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BIWEEKLY BRIEFING

Wednesday/September 8, 2004

ANALYTIC ARTICLES:**FLAWED ELECTIONS AND THE CONFLICT IN CHECHNYA.....3***Murad Batal al-Shishani*

The elections held in Chechnya on August 29, 2004 followed the assassination of former pro-Moscow president Ahmad Kadyrov in a May bomb attack. Alu Alkhanov, who was nominated by the Kremlin, won the elections to become the head of the Chechen Administration. The election was immediately overshadowed by the tragic hostage-taking acts in Beslan, North Ossetia. Yet these elections carry no hope of promoting peace in Chechnya. The campaign of the new president indicated that he will adopt the same policy as his predecessor's in running the Republic, which was based on escalating the conflict rather than easing it. As already seems to be the case, these elections could lead to more violence than before.

RUMSFELD AND THE CAUCASUS: AMERICA'S DEEPENING INVOLVEMENT IN THE SOUTH CAUCASUS CONFLICTS.....5*Stephen Blank*

Even without terrorism, there would be more than enough reason to fear that the South Caucasus might erupt in violent conflict and endanger the interests of all those powers who have significant interests there. Turkey seeks to internationalize the peacekeeping contingents now operating in the South Caucasus and Russian observers fear that NATO is gearing up to intervene in the Georgian-South Ossetian crisis. Recently, the man in the middle of Washington's watchful solicitude for American interests has been Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld. In meetings in Washington with Georgian President Mikhail Saakashvili and in Baku with President Ilham Aliyev, Rumsfeld has sought to reinforce and secure Washington's position and interests in the South Caucasus.

CADRE CHANGES IN AZERBAIJAN: HOW FAR AND HOW FAST?.....7*Fariz Ismailzade*

After Ilham Aliyev's election to the presidency in October 2003, many foreign and domestic observers hoped that the election of a young president would mean fast cadre changes in the governing administration and speed up the political and economic reforms in the country. Although taking a slower pace in cadre changes than expected, Ilham Aliyev, has already replaced several ministers, refuting speculations that he was not committed to making changes. Yet the gradual pace of change of the old cabinet puts the members of the "old guard" under pressure and increases the risk of a split within the ruling elite. How to bring his own reform-minded loyalists to power while not upsetting conservatives will remain a dilemma for Aliyev.

KARACHAGANAK GAS AND THE FUTURE OF KAZAKHSTAN'S PIPELINE SYSTEM.....9*Robert M. Cutler*

The supergiant Karachaganak energy field, onshore in northwestern Kazakhstan, sends gas for processing over the Russian border to a processing plant Orenburg operated by Gazprom. Production is slated to increase. The joint operators of the Karachaganak gas venture, BG and ENI, together with the Government of Kazakhstan, are considering building a plant on-site in Karachaganak to process the new volumes. Gazprom argues against this and is trying to offer incentives to send the gas instead to an expanded Orenburg plant. The eventual decision, coming soon, will have significant implications for how Kazakhstan's national pipeline system develops in the future.

FIELD REPORTS:**TURKMENISTAN: THE XIIIth ANNIVERSARY OF NIYAZOV'S PRESIDENCY.....4***Chemen Dirdiyeva***THE GLOBAL FUND LAUNCHED A US\$17 MILLION PROGRAM TO FIGHT AIDS IN KYRGYZSTAN.....6***Aziz Soltobaev***REACHING FOR THE MOON: KAZAKHSTAN LAUNCHES SPECTACULAR SPACE PROGRAM.....8***Marat Yermukanov***SOUTH OSSETIA JOURNAL, PART I: CONFLICT ZONE RESIDENTS BEGIN TO RETURN.....10***Theresa Freese***NEWS BITES.....11**

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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FLAWED ELECTIONS AND THE CONFLICT IN CHECHNYA

Murad Batal al-Shishani

The elections held in Chechnya on August 29, 2004 followed the assassination of former pro-Moscow president Ahmad Kadyrov in a May bomb attack. Alu Alkhanov, who was nominated by the Kremlin, won the elections to become the head of the Chechen Administration. The election was immediately overshadowed by the tragic hostage-taking acts in Beslan, North Ossetia. Yet these elections carry no hope of promoting peace in Chechnya. The campaign of the new president indicated that he will adopt the same policy as his predecessor's in running the Republic, which was based on escalating the conflict rather than easing it. As already seems to be the case, these elections could lead to more violence than before.

BACKGROUND: 47-year old Alu Alkhanov was Minister of Interior in Kadyrov's government. A bureaucrat and former transport police chief, Alkhanov was, unlike Kadyrov, never an advocate of Chechnya's independence. After Chechen fighters defeated the Russian forces in 1996, Alkhanov left Chechnya to work in the local police department of a small Russian village close to Ukraine. He returned to Chechnya when Russian forces entered Chechnya in 1999, and was appointed Minister of Interior in Ahmad Kadyrov's Administration.

Kadyrov and Alkhanov were both backed by Russia and the Kremlin. Their political agendas were similar: to crush armed groups (that is, the Chechen resistance), fight extremism and corruption, establish a market economy in Chechnya, counter unemployment (figures reach 70%) and use Chechen oil money, keeping it apart from the Russian general Budget, through increasing oil production from 2 million tons to 5 million tons yearly. This would add 3 billion rubles (US\$100 million) to the Chechen treasury. Kadyrov made this demand, but it was never granted by Moscow until now. In addition, both men are from the Tsep tribe, which explains why Alkhanov, like Kadyrov, received 90% of votes in some areas where there are concentrations of members of their tribe. The last and most important similarity between the two is their adamant refusal to negotiate with the Chechen resistance.

These similarities could be attributed to the fact that they both adopt the pro-Russian policy in Chechnya.

Despite all this, there are basic disparities between them that are sure to impact the policies of Chechnya's new pro-Russian president. As *The Economist* noted, "Mr. Alkhanov is a bureaucrat and policeman, not the mixture of politician, father figure, bandit and warlord that his late boss was, and which anyone hoping to pacify Chechnya by force would need to be." In addition to that, Kadyrov was a religious person who represented "Official Islam" in Russia, sought legitimacy on that basis, and tried to play role in promoting Russia's foreign policy in the Islamic world. Finally, he at least had a history with the resistance, unlike Alkhanov, who is completely opposed to independence and was never involved with the national movement.

IMPLICATIONS: These differences will play a major role in Alkhanov's policies on three levels: his relationship with the Chechen resistance; his international relations and the global acceptance he receives; and finally, his relationship with Kadyrov's son, Ramzan Kadyrov. His attitude on these issues will show whether his election will make a difference towards peace in Chechnya or not.

His relationship with the Chechen resistance is clear from the statements made by the two parties. Alkhanov's first statement after his election was that he thought it unlikely that he would hold negotiations with the separatist Chechen president and resistance leader Aslan Maskhadov, and said that granting Maskhadov any legitimacy is an "illusion". On the other hand, the Chechen president Aslan Maskhadov has vowed that anyone succeeding Kadyrov will face the same fate. He stated in a special interview with Free Europe Radio that the elections were not legitimate and were conducted under occupation. His deputy, Ahmad Zakayev, compared the voting process to "a ghetto in Warsaw or a Stalin concentration camp." It was never likely that Alkhanov – and with him Russia – would contemplate to deal with the Chechen resistance, which in its turn refuses to deal with a "collaborating" government. If anything, the tragic carnage at Beslan will close any such avenues for the foreseeable future.

As for Alkhanov's relationships internationally, the election received a lot of criticism from human rights organizations and non-government organizations, as was the case with the March 2002 elections which brought Kadyrov to power. As in 2002, 200,000 out of the 587,000 registered voters are not alive.

Other organizations said the elections were a sham and a travesty. The official election commission said that 24,000 of the Russian military cast their votes, while other unbiased observers said the number reached 80,000). Furthermore, U.S. State Department spokesman Richard Boucher was skeptical about the elections and said they did not meet international standards. It will remain doubtful whether the West will grant legitimacy to a president who won in a questionable election process. This will undermine Alkhanov, and although Kadyrov went through the same thing, he used his religious credentials to gain the support of the Islamic World, as exemplified by his visit to Saudi Arabia.

The third and most dangerous level is Alkhanov's relationship with Ramzan Kadyrov, in reality the powerful man in the Republic thanks to his well-armed militias. Probably due to his young age, Russia made him Deputy Prime Minister instead of putting him on the ballot. Some suggest Alkhanov's presidency may be simply superficial, pending Ramzan reaching the eligible age for the presidency of Chechnya. In his last visit, Putin made it a point to meet with Ramzan Kadyrov in confirmation of Russia's reliance on him.

In spite of sharing Moscow's patronage and the same tribal origin, Alkhanov and Kadyrov Jr. may run into a conflict of interest over oil, as Chechnya's oil revenues will – theoretically – go back to Chechnya rather than to the Federal treasury. Most of the corruption in Chechnya is based on oil deals. Moreover, Alkhanov will not be able to disarm Ramzan Kadyrov's militias although he might desire to, having recently criticized Ramzan and his armed groups.

