia's aspiration for NATO membership, and other issues of crucial significance for Georgia's future security and development. In the current predicament, Georgia may pay too high a price for any attempt to remove Abashidze. It is also worth noting, that Abashidze is not the only anti-democratic governor of a region in Georgia --perhaps such figures can be tolerated in the short term as long as they pay taxes, recognize federal authority, and refrain from violence and repression.

AUTHOR'S BIO: Nino Tetelashvili, a freelance journalist in Tbilisi.

PACE INCIDENT COULD HURT AZERBAIJANI-TURKISH RELATIONS

The spring session of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe turned out to be both a break-through success and a diplomatic scandal for Azerbaijani foreign policy. The former is associated with the visit of President Ilham Aliyev to Strasbourg, where he met with Peter Schieder, president of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE), the head of European Court for Human Rights Luzius Wilhaber and Walter Schwimmer, Secretary General of the Council of Europe. In these meetings, Aliyev again indicated at Baku's desire for development of cooperation with Strasbourg. Aliyev stressed that Baku intended to fulfill all obligations toward the Council of Europe. "Azerbaijan will soon make a breakthrough in field of democracy and everyone will see that", he said. In his meeting with the rapporteur of Council of Europe on political prisoners Malcolm Bruce, Aliyev also promised that "Azerbaijan will fulfill all obligations to the Council of Europe and the problem of political prisoners will be resolved".

Schieder awarded the medal of Honorary Member of the Council of Europe to President Aliyev for "active cooperation" with the Council of Europe. Aliyev became the second politician to receive this honor.

Ilham Aliyev also spoke at the PACE's session in Strasbourg. He informed deputies about economic reforms, prospects of utilization of oil incomes for non-oil sector development, and implementation of political reforms. Aliyev spoke about the role and importance of Azerbaijan in the implementation of large international projects, and the country's active involvement in the resolution of global problems

and tasks, such as the struggle against international terrorism.

Despite these successful meetings, the visit was overshadowed by a scandal on the last day of the session. During the voting on a bill that would allow the unrecognized Northern Cyprus republic to establish its representation at the Council of Europe, all Azerbaijani delegates except one were absent. The bill was defeated and the Turkish delegation accused their Azeri "brothers" of betraying them.

The topic quickly developed into headlines in the Turkish press. The influential daily *Hurriyet* accused Azerbaijan and its leadership of killing the bill and not supporting Turkish national interests. Similarly, the opposition press in Azerbaijan rushed to slam Ilham Aliyev's foreign policy and its inconsistency. "Sell-out action from the regime," exclaimed oppositional daily *Yeni Musavat*.

The scandal was connected to a statement made by Ilham Aliyev during his visit to Turkey two weeks earlier, where he said that should the referendum on the unification of Cyprus fail, Azerbaijan would be one of the first countries to render international recognition to the Turkish part of the island. The opposition went furious after these remarks. "This could be a bad precedent for Nagorno-Karabakh," said *Musavat* party activist Hikmet Haji-Zade.

Meanwhile, ruling party member Samed Seidov, who is also heading the Azerbaijani delegation to the Council of Europe, denied all accusations. "First of all, the bill was rejected by more than two dozens votes. The votes of six Azerbaijani delegates would not matter much," he told ANS

TV. On May 4, members of the Azerbaijani Parliament (*Milli Mejlis*) demanded that Seidov explain the absence of the delegation members at the PACE session. *TURAN* news service reported that Seidov's answer was sensational. The head of delegation stated that the Azerbaijani delegation deliberately did not participate in the session, because it could create a precedent for the "recognition of unrecognized regimes".

Another member of the Azerbaijani delegation to PACE, Asim Mollazade of the oppositional Popular Front party, said in an interview to *Echo* newspaper that "there was a serious reason for this action." Mollazadeh noted that all delegates were free in their actions at all times and that he personally preferred to be absent so as to avoid creating a negative precedent for the separatist regime in Karabakh. "Separatist regimes in Karabakh, Abkhazia and other places have also requested to open an office at PACE, so voting on the issue on Northern Cyprus could damage the national interests of Azerbaijan."

Official Baku hopes that the incident will not hurt bilateral political relations with Turkey. Azerbaijan's ambassador to Ankara was instructed to explain the situation to the Turkish public and media. "Someone is interested to hurt the bilateral relations between the two brotherly countries. But they will not succeed. Azerbaijan and Turkey have always supported each other and will continue doing so in the future," said Seidov.

Fariz Ismailzade

THE KILLING OF ABU AL-WALID AND THE RUSSIAN POLICY IN CHECHNYA

Murad Batal Al-Shishani

The Arabic leader in Chechnya "Abu Al-Walid Al-Ghamdi" was killed (or at least announced to be killed) on Apr. 17, 2004 in "mysterious circumstances" as part of the Russian policy of assassinating the leaders of the Chechen resistance cells in an attempt to dismantle and undermine the structure of these groups. This state of affairs calls for a close study of the future of the Arab fighters in Chechnya and the extent to which the Russian policy of assassinating the leaders of the Chechen leaders will succeed in putting an end to the ongoing conflict and bringing peace to the region.

BACKGROUND: Abd Al-Aziz Bin Ali Bin Said Al Said Al Ghamdi, known as Abu Al-Walid, took over leadership of Arab fighters in Chechnya after the death of Amir Khattab (Samer Bin Saleh Bin Abdullah Al-Swelim) in 2002. Accused by the Russian government of being the mastermind of numerous terrorist attacks in Chechnya and Moscow, Al-Walid is the poster child for Russian allegations that legions of al-Qaeda are fighting in Chechnya.

In a full exposé on Al-Walid's life, the Saudi newspaper *Al-Watan* interviewed members of the al-Walid family (23 June 2002) describing his upbringings and how he went to Afghanistan in 1986 at age sixteen, but only after first receiving "the permission of his parents", which is important because parental consent is essential in some parts of the Muslim world in determining whether a person can wage jihad. Al-Walid comes from the town of al-Hall, located in the southern province of Baljarshi province, near Jeddah. According to *al-Watan*, Al-Walid grew up in a pious family and the son of a well known *Imam*. His brothers told *al-Watan* that Al-Walid enjoyed spending his time reading religious books and was conscientious about his lessons studying the Qur'an.

While in Afghanistan Al-Walid spent two years training in the *Maktab Al Khadamat* (Office of Services), a center created by the Jordanian-Palestinian leader of Arab fighters in Afghanistan in the 1980s, organizing the inflow of Arab volunteers to Afghanistan by registering and distributing them to training camps. These two years appear to have played an important role in the development of Al-Walid's Jihadist views. Al-Walid took leave from the fighting to return to Saudi Arabia for three months between 1987 and 1988. He fought for another two years in Afghanistan before finally coming back to Saudi Arabia for treatment of an injured left hand at King Fahd hospital in the Saudi city of Khobar. After spending three months recovering from his surgery, Al-Walid left once more for Afghanistan.

In the early 1990s Al-Walid traveled to Afghanistan, Bosnia and Tajikistan, fighting in the Balkans and Central Asia. His jihadi career led him to Tajikistan, where he participated in the Tajik civil war (1994-1995). He later traveled to Bosnia to fight against the Bosnian Serbs. Al-Walid left the Balkans in 1995, taking up the cause of the Chechens by joining the group of Arab fighters serving under the Saudi fighter Khattab. He adapted to Chechen society by marrying a Chechen woman, a marriage that produced two children.

IMPLICATIONS: The Russian policy of assassination began in 1996 when the President of the Chechen Republic and leader of the nationalist movement Jokhar Dudayev was killed. But the assassination backfired and instead of ending the Chechen resistance, as the Russians expected, it fueled an upsurge in the resistance, forcing the Russian Government to negotiations. The Chechens succeeded in achieving *de facto* independence and sign a Russian-Chechen treaty in 1997 between President Yeltsin and the Chechen President Aslan Maskhadov who came to power upon this *de facto* independence.

With second Chechen war in its second year, the assassination policy became official Russian policy, and was launched as a means to counter the leadership of the independence movement in Chechnya or those who came from Arab countries to support the movement bringing with them their religious ideologies. Upon assigning the operations in Chechnya to the Federal Security Service on behalf of the Russian Government in early 2001, then Kremlin spokesperson on Chechen affairs Sergei Yasterzhembsky declared that "reestablishing security in the Caucasus Republic will only take place after eliminating the leaders of the Chechen fighters", and that "special security forces and the forces of the Ministry of Interior and the Russian Army must strive to eliminate the Chechen leaders".

The elimination saga started with the killing of Arbi Barayev, Salman Raduyev (who died in captivity in mysterious circumstances, Khattab (with a poisoned letter), and more recently the assassination of former Chechen interim President Zelimkhan Yandarbiyev in the Qatari capital, Doha, and of guerrilla leader Ruslan Gelayev. The assassination of Yandarbiyev, for which Russian Intelligence agents were accused, was brought to Qatari courts. Still, these assassinations failed to end the resistance in Chechnya, which is continuing in different places and at different times.