CONCLUSIONS: Based on the above-mentioned points, it does not seem that Alkhanov will offer any change to the current Russian policy. If anything, his election indicates a Russian persistence in the “Chechenization” the conflict. The zero-sum relationship between the resistance and this

kind of government will witness repeated cycles of violence. Furthermore, the possibilities of conflict between Alkhanov and Kadyrov, Jr. do exist and could emerge. All this will have negative consequences on the state of a Republic torn by conflict over ever-diminishing resources due to the years of war Chechnya witnessed.

It has become clear that Moscow's “electoral solution” in Chechnya and persistent refusal to deal with the legitimate Chechen government represented by Aslan Maskhadov is going nowhere. It also seems that the interests of those who wish to sustain the no-peace, no-war situation, or in other words chaos, in Chechnya fit with this kind of elections. All indicators show that the course of conflict is moving towards escalation – not normalization or a search for real solutions to the conflict and its social and economic ramifications for civilians.

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).

TURKMENISTAN: THE XIIth ANNIVERSARY OF NIYAZOV'S PRESIDENCY

June 21 marked another big milestone in Turkmenistan – the twelfth anniversary of Saparmyrat Niyazov's Presidency. As the anniversary approached, it was met with nationwide festivities, official ceremonies and the President's briefing with a number of agencies.

Saparmyrat Ataevich Niyazov was officially elected as the first President of Turkmenistan in June 21, 1992 and has been in office ever since. At the session of *Khalk Maslahaty* (People's Council), the highest body of popular representation, Niyazov was reelected as life-term President in 1999, and subsequent constitutional amendments were adopted to eternalize his presidential term. The People's Council, under the chairmanship of Mr. Niyazov, holds annual sessions where it proposes recommendations to the executive branch on further social, economical and political development of Turkmenistan.

On June 19, amongst the nationwide preparations for the twelfth anniversary, an International Conference entitled “Ever Great Saparmyrat Turkmenbashi – the Turkmen's Golden Century's President” took place in the *Mekan* palace in Ashgabat. Representatives of the *Mejlis* (legislature of Turkmenistan), the Cabinet of Ministers, and observers from foreign embassies, organizations, scholars and university lecturers participated in the conference. Participants such as Amangeldi Rejepov, the *hakim* (governor) of the capital city Ashgabat highlighted the increasing number of new buildings, fountains, and roads that have been built under the tutelage of Turkmenbashi. In his speech,

the rector of the Institute of Culture also accentuated the President's policies to revive Turkmen history, culture, traditions and also noted that purifying the mind of Turkmen youth takes a special part in presidential policies. As a result of the conference, the presenters bowed to Niyazov's policies, reforms and vowed to follow his path to lead Turkmenistan with a separate way of development claimed to be dissimilar different from those of its neighbors.

The deputies of *Mejlis* sent an official letter of congratulations to Mr. Niyazov as well. The letter stressed a number of key issue areas where Turkmenistan has achieved tangible results within the years of independence. Within this context, Turkmenbashi's foreign policy, congruent with the status of neutrality, stable domestic policies, and high productivity under the guise of a Ten Year Prosperity Program, were highly evaluated. The deputies also extolled the growing trade relations between Turkmenistan and Russia, the U.S., Turkey, and neighboring countries such as Iran, Uzbekistan, and Afghanistan. Turkmenistan's GDP growth of 21% for the last six months distinguishing it among CIS countries was a remarkable point to pause at.

On the occasion of his twelfth anniversary, a monument of Niyazov was also erected in his honor in front of the building of *Mejlis*. However, the President himself did not participate in the opening ceremony. In addition, a gala concert was also organized in the *Ruhyyet* palace as a part of the nationwide festivities. Distinguished national

singers expressed their congratulations to the President through their poems, songs and plays on the stage of the palace, with roughly 3,000 people in attendance. Turkmenbashi's poems such as “*Gownum*” (My Soul) were sung to a song the first time during the ceremony. Besides, a grand fountain, reminiscent of mountain nature was opened in front of the Gorogly highway in Ashgabat. The width of the fountain is 40 meters and the circulation capacity is 730 cubic meters of water.

In the pace of all celebrations in the country, President Niyazov also held a session of the Cabinet of Ministers on the day of his anniversary. Among other issues, Turkmenbashi spoke about the pace of development Turkmenistan is going through, the busy wheat harvesting and Turkmenistan's foreign relations with foreign and neighboring countries. He said some people abroad think Turkmenistan is a “closed society” and utterly rejected it by referring to the country's good standing in its political, economical and cultural relations with other countries. During the course of the meeting, he also gave a hint that he might announce the date for next presidential elections in the coming thirteenth session of the Peoples Council. Earlier, he said that elections could possibly be held in 2008. At the end of the session, he expressed his gratitude for all the congratulations sent and festivities organized on the occasion.

Chemem Durdiyeva

RUMSFELD AND THE CAUCASUS: AMERICA'S DEEPENING INVOLVEMENT IN THE SOUTH CAUCASUS CONFLICTS

Stephen Blank

Even without terrorism, there would be more than enough reason to fear that the South Caucasus might erupt in violent conflict and endanger the interests of all those powers who have significant interests there. Turkey seeks to internationalize the peacekeeping contingents now operating in the South Caucasus and Russian observers fear that NATO is gearing up to intervene in the Georgian-South Ossetian crisis. Recently, the man in the middle of Washington's watchful solicitude for American interests has been Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld. In meetings in Washington with Georgian President Mikhail Saakashvili and in Baku with President Ilham Aliyev, Rumsfeld has sought to reinforce and secure Washington's position and interests in the South Caucasus.

BACKGROUND: U.S. interests in the South Caucasus include thanking both Georgia and Azerbaijan, the only Muslim country with forces in Iraq, for their support of the U.S. invasion there. But much more is at stake than expressions of gratitude. Rumsfeld clearly aims to strengthen the U.S. military programs to train and equip the Georgian Army, which evidently were extended owing to his conversations with Saakashvili, and to defend Azerbaijan's coastline. These programs provide the basis for future bilateral or multilateral cooperation of these armies with the U.S. military or with NATO. They are also the centerpiece of any hope for reform of Georgia's defense structures, a prerequisite for realizing the regime's great goal of inclusion in NATO.

Rumsfeld's discussions with Saakashvili undoubtedly worked out the modalities of continuing this program and ensuring its funding. Rumsfeld and his colleagues at the State Department also evidently were instrumental in persuading Georgia to resume work on the Baku-Ceyhan pipeline, which had been stopped due to environmental concerns. Work was only resumed after high-ranking State Department officials personally vouched for its environmental security and steps were taken to allay Georgian concerns. But it is also possible that the threat of the suspension of the pipeline's construction was used to induce the United States to support Georgia's position in the dispute with Russia over South Ossetia. Undoubtedly this crisis also lay at the center of Rumsfeld's discussions.

While Colin Powell called for mediation of the crisis, both Tbilisi and Moscow regularly appear to be acting in ways that alternate provocation and moderation, and not always in well thought out ways. On both sides, there has been plenty of bellicose rhetoric, coupled with local acts of violence and covert Russian attempts at violence or support for separatists that were, as is almost always the case, found out, which only inflamed matters further.

IMPLICATIONS: Georgia is already spending millions that it can ill afford on weapons. Whether this spending is for defense against Russian or Russian-supported forces or is intended to threaten separatists, it appears that only through Washington's facilitation of negotiation is a peaceful

resolution possible. This fact underscores the centrality of the U.S. presence in the area to the preservation of peace and America's beneficial impact upon the habitually tense Russo-Georgian relationship. But secretaries Rumsfeld and Powell's intervention also underscores the need for Moscow and Tbilisi to avoid provocative and poorly conceived actions that may play well at home but lead to an irretrievable tragedy for all parties. And, in fact, we cannot count on either actor to avoid the temptation to score quick or cheap points that only escalate tensions further.

Azerbaijan also presents problems for Washington, not least because of the stalemated war with Armenia over Nagorno-Karabakh which shows no sign of coming closer to political resolution even as Aliyev's government ratchets up the belligerent rhetoric and play to the large refugee population in Azerbaijan. Increasing numbers of people in Baku feel that despite all the help it has given Washington, America has not helped provide an answer to the problem. This view overlooks the fact that without a decent army of its own Azerbaijan cannot compel Armenia to yield, and goes hand in hand with the dangerous stimulation of belligerent rhetoric that the Aliyev government has fostered. But at the same time both Iran and Russia oppose extension of Baku's military collaboration with Washington and if America cannot help Azerbaijan with Armenia, Aliyev may feel he has no choice but to turn to those two countries for help. After all, both also dispose of formidable means of inciting internal unrest inside Azerbaijan and have not shrunk from doing so in the past. That potential leverage is obviously another reason for Aliyev to harken to them rather than Washington.

Certainly Iran has in the past tried not just to restrict and curtail America's military presence but also to incite agitation for an Islamic regime there. Moscow has played at coups against the governments in Baku that have ruled since 1991, including that of Aliyev's late father, Heydar Aliyev, and remains the nearest great power even if some analysts charge that a subterranean Irano-Russian rivalry is taking place and that Tehran believes that Russia is in long-term retreat.

Undoubtedly Aliyev and his government seek the kind of assistance that Washington has given Georgia in defending its sovereignty against Russia as well as more tangible assistance

against Armenia. But failing to get it, Aliyev has turned to Russia, China, and Pakistan for support. Islamabad has previously promised defense cooperation, i.e. arms sales and training for Azeri officers. China also provides such training and has improved its defense and energy profile in Azerbaijan by also buying into Azeri oil projects.

Thus Rumsfeld apparently hurriedly included Azerbaijan in his itinerary of trips to Oman, Afghanistan, Russia, and Ukraine. Rumsfeld's talks with Aliyev ostensibly revolved around issues of defense or security cooperation between Baku and Washington, which may also include a potential base for U.S. forces down the road. But there is good reason to believe that pressure is also building upon Washington to launch an initiative to unblock the frozen status quo regarding Nagorno-Karabakh. Washington may be the only capital that has the means to launch such an initiative and the credibility to see it through, but that is by no means a foregone conclusion. Neither is the success of any American initiative to be taken for granted because there are so many factors and actors who might act individually or conspire to frustrate any American initiative.

CONCLUSIONS: All signs of growing U.S. involvement as a critical actor and security manager for the area indicate the

depth of America's interests, and involvement in the South Caucasus and the fact that this involvement could lead to further entanglements, if not causes for estrangement, with Tehran, Moscow and other capitals. Now that Washington has become a legitimate security manager for the South Caucasus, if not the premier foreign player there, it must reckon with all the dimensions of this region's security dilemmas and agendas.

Nobody should think that these can be anything other than long-term and protracted responsibilities. Rumsfeld's visit, not the first he made to this area, will probably not be the last made by him or by future Secretaries of Defense and State.

Washington is in the Caucasus to stay, but it is not clear whether it can do better than all those who have tried in the past to master the region and who would gladly try to supplant it today.

AUTHOR'S BIO: Professor Stephen Blank, Strategic Studies Institute, US Army War College, Carlisle Barracks, PA 17013. The views expressed here do not represent those of the US Army, Defense Department, or the US Government.

THE GLOBAL FUND LAUNCHED A US\$17 MILLION PROGRAM TO FIGHT AIDS IN KYRGYZSTAN

The Global Fund against AIDS, TB and malaria, headquartered in Bishkek, began last March with a problematic entry into the donor community. A January press release about the Global Fund's intention to launch a campaign against HIV/AIDS (with the largest budget to date for such a program) inadvertently led other regional donors to halt their financing of similar projects in Kyrgyzstan.

"It turned out that other donors began cutting their support before our operations had even begun. As a result, a two month financing gap appeared. Finally, we had to conduct negotiations with donors, particularly the Soros Foundation, to prolong project financing and come to a common understanding", stated Country Project Manager Talgat Subanbaev. Kyrgyzstan is widely considered to be a key drug transit route between Afghanistan and Russia (with Europe often being the final destination). The number of drug users in Kyrgyzstan is estimated by the UNODC to be 50,000 – or roughly 1% of the population. Since its sovereignty, the Kyrgyz government has failed to protect itself from drug trafficking in general – and the subsequent increase of intravenous drug use in particular. The spread of the use of heroin in Kyrgyzstan and created an urgent demand for increased drug treatment and prevention programs – particularly ones targeted

at preventing the spread of HIV infection. The Kyrgyz government itself has lacked the resources necessary to tackle this problem and has relied almost entirely on the international community for support and assistance in this area.

Previous efforts to tackle this problem, before the Global Fund arrived, were generally piecemeal, pilot projects with short-term perspectives and generally lacking sound, cohesive strategies (a now reoccurring criticism of the donor community in general in Kyrgyzstan).

"We have a concrete task to reach 15% of all intravenous drug users (7,500 people) by the end of the second year of our activity. Today only 6% of IDUs are being reached by outreach programs", said Subanbaev.

The first stage of the Global Fund's actions are targeted at reducing the spread of HIV infections by supporting HIV prophylactics programs, reducing youth vulnerability, and providing for greater security and screening of donated blood supplies.

The second stage targets assisting people presently living with AIDS. "We intend to buy generics of anti-retroviral (ARV) medicals. Unfortunately, the current criteria for patient selection to receive ARVs are a positive clinical

diagnosis by a central and state run laboratory. We have set a goal to reach 100% of all people that need this treatment," Subanbaev said – implying that cutting red-tape and decentralizing the diagnosis and registration process is a necessary step towards progress.

Sultan Mamytov, a member of the NGO "Rainbow" which focuses on HIV/AIDS prevention, stated that "If the Global Fund would support its Kyrgyzstan project at full funding, we could reach our HIV/AIDS reduction targets. Also the success of the project will depend on the work of the Coordination Committee, the Project Administration, and its executive team. At present, it's difficult to assess the role of Global Fund, because full-scale activity is yet to be observed".

Global Fund Portfolio Manager Valeriy Cherniavskiy, during his recent arrival to Kyrgyzstan, gave a high mark to the NGO's involvement; and stated his intention to accelerate the process of disseminating the second disbursement of funds (1.315 million USD) to continue working on this massive campaign. Global Fund is set to begin receiving these funds this month.

Aziz Soltobaev

CADRE CHANGES IN AZERBAIJAN: HOW FAR AND HOW FAST?

Fariz Ismailzade

After Ilham Aliyev's election to the presidency in October 2003, many foreign and domestic observers hoped that the election of a young president would mean fast cadre changes in the governing administration and speed up the political and economic reforms in the country. Although taking a slower pace in cadre changes than expected, Ilham Aliyev, has already replaced several ministers, refuting speculations that he was not committed to making changes. Yet the gradual pace of change of the old cabinet puts the members of the "old guard" under pressure and increases the risk of a split within the ruling elite. How to bring his own reform-minded loyalists to power while not upsetting conservatives will remain a dilemma for Aliyev.

BACKGROUND: When appointed prime minister of Azerbaijan in August 2003, Ilham Aliyev pledged to work with his father's team. In the short run, at least, he has kept his word. The unification of the ruling elite around Ilham Aliyev prevented the fragmentation of the ruling New Azerbaijan party (YAP) and made a relatively smooth transition from former President Heydar Aliyev's era into his son's possible.

Many international and domestic observers nevertheless expected that once elected to the presidency, Ilham Aliyev would bring his own cadre, typically younger, reform-minded individuals many of which have western education, to key governmental positions. In the past nine months, this process lagged behind expectations, as President Aliyev only made generally welcomed replacements of the ministers of communication and foreign affairs, and second-tier officials. This reflected, among other things, Azerbaijan's difficult and complex political landscape. Many started speculating that Aliyev is too dependent on his father's team and lacks the political power to replace it. But last month's sacking of influential Minister of National Security Namik Abbasov and his replacement with Ilham Aliyev's dynamic younger loyalist and former coordinator of national efforts to combat trafficking, Eldar Mahmudov, indicated a shift of priorities and showed Aliyev's commitment to the gradual cadre change policy. Furthermore, in accordance with Azerbaijani traditions, it has been deemed unlikely that Aliyev is going to make sharp moves until the one-year anniversary of his father's death.

The gradual replacement of the conservative "old guard" has put many influential members of the ruling elite under pressure. Lately, the rivalry and open confrontation among the members of the ruling party have intensified. YAP has been known for its internal rivalries for many years, as several competing groupings were united under the authority of former President Heydar Aliyev. Yet after Heydar Aliyev's death, intrigues within the party have taken an open form.

Earlier this year, several pro-governmental media outlets launched an attack against the Mayor of Baku, Hajibala Abutalibov, and the Ministers of Education and Health, Misir Mardanov and Ali Insanov, respectively. These officials were

said to be the political rivals of the Head of the Presidential Administration Ramiz Mehtiyev, which prompted many people to believe that Mehtiyev had been behind the media accusations. Later on, there were articles directed against Mehtiyev himself.

In addition to this, former mayor of Baku Rafael Allahverdiyev launched an attack against Mehtiyev and Abutalibov in the past several weeks, accusing them of corruption and disloyalty against President Aliyev. He went as far as saying that some members of the ruling party had been preparing a coup d'état against the President. These allegations received an immediate answer from Minister of the Internal Affairs Ramil Usubov, who said: "Who can carry out a coup? Nobody. There is no such force in Azerbaijan."

IMPLICATIONS: As the ruling elite gets engaged in a more overt rivalry for the re-distribution of political and economic influence in the country, President Aliyev will continue facing an increasing challenge of maintaining the balance of power between the competing groupings and refreshing the administration at the same time. On the one hand, he is following a careful approach of not upsetting all members of his father's administration at the same time. This is done in order to maintain stability in Azerbaijan and to avoid the creation of a new, more well-financed opposition in the face of the sacked ministers. Past experience shows that some of the sacked notoriously corrupt members of the ruling party, like former speaker of Parliament Rasul Guliyev, moved on to finance a political struggle against the regime. For this reason, President Aliyev needs to play a safe game.