In this context, the killing of Abu Al-Walid might be a blow to the Salafi-Jihadist way and the Arab fighters. Although it has been rumored that a known salafist fighter named Abu Hafss al-Ordni has taken over leadership after al-Walid, it is expected that Abu Omar Al-Saif, the ideologue of Arab fighters in Chechnya and the head of the Shari'a courts established in Chechnya in 1997, will assume leadership. The problem is that Abu-Omar's role has always been ideological, and his expertise in the field is not as strong as that of Khattab or Abu Al-Walid. This dilemma will only add to the problems the Salafi-Jihadists are already facing in

Chechnya, with funds to the group cut as part of the international campaign to block funds for "terrorism". External funding was one of the most important mainstays that the Salafi-Jihadists used to recruit fighters. Yet the killing of Abu Al-Walid and the policy of assassinations are not expected to have any great implications on the Chechen resistance as a whole, especially the nationalist movement fighting the Russian troops in separation from the Salafi-Jihadists.

CONCLUSIONS: Be it that the killing of the Arab leader Abu Al-Walid might affect the Salafi-Jihadist way in Chechnya, the Russian policy of assassinations will not make a difference on the fundamentalist movement in Chechnya because the latter is being fed by violence against civilians, the *Zachistka* ("mopping-up operations"), refusing to deal with the legal Chechen leadership and trying to strengthen the rule of the brutal Russian proxy

Ahmad Kadyrov. This continues to make radicalism and resistance, in any form, the alternative for many young Chechens who have lived in war and destruction from 1994.

It is also noteworthy that the policy of assassinations has failed to put an end to the Chechen resistance in general, because even if the Salafi-Jihadist strain of resistance would be killed along with its leader, the Chechen resistance will persist since it is not part of the Salafi-Jihadist way. If anything, the resistance is likely to become more localized and uncontrollable following the assassination campaign of its leaders.

AUTHOR'S BIO: Murad Batal Al-Shishani is a Jordanian-Chechen writer who holds an M.A degree in Political Science, specializing in Islamic Movements in Chechnya. He is author of the book "Islamic Movement in Chechnya and the Chechen-Russian Conflict 1990-2000, Amman 2001 (in Arabic).

PRISON SYSTEM REMAINS THE MAJOR SOURCE OF DRUG ADDICTION, HIV/AIDS AND TB IN KYRGYZSTAN

Over 90% of 17000 prisoners are drug users and continue using drugs even after arriving in the penal system. Nearly 10% of prisoners have contracted tuberculosis (TB). Last year, about 600 persons died of dysentery and tuberculosis. The penal system remains the major sources of disease dissemination. Diseases are generated mainly from malnutrition, overcrowded facilities and poor living conditions in prisons.

The Kyrgyz Government allocates only 40% of the budgeted sum for nutrition in prisons to the Central Prison Service Department (CPSD), justifying this with the lack of finances in the state budget. Prisoners receive additional food from relatives and other prison attendants, but that still does not rescue them from malnutrition. This problem directly impacts on the dissemination of TB, because malnutrition weakens the organism's resistance to external diseases and viruses.

While the Government suffers from a lack of financing, prison cells are overcrowded with prisoners. If initially, each colony was planned to contain nearly 700 persons, the actual number is over twice that figure. With the collapse of the Soviet Union, labor therapy that somehow promoted employment inside prisons and promised some job opportunities after release also disappeared. Now, poor living conditions and total unemployment leads prisoners to depressive states of mind, which in turn increase drug use.

The prison system registers drug users as persons diagnosed with drug addiction when arriving to the prison. As several interviewed NGOs pointed out, the number of people beginning to use drugs while in prison is not registered. The prison system nevertheless recognizes that inflows of illicit drug are present in the prisons. Therefore, the CPSD has sought to openly approach the problem and recognized it, calling on the international community to assist in conducting penal reform.

"Syringe exchange programs began in prisons at the end of 2002 in two pilot colonies. Now this program covers all colonies, except for the female and youth prisons that are considered to have a more hygienic approach to drug use. The program has a good and provides promising

results, even though there is no data on the HIV/AIDS situation", says Elvira Muratalieva, coordinator of the public healthcare program of the Soros Fund in Kyrgyzstan, in an interview with the author.

Along with a legal program, the Soros Foundation carries out a medical program, the mission of which is to improve the penal healthcare system by integrating it with public healthcare services. Primarily, the program's activity is targeted on drug users and HIV positive persons arriving to prisons. Elvira Muratalieva informed that plans exist to start a methadone project in prisons, starting daily therapy with a duration of one year for 20 patients, who had passed strict selection criteria to be included. "We are trying to make this project as efficient as possible, that's why we are selecting candidates who have shown a steady desire to stop using drugs and need help for that", she informed. "The efficiency of methadone therapy is that methadone guzzles receptors responsible for getting euphoria out of drugs for 24 hours. And even if therapy participants use opiates, they would not get high. It would give only a somnolent effect and nothing more", Elvira Muratalieva told the Analyst.

Recently, IRINnews.org reported that the "Kyrgyz Justice Ministry estimates that approximately 2,000 out of 17,000 prisoners serving their terms are infected with the "open" (easily contractible) form of TB. According to doctors, each sick person with this form of the disease can infect up to 100 people after being released from prison". That implies that without appropriate treatment, released prisoners could potentially harm 200,000 persons, a figure that would make it necessary to close the country down for quarantine.

According to the official data by the beginning of April 2004, there were 160 HIV carriers in prisons. The individual prison administrations cannot disclose data on the HIV status of the inmates. Yet frequently prisoners speak about their HIV positive status themselves, and moreover, they have indulgences: separate dishes, the right not to take part in internal assemblies, etc. HIV positive persons also receive a special examination and treatment at the medical departments of the prisons.

Such treatment of HIV positive individuals gives a signal that dissemination of the virus among prisoners could be limited and that the risk of its subsequent transfer into the rest of the Kyrgyz population also is limited.

Sherboto Tokombaev, director of the NGO Center for Therapy "Ranar" further developed the theme of the lack of work mobilization of prisoners. "Initially when convicts are imprisoned, they have neither higher nor specialized education. Staying in prisons, having anything to do, they further degrade and get depressed. What could they do after release? Nothing, but stealing and being imprisoned again".

Ranar has targeted its efforts exclusively on aid and therapy of HIV positive prisoners. In 1999, Ranar members organized and began to carry out the "12 step program for HIV carriers" according to the Minnesota model, which includes the first 3 steps of the program. "We still hold therapeutic groups and create groups of mutual help among HIV-positive people in prisons. Since most of them are also drug users, we are working with these too. Our primary goal is to convey idea that if they do not change their behavior, they will not be able to change their lives either", Ranar project manager Madina Toktogulova told the author. Ranar is also assisting prisoners prior to release by providing trainings on how to plan their future life. Further, Ranar has rented a farm, where ex-prisoners work as farmers and start a new life. "That's why we call this center an adaptation center rather than rehabilitation", said Sherboto Tokombaev.

Despite the meager subsidies for nutrition, prisons try to make changes themselves at least to provide better meals for the prisoners. Now each colony intends to organize mini-farms. In turn, the Government tries to resolve the problem of overcrowded prisons with legislative measures. By 2005, the level of overcrowdedness will be reduced from two to one and a half. Experts think that this measure could dramatically cut the new cases of drug use and the number of potential sources of diseases in colonies.

Aziz Soltobaev

TERRORISM IN UZBEKISTAN: THE IMU REMAINS ALIVE BUT NOT WELL

Richard Weitz

The recent bombings and street fighting in Tashkent and Bukhara demonstrate that the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) remains capable of conducting terrorist operations despite suffering years of vigorous repression. IMU members have even adopted new tactics including their first use of suicide bombers. Although the attacks caught the Uzbek security services by surprise, they rapidly suppressed the assault. The IMU has shown it remains alive, but its swift defeat in the recent fighting also underscores its continued impotence.

BACKGROUND: Despite Uzbek efforts to convince their American interlocutors otherwise, Central Asian terrorists are seeking to undermine President Islam Karimov not because he is a U.S. ally, but because he opposes their efforts to establish a Taliban-like regime in the region's most important country. In an August 1999 communiqué, IMU leaders clearly promulgated their objective of overthrowing Karimov's authoritarian regime and establishing an Islamic republic. They believe that Uzbekistan's transformation along fundamentalist lines would resonate among neighboring states in the traditional pattern of falling dominoes.