At the same time, it is clear by now that President Aliyev will bring more and more of his own loyalists and younger reformers to power, probably more so after the Parliamentary elections of 2005, which are expected to change the composition of the conservative-dominated legislature. This makes some older members of the ruling party unhappy and nervous. They feel that they served the elder Aliyev loyally and that now, younger protégés of the new President are eager to push them aside. A redistribution of political and economic influence is indeed taking place in the country, as indicated by pressure on the business interests of some of the members of the ruling elite. This puts

members of the “old guard” in a defensive position. Media outlets have recently reported that some of the members of the “old team” have met privately to develop a strategy of creating a new party, which will unite sacked or unhappy members of the ruling elite.

One way President Aliyev may prevent the fragmentation of the ruling party is to keep the sacked ministers in the loop of the ruling elite by appointing them to the honorary positions, such as ambassador or president of a university. This was done with former minister of foreign affairs Vilayet Guliyev, for example. Others might be prevented from joining the opposition by threats of prosecution on charges of corruption. On the other hand, the new President, whose leadership style is less dominant than his father’s, may benefit from the elite’s internal rivalries, which provide the system with greater dynamism and himself with more room for maneuver.

CONCLUSIONS: President Ilham Aliyev’s power is still in the process of consolidation and in many ways, he still relies on the members of his father’s administration. From this perspective he can not afford to spoil relations with all of them at the same time. Nevertheless, he seems committed to cadre changes in the country and will probably replace several more ministers by the end of the year. Maintaining Azerbaijan’s stability will remain his first priority, however. At the same time, President Aliyev will have to continue to play a balancing game between the fractions of the ruling party, at least until parliamentary elections.

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REACHING FOR THE MOON: KAZAKHSTAN LAUNCHES SPECTACULAR SPACE PROGRAM

On August 27 a group of cosmonauts receiving training for future space flights in Russian space center arrived at Baikonur Cosmodrome in Kyzylorda region of Kazakhstan for two-day training courses. The group included two Kazakh trainees, Mukhtar Aimakhanov and Aidyn Aimbetov, who symbolize the implementation of the independent space project of Kazakhstan.

The Baikonur launch site is the object of dubious pride for Kazakhstan. Every time a Russian rocket is shot into space from Baikonur, Kazakh official media underlines that is blessed by god to have such a unique cosmodrome on its soil. But in reality everything indicates that the launch site belongs to Russia. Even the small town of Baikonur with 50,000 residents has an ambiguous status. Thousands of the inhabitants of the town have dual citizenship. Interior troops and law enforcement bodies in Baikonur are governed by the Russian and Kazakh Interior Ministries. Kazakh residents of Baikonur constantly complain that Russian administration neglect their social rights and living conditions.

Baikonur Cosmodrome was leased to Russia for twenty years under an agreement signed between the leaders of the two countries in 2000. Promises for cash-strapped Kazakhstan were very tempting. Russia took the obligation to pay an annual rent of \$115 million to use the launch site. The conclusion of the deal came amid strong protests from Kazakh nationalists who feared that the agreement was part of Russia’s scheme to expand its military presence in the country. They were supported by environmentalists who voiced concern over the growing pollution level in Kyzylorda region and the Aral Sea basin as the result of rocket launches. It is estimated that between 1964 and 1999, more than twenty rockets crashed over Kazakhstan, causing

disastrous environmental damages. In July 1999, the Kazakh government had to ban further launches of the Russian Progress cargo rockets from Baikonur Cosmodrome. The decision was precipitated by the explosion of the Proton rocket over central Kazakhstan, which scattered its debris across a vast area, contaminating pasture lands with deadly rocket fuel. These incidents were followed by a diplomatic row. Kazakhstan’s Foreign Ministry sent a note of protest to Russia and demanded the payment of outstanding debts of millions of dollars for the use of the launch site. In the course of high-level talks, the conflict was ultimately settled.

However deep Kazakh grievances over Baikonur may be, the government has to put up with Russian disregard for the laws of the country, at least for the next several years in the course of which Kazakhstan will develop its own space program. The attainment of this end would be impossible without Russian space technology and experience. Earlier, Kazakh nationals Tokhtar Aubakirov and Talgat Mussabayev took part in space missions composed of international crews, but they were regarded as Russian cosmonauts. Later they returned to Kazakhstan, but due to their advancing ages it is becoming increasingly problematic for them to participate in further flights. In 1994 it was suggested that Kazakhstan should train its own cosmonauts. Officials of the National Aerospace Agency of Kazakhstan had a series of talks with the Russians, seeking technical and theoretical assistance from Moscow. On November 9, 2002, four candidates were named by the selection committee as physically fit for space flights. They were sent to the space training center near Moscow. Aidyn Aimbetov and Mukhtar Aimakhanov are said to stand good chances to become the first Kazakh cosmonauts to be launched into space.

A part of the “Bayterek” (“Giant Poplar”) space program to be implemented in the years 2005 and 2007 is the planned launch of the first communication satellite of Kazakhstan in late 2005 or early 2006. This \$65 million project was developed in cooperation with Russian Khromichev Scientific and Production center. Kazakh government has announced that the satellite will be used exclusively for peaceful purposes, mainly to monitor the environment of the Caspian basin and crop yields. It is not ruled out, however, that the satellite will survey border areas of Kazakhstan.

It is obvious that this ambitious project, if implemented successfully, would place Kazakhstan as the first space nation in Central Asia and boost its sense of superiority. But the project is not just a matter of political image for the country. Analysts predict that Kazakhstan will reap huge profits from future commercial space flights. The question often asked by critics of the government plan is in what way can the population of the country can benefit from these flights in this corruption-ridden environment. As if to justify their doubt, a new corruption scandal broke out in Baikonur a few days ago. Investigations revealed that \$49 million reportedly paid by Russia for renting the cosmodrome have disappeared in an inexplicable way and have, to all probability, landed in the pockets of high placed Kazakh and Russian officials. The scandal caused a great stir in parliament and government. Some members of parliament sent a letter to Russian president Putin asking for assistance in clearing up the unprecedented case. Regrettably, it is a bad omen for Kazakhstan’s endeavor.

Marat Yermukanov

KARACHAGANAK GAS AND THE FUTURE OF KAZAKHSTAN'S PIPELINE SYSTEM

Robert M. Cutler

The supergiant Karachaganak energy field, onshore in northwestern Kazakhstan, sends gas for processing over the Russian border to a processing plant Orenburg operated by Gazprom. Production is slated to increase. The joint operators of the Karachaganak gas venture, BG and ENI, together with the Government of Kazakhstan, are considering building a plant on-site in Karachaganak to process the new volumes. Gazprom argues against this and is trying to offer incentives to send the gas instead to an expanded Orenburg plant. The eventual decision, coming soon, will have significant implications for how Kazakhstan's national pipeline system develops in the future.

BACKGROUND: The supergiant Karachaganak condensate and gas field, onshore in northwestern Kazakhstan was discovered in 1979. Production began in 1984. After Kazakhstan became independent, BG (formerly British Gas) and Agip acquired rights to negotiate its development. In 1995 they became joint operators of the field (later becoming ENI), and Gazprom also joined the group. Two years later Texaco, now part of ChevronTexaco, acquired a 20% share and Lukoil took over Gazprom's 15% share. Also in 1997 a definitive Production Sharing Agreement was signed.

In the Soviet era, the gas that was produced went over the Russian border to Orenburg. BG acquired a 2% stake in the Caspian Pipeline Consortium (CPC) when the latter was restructured in 1996. Liquids from Karachaganak began to flow through the CPC pipeline in early 2004 through a pipeline constructed to Atyrau. The field is estimated to be capable of producing 200,000 barrels per day (bpd) of oil. With Karachaganak oil now in the pipeline, CPC is ramping up its capacity to a half-million bpd, and Karachaganak will be the second largest supplier to the CPC.

In recent years, the gas has gone to Orenburg and travelled through the Russian pipeline system to the final consumer, more than half of it to Azerbaijan. The company KazRosGaz, a joint venture created in 2002 by Gazprom and Kazakhstan's KazMunaiGaz extracts raw gas from the Karachaganak field and processes it at Orenburg. In 2003 the quantity processed was 5.5 billion cubic meters (bcm) out of 9.5 bcm total Karachaganak gas production, and 7 bcm is the figure projected for 2004 out of 13 bcm total. The third phase of development of the Karachaganak gas field, which is about to begin, seeks to increase production but an additional 8 bcm.

But raw gas from Karachaganak has high sulfur content, so it cannot meet contractual specifications as to export quality. This, together with additional propane and butane in the gas, makes for economic losses to the operators, who have long sought to ameliorate the present situation, particularly since they plan to more than triple the current gas production level by the time Karachaganak peaks.

IMPLICATIONS: Consequently, the operators have for some time been studying a project to build a gas processing plant on the Karachaganak site itself. Such a plant would take sulfur out of the gas and stabilize the condensate. In its first stage it would treat about 4 bcm of gas per year. The plant would then expand to handle larger amounts of gas as production increases in the future. The project on the Karachaganak site, which the Kazakhstani government would appear to prefer if all other things were equal, would eventually be able to process up to 10 bcm annually.