The IMU has had extensive connections with al-Qaeda and the Taliban since its founding in 1998 in Taliban-controlled Kabul. The IMU fought alongside Taliban forces and their al-Qaeda allies during the Afghan civil war and the subsequent American-led occupation. Its military leader Juma Namangani died in Afghanistan in November 2001, but many IMU members, including Yuldeshev, fled to neighboring countries to regroup. On February 16, 1999, IMU operatives detonated six car bombs in Tashkent in a failed effort to assassinate Karimov. The explosions killed 13 and wounded 128 people. The following year, IMU guerrillas based in neighboring countries invaded southern Uzbekistan and penetrated as close as 60 miles to Tashkent before being driven back. In April 2003, construction workers found a probable improvised explosive device in a Tashkent hotel. The explosives were reportedly similar to those used in the 1999 car bombings.

In general, Uzbek authorities have been sufficiently strong to suppress most IMU activities (as well as other forms of dissent) within their frontiers, so IMU leaders have tended to reside and operate elsewhere. The IMU's membership roster includes a large number of non-Uzbeks, and the organization has been militarily active in much of Central Asia.

American officials have become increasingly concerned about the IMU's activities. In September 2000, the State Department designated the IMU a Foreign Terrorist Organization, and in 2001, President Bush explicitly linked the IMU to al-Qaeda, identifying both groups as terrorist threats to the US. The State Department issued a warning in April 2003 (renewed in October) that the IMU might be planning attacks against U.S. citizens in Uzbekistan. Although the United States has not offered explicit security guarantees to Tashkent, the U.S.-Uzbek joint strategic declaration of March 2002 states that Washington "would regard with grave concern any external threat to the security and

territorial integrity of the Republic of Uzbekistan." Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld has visited the country three times in the past two years. Approximately 1,000 U.S. Air Force and Special Forces personnel have been deployed since late 2001 at the former Soviet Khanabad airbase in southwest Uzbekistan. Soon after the troops' arrival, rumors of an impending terrorist attack against them began to spread.

IMPLICATIONS: The explosions and fighting in Uzbekistan that began on March 29 represent the largest IMU-led operations since the 1999 Tashkent bombings. At least 47 people died and a larger number were injured in a five-day spree of unprecedented urban violence. (Over half of those killed were IMU militants. Unlike in 1999, they apparently took care on this occasion to avoid hurting civilians, focusing their attacks on the police.) Although the explosive devices involved resemble those employed in 1999, IMU militants, some of whom were women, for the first time operated as suicide bombers on at least four occasions. The use of suicide bombers of either sex is a new practice for the IMU, which previously had favored planted bombs and small-scale insurgency operations, and had not been employed by any other armed group in Central Asia. But this technique has been increasingly adopted by terrorist groups in the Middle East and Chechnya, whose actions may have inspired their Uzbek colleagues. In addition, the IMU appears to have gained new recruits among dissatisfied young people to replace those lost in Afghanistan or imprisoned in Uzbekistan.

Pakistani authorities claim to have wounded IMU leader Tahir Yuldashev during last month's military operations in Waziristan in Pakistan's Federally Administered Tribal Areas. Press accounts also indicate that Pakistani forces encountered many fighters of Uzbek nationality during the campaign. Although some have speculated that the IMU operations in Uzbekistan were somehow related to this incident, the attacks appear to have been planned months in advance of the Pakistani crackdown. Indeed, the fighting only started after what appears an accidental explosion at a bomb-making factory in Bukhara, which apparently exposed the entire operation prematurely. The attacks suggest that like al-Qaeda, the IMU may have decentralized much command and control to local autonomous cells. Its militants now seem to have both the capacity and the will to launch operations largely on their own initiative.

The Uzbek government's anti-terrorism efforts remain sufficiently robust to counter the new IMU offensive. Although seemingly

caught off guard during the initial onslaught, the Uzbekistan National Security Service rebounded rapidly and soon suppressed the latest attacks. In effect, the outcome is repeating the pattern seen in 1999. On that occasion, IMU operatives were able to plan, coordinate, and launch a series of deadly strikes, but the offensive quickly petered out after the security forces responded vigorously. The main risk now is that the Uzbek government will react too forcefully and repress even further all its perceived opponents, thereby alienating members of the nonviolent opposition and supportive foreign governments such as the United States. American policy-makers already are finding it difficult to sustain Congressional support for State Department aid programs to the Karimov government because of its human rights abuses—particularly its failure to establish multiparty elections, press freedoms, a torture-free prison system, or an independent judiciary. The initial efforts of Uzbek officials to blame the recent terrorist incidents on members of the Hizb-ut-Tahrir al-Islami (“The Party of Islamic Liberation”), an influential but nonviolent opposition group that the American government

and other outside observers have explicitly declined to identify as a terrorist organization, does not bode well in this regard.

CONCLUSIONS: The recent bombing campaign in Uzbekistan shows that the IMU is alive but not well. Despite years of vigorous government repression and widespread international support for cracking down on Central Asian terrorism, IMU operatives were able to launch a surprisingly extensive terrorist campaign in the heart of downtown Tashkent. On the other hand, Uzbek security authorities were able to repress the campaign in only a few days. This outcome, which repeats the pattern seen after the 1999 bombings, suggests that the IMU likely will remain a disruptive but manageable force in Central Asia for some time to come.

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UNDEMOCRATIC MEDIA LAW VETOED IN KAZAKHSTAN

On April 22, President of Kazakhstan Nursultan Nazarbayev announced his decision to reject the new media law earlier approved by parliament. Initiated by the Ministry of Information and supported by conservative members of parliament, the law had caused heated debates in various political circles. Although the presidential decision encourages journalists, the freedom of speech enjoyed in countries of genuine democracy is a long way off.

The controversial media law was adopted by parliament on March 18 after a long-run public discussion in the country. Expressing the mood of the majority of journalists, leading opposition parties complained that most of their suggestions aimed at granting more freedom of speech to journalists were discarded by parliament in the process of drafting the law. Far from being a substantial improvement over the law adopted in 2001, the new media law restricted further journalistic activities.

Nevertheless, on March 25 the law was submitted for presidential endorsement. Protests to the restrictive law reached its climax at that point. On April 12 opposition figures, democratically-minded parliament members, independent journalists, leaders of the International Public Foundation for the Protection of Freedom of Speech “Adil Soz”, the International Human Rights Bureau in Kazakhstan, the public foundations “Journalists in Distress” and “Transparency Kazakhstan” and a host of other organizations sent an appeal to president demanding him to veto the new media law in order, as they put it, “to avert a monopolization of the media in any form”. “This law enhances the already unjustifiably inflated power of the state bureaucracy enabling it to restrict the professional activities of journalists and reducing their chance of creating new media” the appeal said.

For their part, members of the Constitutional Council, after scrutinizing the submitted law at their April session, concluded that the new law contradicted the

basic principles of civic liberties laid down in the constitution. Article 20, Clause 2 of the Constitution grants the freedom of expression and the right to get and disseminate an information, not prohibited by law, to all individuals, while according to the new media law non-citizens and foreigners are denied such rights. The Constitutional Council also pointed out that the Article 5 of the media law leaves loopholes for abuse of power by local authorities who wish to ban any information they interpret as “harmful to society”. Further, the government version of the media law vests “authorized bodies” with power to revoke the licenses of broadcasting stations or declare their registration certificates invalid, while according to the Constitution only the court is empowered to deprive electronic or print media of licenses.

The Constitutional Court announced that the new media law could not be signed and enacted as it infringes on the constitutional rights of individuals. This decision was welcomed by opposition parties and the international community. Symbolically, the rejection of the unconstitutional media law coincided with the third Eurasian Media Forum in Almaty and produced a positive impression on foreign participants of this traditional international event.

As if by coincidence, shortly before the opening of the Media Forum, at which the President gave a welcoming speech, the district court of Aktobe (West Kazakhstan) announced its decision to release the founder of the independent paper “Diapazon” Vladimir Mikhailov who spent several months in confinement for allegedly being involved in illegal business. It should be mentioned that journalists of the paper were beaten and intimidated prior to the unsubstantiated detention of Vladimir Mikhailov. In the early hours of January 27, according to journalists, policemen broke into the office of the paper and ransacked all the rooms searching for compromising documents. Two days

after the incident Viktor Mikhailov got a two years prison term.

Unfortunately, the persecution of the “Diapazon” journalists is not an isolated case. Similar violations of journalists’ rights in Pavlodar and Petropavlovsk have been reported even in papers with government leanings. Although under the present law journalists have a sufficient degree of freedom, administrative power and financial strains put a strait-jacket on their creative activities. All Soviet-era regional papers in Kazakh and Russian have become nothing more than a personal mouthpiece of the local governor. They are financed by local governments who place the so-called state orders to promote official ideology.

It is not a real pleasure for people to read papers which in every issue carry front-page pictures of akims (governors) and parrot their sugar-coated speeches. But for regional papers, that is the only way of surviving. Company-owned papers have no better luck either. They are entirely dependent on their financial backers. Owners of the papers can fire a journalist on a whim. Monopolization of the press deeply erodes public confidence in journalistic integrity. A recent public opinion poll showed that only 30% of the population trusts the printed word.

The presidential veto of the unpopular Media Law was intended, as it is speculated in various circles, to create a favorable image of the leadership as a committed guardian of democratic reforms in Kazakhstan. Under growing pressure from opposition as well as from the international community, the government feels whipped up to soften its media policy. The rejection of the media law can be seen as a part of this political maneuvering. Although the decision of the President was officially hailed by the US State Department, the government has still to prove that it really deserves that praise.

Marat Yermukanov

IS FOREIGN PRESENCE IN KYRGYZSTAN NEGATIVELY AFFECTING REGIONAL COOPERATION IN CENTRAL ASIA?

James Purcell Smith

2002-2003 witnessed an increase in the foreign troop presence in Kyrgyzstan. The U.S. gained a foothold at Manas airport. In October 2003, Russia opened an airbase of its own in Kant. China for the first time conducted joint military maneuvers with Kyrgyz troops in 2003. This intensive geopolitical dynamic in and around Kyrgyzstan led to significant changes in the policies of Kyrgyz authorities. Flooding in southern Kazakhstan this February as a result of economic contracts with foreign company to export Kyrgyz electricity to Russia, permanent conflicts with neighboring Kazakhstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan over a number of issues, created an atmosphere of regional distrust and pose a threat to security of Kyrgyzstan. Key reasons for this situation are Kyrgyzstan's over-reliance on foreign powers, ignorance of its real interests and overestimation of its available options in regional Realpolitik in Central Asia.

BACKGROUND: The U.S. war against the Taliban and Al-Qaeda in Afghanistan needed launching pads for air force, and supply bases in neighboring countries. One of the bases set up to conduct operation Enduring Freedom, was at Manas airport. The U.S.-led base was later renamed after New York firefighter Peter Ganci, who perished in the collapsed WTC towers. As some analysts predicted, U.S. bases in Central Asia revived geopolitical competition in the region. As a result, in October 2003, Russia opened an air base of its own in Kant, just 20 miles from the Ganci base. The same year, China held maneuvers with Kyrgyz troops for the first time ever in the border area near the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region. Furthermore, Kyrgyzstan, as a member of the Collective Security Treaty under the Moscow's patronage and of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization under both Russian and Chinese wings, is to a certain extent limited in its foreign policy formulation.

The domestic political situation is characterized by a high degree of volatility, susceptible to the quick ignition of regional conflicts, as the Aksy events of March 2002 indicated. Frictions exist also along regional and interethnic lines: between the russified North and the more traditional South, as well as between Kyrgyz and other ethnic minorities in the country. The surrounding regional reality for Kyrgyzstan is even more grim, if one bears in mind recent border clashes between local residents in the Kyrgyz-Tajik border region, the war of words with neighboring Kazakhstan over the flooding in southern Kazakhstani region of Kyzyl-Orda. The dynamic involvement of foreign powers in Kyrgyzstan during the last 2 years has already produced a situation where Kyrgyz authorities have increasingly little control over foreign policy, and now, even over internal politics. The country's relations with neighboring countries is now becoming a victim of foreign involvement and of the "new great base race" in Central Asia.

IMPLICATIONS: In January 2003, Russian "Inter RAO EES" and Kyrgyz "Eletricheskii Stantsii" (Power Stations) signed a five-year contract to sell 1.5 billion kWh of electricity to Russia. Kazakhstan agreed to transport the electricity via its power grid. The resulting intensive water release from the Toktogul water

reservoir in Autumn and Winter of 2003 resulted in flooding in Kazakhstan's Kyzyl-Orda region and threatened to destroy the Shardara water reservoir, which accumulated more than five billion tons of water. This possibility endangers the very life of more than 500,000 people in southern Kazakhstan. Kyrgyzstan has been experimenting ad-hoc with its economy and nation-building in the past decade. This is mainly a result of the geopolitical reality around the country as well as domestic mistakes in the path of reforms. In 1992-1995, Kyrgyzstan was seen as an "Island of Democracy" and aspired to the title "Switzerland of Central Asia". Both prospects failed to materialize. Since 1995, with incumbent president Askar Akaev time and again re-elected for the office, this country lost its democratic appeal as the model case in Central Asia in the eyes of the West, especially in the United States.

In economic terms, the country moved from one version of reforms to another, from "shock-therapy" to an absolute lack of meaningful reforms. Currently, the state of the economy is in such a degree of disarray that vital lines of electricity supply and railways have been dismembered by poor people and sold as scrap metal in flourishing businesses that sell strategic infrastructure of the state for pennies. Local opposition leaders and foreign analysts point out the failures in many areas of responsibility of the Kyrgyz state. International developments around Kyrgyzstan during the last two years have affected the development of the situation in this country and the path of its international relations. Foreign powers increasingly affect the course of Kyrgyz authorities in relation even with its immediate neighbors. The common interests of all Central Asian nations are hence starting to fall victim of competing foreign interests in Kyrgyzstan. It is likely that this could eventually lead to even more complex problems between Kyrgyzstan and its neighbors.

CONCLUSIONS: The "Great base race" in Central Asia has already resulted in mounting problems for Kyrgyzstan. Kazakhstan was assessing not only the economic damage from the flooding of its southern Shymkent and Kyzyl-Orda regions, but also trying to assess international legal actions, if the Shardara reservoir is destroyed. Many other problems in Kyrgyzstan's

relations with neighboring countries have been lingering for almost a decade without a solution. The volatility of internal politics in Kyrgyzstan, especially the Kyrgyz parliament, has been preventing the government of president Askar Akaev from being able to push international treaties through the legislature. Under these circumstances, the meddling of foreign powers in Kyrgyzstan's affairs and inter-state relations in Central Asia are increasingly harmful to regional stability. Kyrgyzstan's excessive reliance on foreign powers prevents it from finding realistic and workable solutions to existing problems with its neighbors.

All countries of Central Asia have a direct interest in beginning the intensive work of materializing mutually beneficial projects of cooperation in many fields, beginning with common water use and electricity generation and regional trade. The interests of foreign powers from the far or near abroad are threatening to become the key reason to develop or halt interstate and regional cooperation in Central Asia.

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IMPLEMENTATION OF SAAKASHVILI'S NATIONAL REFORM PROGRAM IN IMERETI REGION

Reforms being implemented at a regional level encompass three main activities: putting a reliable, professional, and efficient regional and municipal government in position, combating corruption through strategic mass arrests, and scrambling to collect taxes for the state budget. This regional effort is meant to pave the way for comprehensive legal and structural reforms in the governance, economic, and security sectors, directed by the national government, its respective Ministries, and upon approval from the new parliament (whose first session was on 22 April) by late-May 2004.

On 24 April, Gia Giorgadze, the former head of the governing bloc's National Movement-Democrats office in Imereti region, officially became acting Kutaisi Mayor.

The former mayor, Nugzar Poliani, had publicly announced his resignation four days earlier after several months of public pressure from a group of local NGOs, the regional prosecutor's office, and the Ministry of Finance for alleged corruption related to his private business and abuse of state finances.

Since the Revolution, Mayor Poliani had been a lame duck: He had won his seat during the 2002 local elections as a member of the opposition party, New Rights, and then switched sides to support the former president, Eduard Shevardnadze, reportedly under pressure from the then-governing bloc, For New Georgia. On 6 December, Saakashvili replaced Imereti's governor, Teimuraz Shashiashvili, with a National Movement leader, Davit Mumladze. Reportedly coerced by the new government, Mayor Poliani fired his administrative staff and deputy mayors, leaving Kutaisi (the seat of administration in Imereti and Georgia's second largest city) bereft of leadership for months and under the de facto control of Governor Mumladze. New Rights opposition leaders claim that the forced resignation of Mayor Poliani is just one step by the new government to install pro-National Movement-Democrats leaders, continuing the former structure of top-down, one-party control.

When launching the topic of Imereti governance reform with Governor Mumladze on 19 April, he smiled, then pointed to the Protest Committee demonstration outside his window, and explained that a "series of reforms will occur very soon". Mumladze emphasized that he fully supported the Protest Committee's actions, noting that the public anti-

corruption campaigns had stripped Poliani of any authority, leaving Kutaisi's city government stagnant and dysfunctional. Once the new mayor was appointed, Mumladze stressed, "If Giorgadze does not perform well he, too, will be replaced."

The new authorities respond to any criticism by explaining that replacements are important for ensuring an active, transparent, and reliable government capable of implementing Saakashvili's reforms. Moreover, new appointments will be through an open, transparent system.