Perhaps not surprisingly, the Gazprom executive team believes such a project to be ill-considered. The deputy chairman of Gazprom's board, Aleksandr Riazanov, has called it "rather expensive and currently not market-effective." Gazprom is in the very final stages of formulating a counterproposal to process an additional 8 bcm at Orenburg, equivalent to the projected increase in Karachaganak's gas production during phase three development about to being. According to Gazprom, such an expansion of Orenburg could be accomplished in a maximum of two years at one-quarter of Riazanov's estimated cost of construction the plant at Karachaganak. The Karachaganak on-site project, on the other and, is unlikely to begin construction before 2007. Current forecasts of Karachaganak's gas production see it holding fairly steady, rising to only 15.5 bcm by 2006, 18.9 bcm in 2007, and eventually to 23.7 bcm in 2010. Not all of this gas is produced for consumption, however. Roughly 6 bcm is slated to be pumped back into the ground in order to maintain proper pressure. So there is not enough to feed both Orenburg and the Karachaganak on-site plant.

To send the planned gas to Orenburg would require significant expansion of the plant there as well as construction of two new gas pipelines from Karachaganak. Gazprom hints at wishing to become part-owner of any pipeline built from Karachaganak not to Orenburg and even to form a joint venture to expand and modernize Kazakhstan's gas pipeline system. This would give it the right to put its own gas through Kazakhstan's system. Gazprom offers Kazakhstan the opportunity to become part-owner of the Orenburg plant. Although certain industrialists in

Kazakhstan are not uninterested in this prospect, it is not certain whether the political authorities would favor such a plan. Also, if Gazprom does not want to finance Orenburg's expansion by itself, this implicitly raises the question how it would finance the more costly Karachaganak plant or its involvement in Kazakhstan's pipeline systems.

CONCLUSION: Gazprom appears to have an appetite for the pipeline systems of neighboring states. A few years ago it became proprietor of much of Ukraine's network in settlement for financial debts. If Kazakhstan sends much more gas to Orenburg or accedes to Russian participation in its own national infrastructure, then it could find that

infrastructure commandeered, to the exclusion of Kazakhstan's own production, by those same Russian companies for transmission to Russia of gas from Turkmenistan, which are slated to increase significantly in the future. On the other hand, if Kazakhstan is able to find other financing for its own pipeline expansion, then it could finally have a card to play when bargaining with Russia in the future, since Turkmenistan's gas exports to Russia rely upon transit across Kazakhstan's territory.

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SOUTH OSSETIA JOURNAL, PART I: CONFLICT ZONE RESIDENTS BEGIN TO RETURN

Not knowing what problems await them at home, women and children have officially begun to return to South Ossetia. From 4 to 6 September, Georgian authorities bused home conflict zone residents officially deemed to be "on holiday" at government-sponsored resorts scattered across Georgia. Many are returning on their own initiative. Others remain with relatives outside the zone. Officials aim to fulfill President Saakashvili's promise to have "temporarily displaced persons" home by 20 September, when school is scheduled to begin. During the conflict, Georgian homes and schools were entirely destroyed or seriously damaged. Schools were direct targets. Now, winter is fast approaching and food and fuel is scarce. Residents fear that the conflict will reignite at any moment, claiming that Ossetians remain armed, continue to dig trenches around strategic villages, and randomly detain Georgians and then abuse them in custody. Meanwhile, nightly shooting from automatic weapons continues.

The evacuation was a mess. Although the Georgian government knew the conflict was heating up (shooting began on 8 July and escalated on 27 July, when Tamarasheni village was first shelled by artillery), no evacuation plans were organized. Exchanges of fire began to turn into a full-scale conflict on 10 August. On 12 August, when women, children, and the elderly began to evacuate by car and on foot in large numbers, carrying only what they could in their hands, local authorities were caught unprepared and had to respond in a haphazard manner. Officials scrambled to organize transportation out of Didi Liakhvi, Patara Liakhvi and Proni Gorge (where Georgian villages are located in South Ossetia). Many were transported on the back of trucks, others in buses and minivans. Local authorities used their own vehicles to drive residents out of the conflict zone. Ossetians reportedly did the same, but information was difficult to confirm.

Consequently, when the official flight began, family members were lost for several days until relatives and officials could locate them. Some, left homeless, stayed with neighbors.

For many in Georgian-controlled territories, this was not the first evacuation. When the shooting began, residents began to leave the area to stay with family and friends. Mothers explained that they were becoming a burden on family members and, thus, decided to return—despite their fear of living in a conflict situation and the threat of being killed. Because many never returned, when the government finally launched an evacuation on 12 August, several residents were not able to join the "holiday" programs (and thus continued to rely on relatives for support).

The number of "temporarily displaced persons on holiday" well exceeded 3000. Due to the chaos that surrounded evacuations, there was no exact record of relocations. Authorities stated, "We have no idea where they are, who they are staying with, or when they will return.... People keep coming and going".

Those who decided to stay did so for numerous reasons. With the memory of evacuating their homes—not knowing they were never to return—during the first 1990 to 1992 conflict, residents stressed they were not going to leave and lose their land again. Families explained that, as before, Ossetians would enter Georgian villages, steal livestock, rob and burn homes, and then claim Georgian territory as their own. Moreover, fields would lay to waste and villagers would not be able to survive the coming winter. Thus, children and women were evacuated instead. While many women accompanied children to resorts, some returned to assist sons, husbands, fathers, and grandfathers who stayed behind to defend villages. One woman whose house in Nikozi was surrounded by evidence of heavy shelling, began to cry when she explained that she let her children leave, but "couldn't leave [her] husband alone to die". One Eredvi villager explained during heavy nightly shelling, "We are standing beside one another to defend our villages. If one leaves that is seen as betrayal and would encourage others to leave."

At the same time, the government appeared to encourage conflict zone residents to stay. Several times during the conflict, Saakashvili and his

authorities could be heard making public statements such as, "Georgians will not leave their homes in these territories. They are ready to die there."

Generally, however, displaced persons were happy with their "holiday" evacuations and thanked Saakashvili and local authorities for their support. Not everyone, however, had a positive experience. Complaints of poor living conditions, dirty accommodation, undrinkable water, poor food, and overcrowded facilities abound. Some explained that relatives did not know where they were located.

Awaiting their return, women sat with children in hopeful anticipation, but also in fear of what lay ahead. Many knew their houses had been destroyed or extensively damaged and were concerned about how they would survive through the winter (food would be scarce since fields had been neglected during the conflict). Approximately 28 buses (1200 persons) returned conflict zone residents home between 4 to 6 September. While the government claims that all residents in government-sponsored programs are now returned, (taking into consideration residents who returned on their own initiative) many remain unaccounted for.

Immediately following an 18 August cease-fire agreement, which has held to date, Georgian authorities, members of parliament, and businessmen from across Georgia sprang into action by delivering humanitarian assistance (flour, oil, rice, sugar, macaroni, school supplies) to conflict zone residents and to assess damage. Monetary compensation is planned for destroyed or damaged houses (though most personal items will not be covered). Reconstruction of damaged or destroyed schools is set to begin soon. Some residents complain that not all of the humanitarian assistance is being distributed as promised. Others worry that the food provided will only last the through mid-September. **(Continued in the next issue)**

Theresa Freese

NEWS BITES

US ADMITS 'BOUNTY HUNTER' CONTACT

26 August

The US Department of Defense has admitted having contact with a former US soldier, Jonathan Idema, charged in Afghanistan with torturing civilians. But it says it rejected Mr Idema's offer to work together in capturing terror suspects in Afghanistan. Mr Idema - who was arrested by Afghan security agents in July - says his operation was approved by the US. He and two other US citizens are being tried for torture, kidnapping and running a private jail in Kabul. When Jonathan Idema, also known as Jack, first appeared in court in Kabul last month, he was asked to prove his claims to have had links with the US Department of Defense. One name he mentioned was Heather Anderson, the Pentagon's Acting Director of Security, who answers to the chief official responsible for intelligence matters in the office of Donald Rumsfeld, the US Defence Secretary. Mr Idema said Ms Anderson had applauded their work in Afghanistan and had wanted them to go on contract. Until now, the Department of Defense has refused to acknowledge any contacts at all between itself and the former US soldier, who it has described as an unauthorised freelancer. (BBC)

GEORGIAN PRESIDENT CRITICIZES RUSSIAN MILITARY EXERCISE

26 August

Speaking on 26 August in Batumi where he attended a government meeting the previous day, Mikheil Saakashvili criticized the Russian military exercises under way at the Gonio firing range near Batumi, which he claimed are inconveniencing tens of thousands of tourists, many of them from abroad, who are currently vacationing at Black Sea resorts. He warned that if Moscow does not voluntarily close its military base at Batumi by the spring of 2005, "we shall force them to leave." (Caucasus Press)

SOUTH OSSETIA ACCUSES GEORGIA OF VIOLATING TROOP-WITHDRAWAL AGREEMENT

26 August

South Ossetian government spokeswoman Irina Gagloeva accused Tbilisi on 26 August of sending 60 special forces troops to the South Ossetian conflict zone in violation of the 19 August agreement under which Russia, Georgia, and South Ossetia pledged to withdraw all forces except for 500 peacekeepers each. Georgian Interior Ministry spokesman Guram Donadze rejected that allegation and offered to launch a joint inspection with the South Ossetian side of the Djava District where the forces in question were allegedly deployed. (Caucasus Press)

RUSSIA SUSPENDS TALKS WITH GEORGIA

27 August

The Russian Foreign Ministry announced in a 27 August statement that it will not participate in any further bilateral talks with Georgia on either military issues or the proposed framework treaty on bilateral relations as long as nightly protests continue outside its embassy in Tbilisi. Since 19 August, Georgian computer enthusiasts have been projecting insulting slogans onto the facade of the embassy building every night and playing Georgian national melodies at full volume. The Russian Foreign Ministry statement characterized the Georgian authorities' failure to take any measures to halt those protests a violation of the Geneva Conventions. (Reuters)

AFGHAN FOREIGN MINISTER WRAPS UP UZBEKISTAN VISIT

30 August

Abdullah Abdullah ended a three-day visit to Uzbekistan on 30 August, Uzbek TV reported. The visit focused on trade and transport relations between the two countries, Uzbekistan's role in Afghan reconstruction, and the fight against terrorism and drug trafficking in the region. According to Uzbek Foreign Minister Sadyk Safaev, "Afghanistan should participate in the integration processes in Central Asia and restore its historic role as a linking point in the region." Safaev pointed to expanding cooperation between the two countries and trade volume of \$80 million in 2003. For his part, Abdullah thanked Uzbekistan, saying, "Uzbekistan, with its active economic and technical assistance, is playing an extremely important role in the construction of a new Afghanistan, in particular in the construction of roads and bridges." The Afghan finance minister and public transport minister accompanied Abdullah on the visit. (ITAR-TASS)

KABUL TENSE AFTER WEEKEND BOMBING

30 August

Security has been tightened across the Afghan capital, Kabul, following Sunday's bomb explosion outside the offices of an American security firm. Nato-led peacekeepers say at least three Americans and three Afghans died in the blast, claimed by the Taliban. But there is confusion about the final casualty toll, with reports of several more dead including some Nepalis. Kabul is tense with extra checkpoints and troops patrolling the streets, and increased security outside embassies. The US embassy and other international organisations in Kabul have told staff to avoid all but essential movement in the city following the blast. The BBC's

Andrew North in Kabul says that some embassies now have international peacekeeping troops outside in addition to their usual guards. Security was especially tight around another building in the city, linked to Dyncorp, the US firm hit by Sunday's explosion. Afghan President Hamid Karzai says he is deeply disturbed by the attack. Dyncorp provides his bodyguards and trains the new Afghan police force. (BBC)

MOSCOW'S CANDIDATE WINS CHECHEN BALLOT

30 August

As widely predicted, Chechen Interior Minister Major General Alu Alkhanov was elected on 29 August to succeed slain pro-Moscow leader Akhmad-hadji Kadyrov. According to preliminary returns from all polling stations, Alkhanov garnered 73.48 percent of the vote; FSB Colonel Movsur Khamidov garnered 5.94 percent; former Kadyrov aide Vakha Visaeu 4.72 percent; former Chechen Deputy Prime Minister Abdulla Bugaev 4.52 percent; Chechenkhimneftprom General Director Umar Abuev 2.9 percent; Chechen State Council staffer Mukhmud-Khasan Asakov 2.57 percent; and businessman Magomed Aidamirov 0.67 percent. Voter turnout was 85.24 percent of the republic's 584,998 registered voters. That turnout figure is difficult to reconcile with a 29 August report by "The New York Times" that residents were streaming out of Grozny the previous day to avoid voting. On 29 August, acting Chechen Interior Minister Ruslan Alkhanov denied that residents were leaving the city, telling Interfax that "the streets of Grozny are filled with people and voting is proceeding actively." (RFE/RL)

CHECHEN ISSUE SHOULD BE RESOLVED WITHOUT DAMAGING RUSSIA'S INTEGRITY - TURKISH PM

30 August

Turkey favors a settlement in Chechnya in the framework of Russia's territorial integrity, Turkish Prime Minister Recep Erdogan said in an exclusive interview with Interfax on Monday ahead of President Vladimir Putin's visit to Turkey. "We want a fundamental solution of the Chechen question in the framework of Russia's territorial integrity and constitutional system, by peaceful means and with due consideration for human rights," he said. "Turkey believes that there should be no place for terrorism under any circumstances and criticizes the phenomenon at the highest level," Erdogan said. He reaffirmed that his country continues to favor "the establishment of a sincere dialogue between our countries in the sphere of resisting terrorism." (Interfax)

CHECHEN LEADERSHIP WILL INSIST ON BAN ON FEDERAL TROOPS WEARING MASKS

30 September

Alu Alkhanov, the Chechen president elect, will work for a ban on wearing masks by federal servicemen during special operations in his republic, Chechen envoy to Moscow and

Deputy Prime Minister Ziyad Sabsabi said on Ekho Moskvu radio on Monday. "The decision to ban the wearing of masks was made some two weeks ago. Alu Alkhanov will continue efforts in this direction," he said. Law enforcers say that unidentified armed groups wearing masks and operating at night are involved in the abduction of civilians in Chechnya. "If we fail to guarantee security, our people won't need homes, paved streets, schools or day care centers," Sabsabi said. (Interfax)

KAZAKH OPPOSITION BLOC HINTS AT POSSIBLE ELECTION BOYCOTT

31 August

Asylbek Kozhakhmetov, co-chairman of the coordination council for the Communist Party of Kazakhstan and Democratic Choice of Kazakhstan's (DVK) election bloc, told a news conference on 31 August that the bloc has not ruled out boycotting 19 September parliamentary elections. Khozhakhmetov stressed that political parties can decide to boycott elections up to a week before voting begins without suffering legal or financial sanctions. He noted that the two parties, as well as the moderate opposition party Ak Zhol, have previously announced that they might boycott elections unless the government limited electronic voting to an experiment affecting no more than 2-3 percent of the population, released and exonerated imprisoned DVK leader Ghalymzhan Zhaqiyarov, and provided equal access to the media for all candidates in their election campaigns. (Interfax-Kazakhstan)

KYRGYZ PRESIDENT HAILS COUNTRY'S ACHIEVEMENTS

31 August

President Askar Akaev lauded his country's achievements at a 30 August ceremony in Bishkek on the eve of Kyrgyzstan's Independence Day. "We live as free people in a free country and serve for the world as an example of the peaceful coexistence of dozens of ethnic groups, various cultures, and religions," Akaev said. He announced that his country's main achievement since gaining its independence on 31 August 1991 is that it has taken shape as an independent state and that its people have become a self-sufficient nation. Akaev also called attention to an ongoing social mobilization campaign to improve the rural infrastructure and reduce poverty. (akipress.org)

RUSSIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH CRITICIZES FRENCH BAN ON RELIGIOUS APPAREL IN SCHOOLS

31 August

The Russian Orthodox Church has criticized a French law banning public school students from wearing religious attire, including headscarves, a measure that led to the abduction of two French journalists in Iraq. "At the very beginning, when this law was being drafted, we voiced our concern over this ban on expressing one's religious sentiments," Father Mikhail Dudko, spokesman for the Moscow Patriarchate, told

Interfax on Monday. Apart from headscarves, the law forbids school students from wearing any conspicuous signs showing their religious affiliation, including large Christian crosses. (Interfax)

CHECHEN OFFICIAL REJECTS U.S. CRITICISM OF ELECTIONS

31 August

The Chechen presidential election campaign was conducted in accordance with international norms, Chechen elections commission chief Abdul-Kerim Arsakhanov told Interfax on Tuesday. Yesterday, U.S. State Department representative Richard Baucher told a briefing in Washington on the results of the presidential elections in Chechnya that serious faults were found in the elections process. Especially problematic was the preliminary dismissal of a leading candidate based on a technical problem. The elections were not conducted in a democratic manner, Baucher said. (Interfax)

CHECHNYA'S NEW PRESIDENT DELIVERS FIRST TELEVISED ADDRESS

31 August

In his first televised address to the Chechen people following his victory in the republic's presidential elections on Sunday, Alkhanov promised to do everything in his power to help members of illegal armed group return to a peaceful life. "You know them and what they are doing. You know what tragedy this illegal activity leads to. That is why we need to convince them to stop this outrageous behavior. I will do everything I can to help them find their place in a peaceful life," he said. He promised security to every person who is not involved in grave crimes if they surrender to law enforcement agencies. (Interfax)

CHECHENS SUPPORT RUSSIA'S INTEGRITY BY VOTING – PUTIN

31 August

President Vladimir Putin believes that by taking part in the presidential elections in Chechnya, the Chechen people confirmed their support for Russia's territorial integrity. "The Chechen people made their choice by voting for preserving a position in which Chechnya is an inseparable part of Russia. In the Chechen presidential elections, the Chechen people once again confirmed their loyalty to this course," Putin told a news conference following talks with German Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder and French President Jacques Chirac in Sochi on Tuesday. (Interfax)

US INVESTIGATES AFGHAN AIR RAID

1 September

The United States military says it is conducting an inquiry into whether civilians were killed in an air attack in eastern Afghanistan on Monday. Afghan officials and a Danish aid organisation said at least six civilians died in the air raid near the village of Waradesh in the Pech valley. A US military spokeswoman said there were no specific reports of civilian

casualties but an inquiry was underway. Earlier, another spokesman denied any civilians had been hit. (BBC)