Once the acting Kutaisi Mayor is installed, Mumladze expects serious governance restructuring and reform. In particular, the city administration would be reduced from 400 to 150 persons, replacing all positions with new staff. The governor had already replaced the eleven district Gangebeli (heads of municipal authorities). However, further action at the regional and municipal level would follow national reform.

The anti-corruption campaign, led by General Prosecutor Irakli Okruashvili, is the most visible program to date in Imereti. Authorities conducted a series of high-profile arrests in March, including: The arrest of Bondo Shalikiani, a Kutaisi Sakrebulo (municipal authorities) member and well-known businessman who heads Kutaisi TV station, for illegal ownership of guns and explosives; (Shalikiani's financial activities are under investigation and the Prosecutor's Office expects him to pay approximately \$7 million to the state budget for illegal activity.) the attempted arrest of Davit Benidze, a well-known New Rights representative of the Kutaisi Sakrebulo who escaped arrest and "disappeared"; the arrest of Nanuli Kiuti, the head of the Gumat-Hesse electro-energy station; and the arrests of two Kutaisi Automobile Factory directors who allegedly stole several million dollars from the factory and whose cases are awaiting decision. The regional prosecutor noted that several further cases of corruption are being investigated. Notably, a number of those being launched had been "frozen" under the old government and never fully investigated.

Authorities interviewed see the arrests not only as providing the Imereti region with a new leadership and as an attempt to clean society of corruption, but also as an effort to add money to the state budget. The Ministry of Finance directed all regional tax authorities to double collection in April. When combining the arrests with the tax authority's active collection

scheme, it appears the new government is trying to fill its coffers in advance of approval of the central budget and tax reform laws, both expected to be public in May. The Imereti tax authority highlighted that arrests had "instilled fear in the population and made tax collection easier". The collection scheme is not based on real tax figures but on the assumption that under the former shadow economy tax officials pocketed taxes rather than put them into the state budget, while businesses and individuals either hid their taxes or paid protection money instead. A more accurate and transparent tax collection mechanism is expected to follow forthcoming legal reform.

Mumladze explained that the anti-corruption measures and arrests are an integral part of governance reform because one important criminal institution, known as avtoritet (authority), which prospered under Shevardnadze's weak state, is being eradicated. Under the former government, if a dispute arose between two institutions, rather than turn to the court system, which could be prolonged and end in a negative result, individuals turned to avtoritets. Avtoritets resolved disputes for a fee and became empowered "top robbers", widely known as the mafia, taking control over social mechanisms. Often, the former government protected avtoritets because they were both businessmen and government officials.

Further, Imereti police are now acting more professionally, responsibly, and transparently. Authorities arrested or replaced many high-level policemen linked with crime. At the same time, police are encouraged by a bonus and promotion system. Consequently, their notorious bribe collection system appears to have been curbed. The governor added despondently, however, that police corruption has not been tackled entirely since it "runs deep".

For the moment, the anti-corruption campaign and high-profile arrests are having a tangible effect on Imereti. Criminal activities have decreased, tax collection has risen, and loyal leaders are being placed in government. The real test will begin after May, once economic, security, and government restructuring programs are implemented at a national level. In the meantime, Governor Mumladze hopes that his transparent endeavors to pave the way for comprehensive, national reforms will attract donor organizations, private investors, and international institutions to Imereti and assist in its long-term reform efforts.

Theresa Freese

NEWS BITES

ISLAMIC DEVELOPMENT BANK TO FUND UZBEK HEALTH CARE

22 April

Uzbekistan's Agency for Foreign Economic Relations announced on 22 April that the Islamic Development Bank (IDB) will provide \$25 million to supply regional branches of the National Intensive Care Center with specialized equipment. Overall, the IDB has allocated \$60 million for Uzbekistan in 2004, and a total of \$456.5 million for 16 projects for the period 2004-2007. (ITAR-TASS)

CHECHEN WARLORD SAYS HIS SUBORDINATES HAVE SURRENDERED

22 April

Magomed Khambiyev, a Chechen separatist leader and former "interior minister of Ichkeria," who surrendered in early March, said all his subordinates have surrendered their arms and have turned themselves in to the law enforcement agencies. "I can say confidently that all the rebels who were with me or reported to me have voluntarily refused to continue armed resistance and have applied for amnesty," Khambiyev told reporters in Gudermes on Thursday. Khambiyev refused to give the exact number of rebels who have surrendered, saying he was not authorized to release such information. At the same time, Ramzan Khadyrov, the head of the Chechen president's security service, has confirmed that "practically all the rebels who reported to Khambiyev have come out of the woods and have turned themselves in to the law enforcement agencies." "After Khambiyev turned himself in and made a public address to the rebels, calling on them to surrender their arms, 27 people who reported directly to him, not including members of other groups operating in the Urus-Martan, Achkhoy-Martan, and Vedeno regions, surrounded their weapons," Kadyrov said. Khambiyev repeated that he does not know anything about the fate of Chechen warlord Shamil Basayev. "Everybody in Chechnya knows that we have never liked each other, and after the military action began we became enemies because I realized that the path chosen by him and people close to him would lead to tragedy," Khambiyev said. Speaking about Chechen separatist leader Aslan Maskhadov, Khambiyev said that "up to ten people could be with him" at this time. (Interfax)

FOUR SENTENCED FOR PLANNING ATTACK ON U.S. BASE IN KYRGYZSTAN

23 April

The capital's Leninsky District Court sentenced three Kyrgyz citizens and one Kazakh citizen to long prison terms for preparing a terror attack against the U.S. air base at Bishkek's Manas airport, defense attorneys told Interfax. The four men

were detained by Kyrgyz security officers in September 2003, on suspicion of planning an attack on the base. Bakyt Batyrbekov, the group's leader, was sentenced to 13 years in prison. Ramiz Berdaliyev, Nadyr Ismanaliyev and Akrol Abduvaliyev were given 10-year sentences. Batyrbekov, Berdaliyev and Ismanaliyev, born in the northern Talas region of Kyrgyzstan, had been trained in an Islamic military camp in Pakistan and Islamic schools in Iran. Investigators said that while staying in Peshawar, Pakistan, Batyrbekov was ordered to stage an attack against the anti-terror coalition forces in Bishkek. The U.S. Embassy in Bishkek may have been another target. Batyrbekov returned to Kyrgyzstan, rented an apartment in Bishkek, and started watching the airport and the U.S. base. Investigators who searched his apartment found drawings of bombing devices, maps of Manas airport, a layout of the air base's checkpoints, a large amount of aluminum powder, ammunition, an F-1 hand grenade, a small amount of heroin and extremist literature. The Kyrgyz citizens facing the court were found to be members of the banned radical party Hizb-ut-Tahrir. Defense attorneys told the press that their clients were innocent and had changed their stories in court after being subjected to torture. The defense plans to appeal the sentence to the Bishkek City Court. (Interfax)

AZERBAIJANI DEFENSE MINISTER REJECTS CALL FOR KARABAKH COMPROMISE

24 April

During talks on 23 April in Baku with Azerbaijani Defense Minister Colonel General Safar Abiev, U.S. Ambassador Steven Mann, who is the U.S. co-Chairman of the OSCE Minsk Group, said that Azerbaijan should make concessions in the interests of reaching a solution to the Karabakh conflict. Mann pointed out that the situation in both Armenia and Azerbaijan will remain "grave" if the search for a settlement drags on for years. Abiev for his part argued that Armenia, as "the aggressor," should be punished, and that it is unacceptable that the international community apply "double standards" by intervening militarily in former Yugoslavia (to protect the Kosovar Albanians) but failing to do so over Nagorno-Karabakh. The Azerbaijani Defense Ministry press service quoted Abiev as saying that "Azerbaijan will not make any concessions." (Turan)

RUSSIAN JUSTICE MINISTRY AGAINST OUTLAWING WAHHABISM

24 April

The Russian Justice Ministry has objected to the idea of outlawing the radical Islamic movement known as Wahhabism and punishing its followers. "Persecuting people for religious beliefs means violating the constitution and

other laws. People must be punished for specific actions and violations of the law," chief of the Justice Ministry's department for non-government and religious organizations Alexander Kudryavtsev told Interfax. The Justice Ministry earlier objected to an initiative from the Dagestani State Council to outlaw Wahhabism. "The Justice Ministry considered this proposal not to be in compliance with international law and Russian legislation," Kudryavtsev said. The Justice Ministry official added that people who have committed crimes and identified themselves as followers of Wahhabism were prosecuted not for their religious beliefs but for specific deeds and offences, particularly for membership in illegal armed units. "If you take residents of the Dagestani villages of Karamakhi and Chabanmakhi as an example, they were punished not for being Wahhabites but for violating Russian laws by setting up illegal armed units," Kudryavtsev said, referring to events in August 1999, when guerilla units attacked Dagestan from Chechnya. (Interfax)

SHEVARDNADZE'S SON-IN-LAW LEAVES PRISON

26 April

Georgy Dzhokhtaberidze, son-in-law of Georgian former president Eduard Shevardnadze and president of the Magticom mobile phone company, left the Tbilisi prison on Monday. He told the press that he "had not transferred any money for his release. The transfer was related to the Magticom activities." Meanwhile, before departing to Kyiv, Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili said "the money has been transferred to the state budget from the individual account of Manana Shevardnadze, and all of it will be spent on paying pension and salary debts." Dzhokhtaberidze was detained for evading \$350,000 in taxes. Earlier in the day, Georgian Prosecutor General Irakly Okruashvili said, "Georgy Dzhokhtaberidze will be released and his criminal case will be closed." He said the release became possible after Dzhokhtaberidze's wife, Manana Shevardnadze, returned \$15.5 million to the national budget. At first, Dzhokhtaberidze refused his release from prison, but decided to leave after the circumstances surrounding the transfer of the money were clarified. (Interfax)

ARMENIAN FOREIGN MINISTRY WELCOMES CANADIAN RECOGNITION OF GENOCIDE

26 April

Foreign Ministry spokesman Hamlet Gasparian expressed satisfaction and gratitude on 23 April at the passage on 21 April by the lower chamber of the Canadian Parliament of a resolution condemning as genocide the killings of Armenians in Ottoman Turkey in 1915. The Canadian upper chamber adopted an analogous resolution in June 2002. On 24 April, President Kocharian, Armenian government ministers, and foreign diplomats laid wreaths at the memorial to the genocide victims, Armenian and Russian agencies reported. Kocharian in his address to the nation reaffirmed Armenia's willingness to establish "normal relations" with all its neighbors, including Turkey. (RFE/RL)

NATO WANTS KAZAKH COOPERATION, NOT MEMBERSHIP

26 April

Jean Fournet, deputy secretary-general of NATO, announced on 23 April that Kazakhstan's widening cooperation with the alliance should not be construed as paving the way for eventual membership, Interfax-Kazakhstan reported the same day. The news agency quoted Fournet as saying, "Kazakhstan's joining NATO is not on the agenda today." NATO will provide grants to Kazakh scientists for antiterrorism research in the framework of the "Security Through Science" program, Khabar Television reported. The research will focus on ways to combat chemical and biological weapons and hazardous radioactive substances. Fournet also noted that NATO does not see itself as competing with the Collective Security Treaty Organization or the Shanghai Cooperation Organization. (RFE/RL)

RUSSIA GIVES KYRGYZSTAN \$2.3 MILLION WORTH OF MILITARY AID

26 April

State-owned Russian arms exporter Rosoboronexport gave Kyrgyzstan nearly \$2.3 million worth of military equipment on 26 April for Kyrgyz rapid-reaction forces under the CIS Collective Security Treaty Organization (ODKB). The ceremony took place at the Russian air base in Kant, Kyrgyzstan, and was attended by Kyrgyz Prime Minister Nikolai Tanaev and Defense Minister Colonel General Esen Topoev, as well as Rosoboronexport deputy directors Anatoliy Isaikin and Aleksei Aleshin. The equipment includes firearms, ammunition, optical sites, bullet-proof vests, uniforms, and spare parts. Isaikin told journalists, "This aid is not a one-time event." Minister Tanaev said that the gift "illustrates the increasing level of bilateral ties between Kyrgyzstan and Russia in all areas." He went on to say that Russia is the "center that brings together the countries in the CIS, Shanghai Cooperation Organization, and ODKB." (akipress.org)

US HIDES ALLIES ON AFGHANISTAN

26 April

The United States' ambassador to Nato, Nicholas Burns, has called on countries without troops tied up in Iraq to do more in Afghanistan. Speaking as he arrived in Kabul for a meeting of the 26 member Nato council, Ambassador Burns said Afghanistan was the alliance's top priority. He said he was confident that allied governments would provide the troops. Officials hope that Nato will be operating in five more Afghan cities in the north and west by June. Mr Burns said that Turkey, Germany and other Nato allies without forces in Iraq - along with Spain which is pulling out its 1,300 troops - could help out with "resource problems" in Afghanistan. "Nato needs to go faster and accelerate its build-up of troops in Afghanistan," he said. He said that the alliance needed help

from those countries which had "excess troop capacity". Correspondents say a recent wave of violence in the south and east of Afghanistan has underlined the security concerns. Three US Marines were wounded, one seriously, over the week-end when a bomb exploded by their convoy in the southern province of Kandahar. Senior American officers have expressed concern that Taleban and al-Qaeda elements may become more active during the spring. "We have a significant number of groups in or coming in to Kabul with explosives and with specific missions to target groups, including us," Nato Lieutenant-General Rick Hillier said. The alliance has agreed to set up and take command of five new teams, which will carry out small reconstruction projects or provide security for aid workers in the north and west by the end of June. Nato is in charge of the 6,500 member International Stabilisation Force for Afghanistan - Isaf - which is drawn from 34 countries. Another 1,500 American soldiers are fighting suspected Taleban and al-Qaeda guerrillas in the south and east of Afghanistan. (BBC)

U.S. CALLS FOR POLITICAL SOLUTION IN ADJARIA

27 April

U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell told journalists in Washington on 27 April after talks with visiting Georgian Prime Minister Zurab Zhvania that the United States hopes the Georgian central government will prove able to find political and economic solutions to the outstanding issues within the state of Georgia without recourse to violence. Meanwhile, the U.S. State Department has responded to Abashidze's letter requesting that Washington intervene to prevent an anticipated attempt by the Georgian authorities to assassinate Abashidze. That response reportedly rejects as "absurd" Abashidze's fears that the United States is colluding with Tbilisi against him and reaffirms Washington's hope that the differences between Abashidze and the central Georgian government can be resolved peacefully and in accordance with the interests of the autonomous republic's population. (Caucasus Press)

KAZAKH DEFENSE MINISTER BOOSTS CHINA TIES

27 April

Defense Minister Colonel General Mukhtar Altyntayev and his Chinese counterpart Cao Gangchuan signed a cooperation agreement in Peking on 27 April. Under the agreement, China will provide the Kazakh Army with aid worth 8 million yuans (\$967,000). Between 1997 and 2003, Kazakh armed forces received 30 million yuans in aid from China. Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbaev is scheduled to visit China in May. Kazakh Deputy Foreign Minister Qayrat Abuseitov announced on 26 April that a final agreement on an oil pipeline from Kazakhstan to China might be signed during the president's visit. (Interfax-Kazakhstan)

ARMENIAN OPPOSITION STAGES NEW PROTEST DEMONSTRATION

28 April

Several thousand people attended a further demonstration convened in Yerevan on 27 April by the Artarutian opposition bloc to demand the resignation of President Robert Kocharian, RFE/RL's Armenian Service reported. The organizers postponed their planned march on the presidential palace from 27 April to 4 May, saying they will give the authorities a final chance to stage a nationwide referendum of confidence in Kocharian. They also stressed they did not want to exacerbate tensions on the eve of a 28 April discussion of the political situation in Armenia by the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe spring session in Strasbourg. Also on 27 April, the Armenian authorities deported Artur Vartanian, an Armenian-born U.S. citizen who served as a bodyguard to Artarutian leader Stepan Demirchian, RFE/RL's Armenian Service reported. Vartanian was detained last week for participating in the ongoing series of protest demonstrations organized by Artarutian. (RFE/RL)

DEPUTY FOREIGN MINISTER COMMENTS ON LEGAL STATUS OF CASPIAN REGION.

28 April

The legal status of the Caspian Region should be elaborated on with regard to the existing agreements between the former USSR and Iran of 1921 and 1940, which have successfully showed their prudence in the past, Deputy Foreign Minister Viktor Kalyuzhny, who is also Russia's presidential representative on the Caspian problem, declared in the capital of Kazakhstan, Astana, speaking at the ceremony of the opening of the first international forum on the Caspian region. According to him, another foundation for the legal status is the vested practices of business activities in the region. As for the meeting of the foreign ministers of the Caspian region, which took place on April 6, Kalyuzhny stressed that the parties have advanced in their negotiations on the legal status of the Caspian Sea, but there were some disagreements. In the situation of the undetermined legal status of the region each person or entity working in the region should stick to common principles of non-infliction of damage to the environment. (RosBusinessConsulting)

IRANIAN OIL COMPANIES TO TAKE PART IN KAZAKH TENDERS

29 April

Iranian oil companies will take part in tenders for the development of new oil blocs in the Kazakh sector of the Caspian Sea. "Both state and private oil companies from Iran will apply for Kazakhstan's tenders for the development of blocs in the Kazakh sector of the Caspian Sea," Iranian Ambassador to Kazakhstan Murtazo Saffori told Interfax. He said the National Iranian Oil Company (NIOC) and its subsidiaries, as well as the private companies Petrokhazar and Petropars would take part in the tenders. The undefined status of the Caspian Sea is not an obstacle for Iranian companies, as they will be working in the Kazakh sector and there is a legal basis for cooperation there. Tehran feels

negative about projects in the southern area of the Caspian Sea, where Azerbaijan, Iran and Turkmenistan have not settled their relations, the diplomat stressed. The Kazakh president signed a state program for the development of oil and gas fields in Kazakhstan's sector of the Caspian Sea in May 2003. The program will remain in effect until 2015 and will be implemented in three phases. It is planned to create conditions for the comprehensive development of Caspian oil and gas fields in the first phase (2003- 2005), provide for the intensive development of the fields in the second phase (2006-2010), and stabilize the oil production in the third phase (2011-2015).