UZBEK PRESIDENT DECRIES 'EVIL FORCES' 1 September

Speaking at a ceremony in Tashkent on 31 August to commemorate victims of Soviet-era repressions, President Islam Karimov noted the need to instill a "healthy ideology" in young people, Uzbek Radio reported. In an apparent reference to Islamist extremist movements, he also urged a fight against "evil forces brainwashing our children, setting them against their parents and trying to bring back medieval times." Describing globalization as the worldwide spread of information within minutes, President Karimov said that an "information assault" is "more dangerous than any military aggression." An address broadcast on Uzbek television on 31 August, the eve of Uzbekistan's 1 September Independence Day, highlighted similar themes. "In these complex and unsafe times, with such maladies as international terrorism, religious extremism, and drug trafficking posing a threat to humanity, I would hope that the clarion call 'Let us protect and defend our sacred land ourselves' will drive home to each citizen the need to be always watchful and vigilant," the president said. (RFE/RL)

KAZAKH ELECTORAL LAWS MEET INTERNATIONAL STANDARDS - NAZARBAYEV

1 September

Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbayev said he is confident that the country's existing legislation allows for honest and transparent elections. "If its provisions are adhered to in a strict manner, existing legislation allows us to hold any elections in compliance with international electoral standards in the republic today," Nazarbayev said at the opening of the sixth parliamentary session in Astana on Wednesday. "While introducing amendments to the constitutional law on elections in the republic of Kazakhstan, the government and parliament managed to avoid any extremities that could add unwanted tensions to the electoral process," the president said. He expressed confidence that legislation "ensures all the necessary prerequisites for the elections to take place in a purely democratic, honest and transparent manner. We have all the capabilities for it, and we have to make this idea a reality." (Interfax-Kazakhstan)

BOMBS PLANTED ONBOARD PLANES BEFOREHAND - AIR FORCE CHIEF

1 September

Commander of the Russian Air Force Vladimir Mikhailov said he believes the explosive devices that went off aboard two Russian airliners over a week ago were planted well beforehand, and said all the suicide bombers had to do was activate them. "It is my personal opinion that the passengers did not bring explosive devices aboard the planes. The explosive devices were brought well beforehand and planted somewhere near the rear toilets by some employees, and the suicide-bombers only had to activate them while they were

aboard the planes," Mikhailov told journalists in Rostov-on-Don. "The planes were not hijacked," he said. (Interfax)

TERRORISTS USE CHECHEN STABILIZATION FOR THEIR OWN PURPOSES - PUTIN

1 September

Russian President Vladimir Putin told Turkish journalists in Sochi that the international terrorists are trying to make use of the current normalization in Chechnya for their own purposes. "The situation is getting back to normal [in Chechnya.] Elections were held there a few days ago and a new president has been elected. But the international terrorists are trying to make use of this situation for their own purposes," Putin said. "You know that two civil airliners have been downed, and that an international terrorist organization, connected with Al Qaeda, has claimed responsibility for this terrorist attack. All this demonstrates once again what we have discussed on many occasions: the separatists in the Caucasus, including in the Chechen Republic, are being guided by their own interests, not the interests of the Chechen people, and are connected with international terrorism," Putin said. He said some of the Turkish public funds had maintained relations with the separatists in Chechnya and with terrorists. But we know that Turkey itself is suffering from terrorism," the Russian president said.

ISLAMBULI BRIGADE TAKES RESPONSIBILITY FOR MOSCOW METRO STATION BOMBING

1 September

The radical Islamic group Islambuli Brigade has claimed responsibility for the terrorist act near Moscow's Rizhskaya metro station, Arabic broadcaster Al Jazeera reported. The channel quoted a statement from the group which said that attacks on Russia will continue. Islambuli Brigade, which is supposedly tied with the international terrorist group Al Qaeda, earlier took responsibility for explosions on board two passenger planes, that killed 90 people, in the Rostov and Tula regions on August 24. The group has named itself after Khaled Islambuli, a Egyptian soldier, who was at the head of the 1981 plot to kill the Egyptian president Anwar Sadat. In July, the Islambuli Brigade took responsibility for the attempt on the life of the Pakistani finance minister Shaukat Aziz. Shaukat Aziz was not hurt, but nine people died and twenty-five were wounded in that attempt. (Interfax)

RUSSIAN-GEORGIAN BORDER TEMPORARILY CLOSED DUE TO EVENTS IN N. OSSETIA

1 September

Russian border guards have temporarily stopped letting people across the Russian-Georgian border after people were taken hostage in a school in the North Ossetian town of Beslan, a source in the North Caucasus department of the Russian FSB's border service's press service told Interfax. "The procession of documents of people who want to cross the Russian-Georgian border one way or the other has been

halted until further notice," the source said, noting that this is related to the events in North Ossetia. (Interfax)

NAGORNO-KARABAKH CONFIRMS ADHERENCE TO PEACE SETTLEMENT WITH AZERBAIJAN

2 September

Arkady Gukasian, leader of the unrecognized republic of Nagorno-Karabakh, has reconfirmed his adherence to the peace settlement with Azerbaijan. "Mediating efforts by the OSCE Minsk Group cochairmen can bring positive results if the administration of Azerbaijan displays goodwill and a sincere wish to resolve the Karabakh problem on mutually acceptable terms," says a Thursday statement of Gukasian on the occasion of the 13th anniversary of the unrecognized republic. "Nobody can take away from us the freedom and independence for which we paid such a big price," the statement runs. "The command-and- staff exercises our army had this August clearly showed to the adversaries of Nagorno-Karabakh that the army is ready for combat and can accomplish the most difficult missions in the provision of security of Nagorno-Karabakh and the people." (Interfax)

PUTIN'S ADVISOR ASKS INTL HUMAN RIGHTS GROUPS TO HELP FREE HOSTAGES

2 September

Russian presidential advisor on amnesty and pardon matters, Anatoly Pristavkin, has called on international human rights organizations to facilitate the release of the hostages who are being held in a school in the North Ossetian town of Beslan. "I am calling on the international human rights organizations to protect the principal right of our children - the right to live," reads Pristavkin's appeal. "I am sure that those who have attacked the unarmed first-graders with assault rifles and grenade launchers in North Ossetia will be damned both by God and their peoples," he said. "I am asking them to stop possibly at the last moment before something irreparable happens," Pristavkin said. (Interfax)

GEORGIAN POLICE DETAIN TWO RUSSIAN FEMALE SOLDIERS

2 September

Georgian police detained two Russian women soldiers near the Georgian village of Kekhvi in the Georgian-Ossetian conflict zone at about 6 p.m. on Thursday. "The women, both of them signallers, were forcibly detained by Georgian police and are currently being held at the headquarters of the Georgian forces in the village of Kekhvi," Russian Defense Ministry spokesman Gennady Dzyuba told Interfax. He said the detained women soldiers were on their way to the peacekeeping battalion based in Tskhinvali for planned rotation. (Interfax)

IRANIAN FOREIGN MINISTER VISITS TURKMENISTAN

3 September

Kamal Kharrazi, foreign minister of Iran, visited President Niyazov Thursday for a broad range of talks. He was

accompanied by Mehdi Safari, deputy foreign minister of Iran and Khatemi's special envoy on Caspian affairs. The sides discussed matters of bilateral and regional interest. Niyazov and Kharrazi reviewed the progress of bilateral economic projects. One of the important projects, almost ready for commissioning, is the Dostluk dam-reservoir straddling Turkmen-Iran border at Serakhs that would feed 25000 hectares of agricultural land on each side of the border. Both parties noted with satisfaction the flourishing cooperation in the fields of oil and gas, road construction, power engineering and trade. Niyazov proposed to increase the export of LPG to Iran. Iran is one of the largest buyers of LPG from Turkmenistan. Turkmenistan and Iran are striving to raise the volume of mutual trade turnover to US \$ one billion, a goal that could possibly be met within the next three years. Problems related to determination of legal status of Caspian also came under discussion. Niyazov and Kharrazi agreed that the status of Caspian should be determined by consensus of all the littoral states. Iran and Turkmenistan reiterated their resolve to continue joint struggle against drug trafficking. Gholamreza Ansari, Iranian ambassador to Turkmenistan, was also present during the meeting. (new Central Asia)

AZERBAIJANI PRESIDENT PARDONS SEPARATIST LEADER

3 September

Ilham Aliyev has signed a decree pardoning 266 prisoners, including Alikram Gumbatov, who in June 1993 declared an independent Talysh-Mughan Republic on Azerbaijan's southeastern border with Iran. Gumbatov was apprehended in December 1993 but escaped from jail nine months later. He was recaptured and sentenced to death in February 1996 for crimes against the state; that sentence was subsequently commuted to life imprisonment. Following Azerbaijan's acceptance in early 2001 into full membership of the Council of Europe, that organization designated Gumbatov a political prisoner and demanded he be retried; he was resentenced to life imprisonment in July 2003. Also on 3 September, President Aliyev stripped Gumbatov of his Azerbaijani citizenship, after which Gumbatov fled to the Netherlands, where his family now lives. (Turan)