The program will enlarge the annual oil production to 100 million tonnes and the annual gas production to 63 billion cubic meters by 2015. An optimistic forecast says that about \$6 billion will be invested in the projects in 2003-2005, about \$10.3 billion from 2006-2011, and about \$15.6 billion between 2011-2015. The minimum investments are estimated at \$2.8 billion in 2003- 2005, \$7 billion from 2006-2010, and \$11.4 billion between 2011-2015. (Interfax-Kazakhstan)

IRAN, KAZAKHSTAN TO SET JOINT TRANSPORT COMPANY

29 April 29

Iran plans to set up a joint transport company with Kazakhstan to ship oil through the Caspian from the Kazakh port of Aktau to the Iranian ports of Neka and Amirabad, Iranian Ambassador to Kazakhstan Murzato Saffori told Interfax. The diplomat said that the oil transport company Naftiran Intertrade Company would participate in this project from the Iranian side. Iran assumes that the Kazakh participant in the venture will be KazMunaiGaz, Saffori said. Iran announced at the end of March that it expects oil supplies from Kazakhstan to double under a swap scheme over the next two months. In 2003 oil supplies from Kazakhstan amounted to 50,000 bpd, of which KazMunaiGaz accounted for 30,000 bpd and PetroKazakhstan - 20,000 bpd. KazMunaiGaz announced earlier that it supplied 1 million tonnes of oil to Kazakhstan under the swap scheme in 2003 and plans to increase this to 2 million tonnes of oil under the same scheme in 2004, while PetroKazakhstan will supply 1 million tonnes. Kazakhstan supplies oil by tanker through the Caspian to the Iranian port of Neka, and in exchange receives the equivalent at an Iranian port on the Persian Gulf. In turn, PetroKazakhstan currently supplies oil to Teheran Oil Refinery by rail only, but plans to set up regular oil supplies to the Iran through the Caspian. In exchange the company will receive light Iranian oil in the Persian Gulf. (Interfax-Kazakhstan)

IRAN SHARES RUSSIA'S CONCERN ABOUT CASPIAN PIPELINES

29 April

Iran shares Russia's concern about the possible construction of pipelines on the Caspian seabed, Iranian Ambassador to

Kazakhstan Murzato Saffori told Interfax. "Iran shares Russia's opinion about the possible construction of pipelines on the Caspian seabed, which Deputy Foreign Minister Viktor Kalyuzhny has made public," he said. "The catastrophic consequences of earthquakes in the sea is the main reason why Russia objects to laying trans-Caspian trunk pipelines," Kalyuzhny said at an international conference on the politics, economy and business of the Caspian Sea in Astana on Wednesday. Iran thinks that the project would only be possible if all the parties provide for the project's technical and ecological safety and get the approval of the five Caspian nations, Saffori said. (Interfax-Kazakhstan)

MANDATES OF EXILED ABKHAZ PARLIAMENTARIANS REVOKED

30 April

After a four-hour discussion, the Georgian parliament's judicial and procedure committees jointly ruled on 30 April to annul the mandates of 10 Georgian deputies elected in late 1991 to the parliament of Abkhazia, and who since the end of the 1992-1993 civil war have been ex officio deputies of the Georgian parliament. Those 10 seats in the Georgian parliament will remain vacant until the central government restores its control over the breakaway Republic of Abkhazia. (Caucasus Press)

AZERBAIJAN'S FM LIFTS VEIL ON NAGORNO-KARABAKH TALKS

30 April

Azerbaijan and Armenia, which are locked in conflict over the disputed territory of Nagorno-Karabakh, are discussing a deal under which Armenian forces would cede territory in exchange for the re-opening of a rail link between their two countries, the Azeri foreign minister said. "We are discussing various ideas, including the option of opening the railway with Armenia in exchange for it pulling back from the seven districts of Azerbaijan it has occupied," Foreign Minister Elmar Mamedyarov told reporters. He added: "The subject of our negotiations right now is how ready the sides are to make compromises." The railway-for-land swap was initially proposed by the European Union as a way of resolving the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh, which has poisoned relations between the two former Soviet republics for more than a decade. Azerbaijan and Armenia fought a war over the mountainous enclave in the early 1990s, which left some 35,000 people dead and forced a million others on both sides to flee their homes. A ceasefire was signed in 1994, leaving Armenian forces in de facto control of the enclave. But the war has never been formally declared over. Peace talks to find a lasting solution have faltered, despite mediation by the international community. The remarks by the Azeri foreign minister partly lifted the veil on peace talks, which are being held in strict secrecy. Details of what the two sides are discussing are very rarely revealed to the public. Mamedyarov said the next round of talks would be in the French city of Strasbourg on May 12, when he is to meet Armenian

counterpart Vardan Oskanian on the sidelines of a Council of Europe meeting. He said they would pick up the discussions started by Azerbaijan's President Ilham Aliyev and his Armenian counterpart Robert Kocharian, who met for talks this week while attending a conference in the Polish capital, Warsaw. The railway line under discussion has been closed ever since the conflict first flared up, some 15 years ago. It remained shut after the fighting ceased as part of an economic embargo imposed by Azerbaijan. It links Armenia to Azerbaijan and also to Russia, a key Armenian ally and trading partner. The re-opening of the route would ease the impact of the economic embargo on Armenia. The seven districts which figure in the proposed deal are not part of Nagorno-Karabakh. They were seized by Armenian forces during the war to provide a buffer zone against a possible attack by Azeri troops. (AFP)

KAZAKH MINISTER SAYS CENTRAL ASIA INTEGRATION 'UNLIKELY'

30 April

Foreign Minister Qasymzhomart Toqayev said on 30 April that integration among Central Asian countries is "unlikely to take place in the near future." The remarks came at the fifth session of the Foreign Ministry's Council for Foreign Policy. Toqayev noted that integration requires similar levels of structural development, a desire for integration, and an enormous amount of work. He concluded that Central Asian countries are not yet prepared for this. Nevertheless, Toqayev termed the Single Economic Space "the first real integration [effort] in the former Soviet Union." Toqayev also said that U.S. military bases in Central Asia are "a natural addition to the other U.S. presence -- economic and political." Additionally, Toqayev thanked the United States for eliminating the Taliban regime. Finally, Toqayev observed that Russia is "making a major effort to direct investments to the economies of virtually all post-Soviet countries." (Interfax-Kazakhstan)

PRO-ISLAMIC GROUP FORMS IN STATE DUMA

30 April

A new inter-factional deputies' association has been created in the State Duma called Russia and the Islamic World: A Strategic Dialogue. Association co-Chairman Shamil Sultanov (Motherland) announced the group's formation at a press conference on 28 April. The group reportedly has 45 members, including Yurii Savelev (Motherland) and Albert Makashov (Communist). Savelev is the former director of St. Petersburg's Military Technological Institute, which was included on a U.S. "blacklist" for alleged unsanctioned military cooperation with Iran, according to the website. General Makashov is perhaps best known for anti-Semitic statements on the floor of the Duma. According to Sultanov, the group brings together all legislators who understand that today it is the Islamic world -- not the West -- that is interested in a strong Russia and is therefore Russia's natural partner. Nothing was said at the press conference with regard

to the association's concrete plans, the website reported. (regions.ru)

POLICE TARGET OPPOSITION IN AZERBAIJANI EXCLAVE

1 May

Police in the Azerbaijani exclave of Nakhichevan have intensified their harassment of opposition politicians in the wake of last week's announcement of the creation of a Center for Democratic Development (DIM) comprising the regional organizations of several prominent opposition parties. On 28 April, two men abducted and beat up a member of the Azerbaijan Popular Front Party, and the following day a Nakhichevan police official visited the DIM headquarters in Nakhichevan and warned activists to abandon their activities and stop publicizing negative political developments in the region. (Turan)

UZBEKISTAN RECEIVES \$516,600 IN U.S. EQUIPMENT AID

1 May

Uzbekistan's Defense Ministry, State Customs Committee, and Border Troops received \$516,600 in equipment from the United States in a 30 April ceremony. The aid comes from the U.S. State Department under the aegis of the Export Control and Related Border Security program and the Aviation/Interdiction Project. The online newspaper quoted U.S. Ambassador Jon Purnell as saying, "Cooperation between Uzbekistan and the United States is multifaceted, and the military aspect is especially significant. We provide assistance to our Uzbek partners to combat terrorism, drug trafficking, and illegal weapons trading." Uzbek Deputy Defense Minister Rustam Niyazov noted that the "high level of military cooperation between our countries maintains stability and security in the region." Another shipment of \$600,000 worth of equipment is also scheduled for 2004; and in 2005, Uzbekistan will receive two helicopter trainers worth a combined \$6.5 million and two patrol boats totaling \$5.8 million. (tribune.uz)

AFGHAN TANKER EXPLOSION KILLS 31

2 May

At least 31 people have been killed and many others injured after an explosion involving a fuel tanker in western Afghanistan, officials say. The incident happened in the town of Azizabad, about 650km west of Kabul, in the Shindand district of Herat. The explosion, believed to have been an accident, hit a busy area of shops and restaurants on the road between Herat city and Kandahar. The death toll is expected to rise, a security official in Herat city said. The blast was so powerful, according to officials, that several buildings were destroyed. The tanker is reported to have been carrying thousands of litres of gas when it exploded around 1400 local time (0930 GMT). There are different accounts as to how it happened. General Ziauddin Mahrudin, the security commander for Herat, told the BBC it was caused by a fire in a welding shop near where the tanker had parked. An

investigation is underway, but he said initial indications are that it was an accident. With limited medical facilities in the immediate area, many casualties have been taken to Herat, 100km to the north. Aid agencies in the region with medical expertise have been offering to assist. (BBC)

ADJAR LEADER ORDERS DESTRUCTION OF BORDER BRIDGES

2 May

On orders from Adjar leader Aslan Abashidze, two bridges linking his autonomous republic with the rest of Georgia were blown up on 2 May. Abashidze argued that the move was necessary in the light of the largescale maneuvers by the Georgian military that began on the Georgian side of the order two days earlier, and which he feared presage military aggression against Adjara. Adjar opposition leader Tamaz Diasamidze said on 2 May that Abashidze also ordered that railway tracks from Georgia to Adjara be dismantled on the Adjar side of the internal border. (Caucasus Press)

SAAKASHVILI CONFIRMS BRIDGE BLOWN ON AJARIAN BORDER

2 May

Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili told journalists aboard the warship Kutaisi that "illegal armed formations have blasted the bridge across the Choloki river." "I would recommend that Aslan Abashidze refrain from provocations. The Georgian authorities do not plan to use force against Ajaria," Saakashvili said. The Ajarian Interior Ministry confirmed the demolition of the bridge, adding that they had no information on who was responsible for the blast. No one was injured in the explosion, the ministry said. Georgia's Imedi television reported earlier that armed formations controlled by Abashidze had blown bridges near Ajaria's administrative border with Georgia. Imedi said that bridges had been destroyed on the Choloki river and in the Kobuleti district. (Interfax)

AJARIA ORDERS REBUILDING BRIDGE ON BORDER WITH GEORGIA

3 May

The authorities of Georgia's Ajaria region on Monday ordered the rebuilding of one of the bridges on the Georgian-Ajarian border that Ajaria blew up on Sunday. A team of carpenters will finish the pedestrian bridge across the Choloki river by Tuesday morning, the Ajarian Interior Ministry told Interfax. "There's nothing difficult about restoring the bridges that have been blown up, but blowing them up averted provocation and loss of life," Ajarian Interior Minister Jemal Gogitidze told reporters on Monday. On Sunday, Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili gave Ajaria ten days "to return to the Georgian constitutional space" and begin disarming armed groups declared illegal by Georgia. He threatened to disband the Ajarian authorities if the demands were not met. "This is the tenth time President Saakashvili has given such ultimatums to Ajaria," Gogitidze said. "[Ajarian leader] Aslan Abashidze has taken steps toward a

compromise, but each concession is followed by new demands from Tbilisi. This is unacceptable not only to us but to the whole of Georgia." (Interfax)

UZBEK PRESIDENT URGES GREATER PARTY ACTIVISM

3 May

In an address to parliament on 30 April, President Islam Karimov berated Uzbek political parties for failing to take a more active role in the country's political life, Uzbek Radio reported the same day. Karimov said, "We have five political parties.... Why don't you even say a word against each other?... The collision of ideas will certainly lead to justice and truth. If there is no struggle between ideas, then why do we need five parties?" The remarks reinforced comments Karimov made at a 29 April press conference. Uzbek Radio quoted him as saying, "These parties have no independent platform or ideology and, regrettably, are still weak in terms of winning the hearts and minds of ordinary people." (RFE/RL)

INTERNATIONAL EXPERTS LAUD TAJIK MEDIA PROGRESS

3 May

Representatives from the UN Tajikistan Office for Peace-Building, the OSCE, and Russia's Glasnost Foundation noted at a 3 May forum on the occasion of World Press Freedom Day that Tajikistan has taken "a step forward toward freedom of the press." They stressed, however, that much work remains to be done. Zafar Saidov, director of Tajikistan's Khovar national news agency, praised a presidential decree exempting the media from the value-added tax. "Now freedom of the media and speech, in the broad sense of the word, is at a sufficiently firm level compared with previous stages," Saidov said. (ITAR-TASS)

AZERBAIJANI OPPOSITIONIST ARRESTED

3 May

Musavat party activist Seyidali Mamedov was arrested late on 2 May and remanded in pretrial detention. He is charged with participating in the clashes between police and opposition supporters in Baku on 15-16 October in the wake of the disputed presidential election and with obstructing state officials. On 3 May, the Baku municipal authorities refused a request by the Musavat party for permission to picket the Justice Ministry to protest the continued detention of seven opposition politicians arrested in October although their term of pretrial detention expired last month (Turan)

RUMORS OF REPORTS OF RUSSIA'S DISINTEGRATION GREATLY EXAGGERATED

3 May

Russian newspapers carried on 28 and 29 April reactions to a December 2000 report by the CIA's U.S. National Intelligence Council, which allegedly forecast that Russia could break up into six or eight separate countries by 2015. In a message posted on "Johnson's Russia List" on 2 May,

George Kolt, a retired CIA official with responsibility from Russia, denied that the report made any such forecast and he alleged that the first report of such a prediction appeared in "Nezavisimaya gazeta." Despite the lack of an actual forecast, Russian media managed to get a wealth of reaction to the prediction. In an interview with "Izvestiya" on 29 April, Dmitrii Orlov of the Agency for Political and Economic Communications said there have been and will continue to be such reports from the CIA, in part because the conservative part of the Republican Party is interested in seeing Russia as weak as possible. Orlov added that he does not agree with "such alarmists," claiming that the head of the same department said on the site four years ago that Russia would disintegrate. State Duma Speaker Boris Gрызlov on 28 April categorically rejected the possibility of the Russian Federation breaking up. He argued that "a lot had been done over the last four years to strengthen vertical power" and that Russian state has been "strengthened." (RFE/RL)

ARMENIA, AZERBAIJAN COUNT COSTS OF DISRUPTED TRANSPORT VIA GEORGIA

4 May

The Armenian government on 3 May sought to reroute 63 freight cars carrying fuel and other commodities bound for Armenia that are currently stranded in the Georgian port of Batumi following the destruction on 2 May of bridges and rail

lines linking Adjara with the rest of Georgia, Transport and Communications Minister Andranik Manukian told RFE/RL's Armenian Service. On 4 May, the independent Azerbaijani daily "Ekho" estimated Azerbaijan's losses due to the temporary impossibility of shipping crude oil via Georgia to Batumi for export at \$200,000 per day. (RFE/RL)

201ST DIVISION COULD LEAVE TAJIKISTAN, RUSSIAN LEGISLATOR SAYS

4 May

Mikhail Margelov, chairman of Russia's Federation Council International Relations Committee, told Ekho Moskvyy radio station on 3 May that Moscow might decide to withdraw its 201st Motorized Infantry Division from Tajikistan. "Under the conditions that have arisen today, the deployment of large, fully mobilized Russian military contingents abroad is not always justified," Margelov said. He also predicted a serious discussion in parliament if the executive branch decides to withdraw the 201st Division from Tajikistan. According to Margelov, Russia could decide to pull out the 201st Division, which numbers some 6,000 men and has been deployed in Tajikistan since the Soviet era, because Tajikistan is setting unacceptable conditions for its continued deployment. Russia had hoped to turn the deployment into a permanent military base, but talks with Tajikistan have stalled, apparently over financial issues. (RFE/RL)