PUTIN ORDERS NORTH OSSETIAN SECTOR OF RUSSIAN STATE BORDER CLOSED

4 September

Russian President Vladimir Putin ordered to close the North Ossetian sector of the Russian state border at a Saturday session in Beslan. The session was partly televised by the Russian Channel One. "Back in Moscow, I issued orders on further actions to find all who are involved in the terrorist attack, I ordered to block the city, to close the state border on the North Ossetia - Alaniya sector, to conduct searches for people involved in the terrorist act and to close the republic's administrative border," Putin said. Sowing interethnic discord and causing a conflict in the North Caucasus was one of the main aims of the militants who took over the school in Beslan, President Putin said. "Anyone who yields to this

provocation will be looked upon as a supporter and associate of terrorists," Putin said. (Interfax)

BESLAN CRISIS "ATTACK ON OUR COUNTRY" - PUTIN

4 September

President Vladimir Putin on Saturday called the Beslan hostage crisis "an attack on our country." "What has happened now is an inhuman, unprecedentedly cruel terrorist crime. It is not a challenge to the president, parliament, or government. It is a challenge to the whole of Russia. To all of our people," Putin said in a televised address. "It is an attack on our country," he said. "What we face are not individual acts of intimidation or isolated terrorist attacks. What we face is a direct invasion of Russia by international terror. An all-out, full-scale war, which is claiming the lives of more and more of our fellow citizens," the president said. "The entire world experience shows that such wars do not, unfortunately, come to an early end. For this reason, we simply cannot and must not lead a life as carefree as before," Putin said. "Terrorists think they are more powerful than we. That they will be able to intimidate us with their cruelty, paralyze our will, and demoralize our society. And it might seem we had a choice of either to rebuff them or accept their claims. To surrender, let Russia be ruined and taken to pieces in the hope that they will ultimately leave us alone," the president said. "As president, head of the Russian state, as a man who has sworn to defend the country and its territorial integrity, and simply as a Russian citizen, I am convinced that in actuality we do not have any choice. Because if we let ourselves be blackmailed and submit to panic, we will plunge millions of people into an endless series of bloody conflicts, such as Karabakh and Transdniestria, and other similar tragedies. It is impossible not to see the obvious," Putin said. (Interfax)

AFGHANISTAN'S ELECTION CHALLENGE

6 September

In war-ravaged Afghanistan, holding the country's first election poses stiff challenges - harsh terrain, suspect security and simply ensuring that people cast their ballots properly. On 9 October Afghans will choose from 18 presidential candidates in some 25,000 polling stations across the country. That is not all - Afghan refugees in neighbouring countries will be also casting their ballots. Some 800,000 Afghans living in refugee camps in Iran are expected to turn up at the 1,000 polling stations on the same day. And in Pakistan, another 1.5 million are expected to vote. The election authorities are trying to keep the voting procedure simple and ensure that men and especially women - who comprise 41.3% of the electorate - come out and vote. Voters will have a thumb marked with indelible ink. A big challenge is to find enough men and women to staff voting centres in a country where literacy is low. State-run radio is spreading the word about the election, and some 1,200 "civic educators" will be going around the country to hire local polling officials. Election logistics are also a considerable challenge in the country that

has few good roads. Pick-ups, four-wheel drives, jeeps, airplanes, helicopters, horses and donkeys will be used to transport polling officials and materials to all over the country. Bringing the 30,000 ballot boxes, built in Denmark, to the counting centres after the end of the voting will be another daunting exercise - an average of 3,000 ballot boxes will be moved to each centre. "There will be convoys of trucks, five MI-8 helicopters, jeeps and hired vehicles bringing ballot boxes to the polling centres," says Julian Type of the Joint Electoral Management Body. In some cases, it may take a week to bring the boxes down to the counting centres, he adds. The ballots will be gathered in the presence of national and international poll observers and candidates' agents. They will be counted in the provinces. (BBC)

KYRGYZSTAN LAYS CLAIM TO UZBEK ENCLAVE **6 September**

Kyrgyzstan's prime minister on Monday laid claim to an enclave that has been part of Uzbekistan since a Soviet-era redrawing of Central Asia _ a move that could further strain relations between the two nations as they continue tense border talks. "Shakhimardan is Kyrgyz land and we will assert our right to that land," Nikolai Tanayev told Parliament. Territorial disputes have strained relations among Central Asian nations since they became independent following the 1991 Soviet collapse. Borders were arbitrarily drawn in the 1920s by Soviet authorities. Tanayev spoke about Shakhimardan on Monday in response to opposition lawmaker Ismail Isakov's call on the government to get the territory back. Isakov said the enclave had been given to Uzbekistan without any legal documents supporting the transfer. "It is not a matter of disputed land, but a matter of returning Kyrgyz land to our country," Isakov said. Tanayev replied that Kyrgyzstan would raise the issue of Shakhimardan at the next session of the Uzbek-Kyrgyz border delimitation commission. No date has been set for the next session. Uzbekistan's Foreign Ministry spokesman, Ilkhom Zakirov, on Monday called Kyrgyzstan's claim unethical. He said the issue could be proposed for discussion by the border delimitation commission, "but it doesn't mean we will accept it." Shakhimardan, with a population of several thousand ethnic Uzbeks, is located in the densely populated, ethnically mixed and impoverished Fergana Valley, which is shared by Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan and is a source of instability for the entire region. Several such enclaves were created in the area _ including the ethnic Kyrgyz enclave of Barak in Uzbekistan _ when it was cut into five republics by Soviet leader Josef Stalin. (AP)

GEORGIAN PRESIDENT PROTESTS **JOURNALISTS' ARREST IN BESLAN** **6 September**

Mikheil Saakashvili sent a letter of protest to the Russian government on 6 September against the arrest in Beslan two days earlier of a journalist and a photographer employed by the independent Georgian television station Rustavi-2 and demanded their immediate release. The two were sentenced

later on 6 September to 10 days' administrative arrest on charges of illegally entering the Russian Federation. The Georgian Foreign Ministry has sent a similar protest to the Russian Prosecutor-General's Office. (Caucasus Press)

FORMER ADJARAN LEADER'S PROPERTY **CONFISCATED**

6 September

The Supreme Court of the Adjar Autonomous Republic ruled on 6 September that the personal fortune of former Adjaran leader Aslan Abashidze and some 30 members of his family, variously estimated at between 100 million laris (\$52 million) and \$70 million, could not have been acquired legally, and should therefore be confiscated. That property includes land, several villas, bank accounts, and luxury cars. Abashidze stepped down under pressure from the Georgian central government in May and has since lived in Moscow. (Caucasus Press)

UZBEKISTAN ACCUSES OSCE OF SOFT STANCE **ON EXTREMIST GROUPS**

7 September

Uzbekistan, hit recently by terrorist attacks, rebuked a group of European nations on Tuesday for allegedly allowing extremists to openly operate on their soil, the Foreign Ministry said. Meanwhile, more than 40 suspects went on trial Tuesday in the capital, Tashkent, and the central city of Bukhara in connection with deadly attacks earlier this year that authorities blamed on Islamic extremists, court officials said. Uzbekistan is concerned that extremist groups are being allowed to openly operate in some Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe member countries, Foreign Minister Sadyk Safayev told visiting OSCE Secretary General Jan Kubis, according to a Foreign Ministry statement. "It was pointed out that there are some differences between (Uzbekistan) and the international community in viewing and handling the problem of terrorism and religious extremism," the statement said. Uzbekistan was hit by two waves of violence earlier this year that killed more than 50 people and included assaults on police and suicide bombings on the U.S. and Israeli embassies. Authorities said the attacks were carried out by al-Qaida-linked extremist groups operating from outside the country. However, government critics say the violence could have been retaliation by Islamic radicals for the government's jailing of thousands of dissident Muslims. President Islam Karimov has long faced strong international criticism for his government's poor human rights record, including use of torture in prisons. Last month, Karimov criticized the British government for "ignoring" the threat represented by the radical Islamic Hizb-ut-Tahrir party, which he blames for the attacks. The group is allowed to operate in Britain. Hizb-ut-Tahrir, which calls for the establishment of a worldwide Islamic state through nonviolent means, has denied responsibility for the attacks. (AP)

RESTRICTIONS IMPOSED ON PUBLIC PROTESTS **IN ARMENIA**

7 September

Senior Armenian police official Hovannes Hunanian has made public a list of "strategically important" locations across Armenia where rallies and demonstrations are banned in accordance with a new law on public gatherings, RFE/RL's Armenian Service reported on 6 September. Those locations include the Medzamor nuclear power plant, the building that houses Armenia's Central Bank, and the area in front of the presidential palace. Gatherings on almost all squares in Yerevan are permitted only if the organizers inform the municipal authorities in advance. (RFE/RL)

BESLAN DEATH TOLL TOPS 350**7 September**

As of 6 September, the number of people killed during the initial stages of the Beslan hostage taking and during the shoot-out on 3 September had risen to 335 hostages and troops, plus 30 hostage takers; 411 people remain hospitalized. More than 100 people are still missing. The death toll in the 2002 Moscow theater hostage taking was 129. Confusion still surrounds the events on 3 September that impelled Russian elite troops to storm the school building. Some eyewitnesses claim that the troops attacked the school after two explosions were heard inside, others say the hostage takers opened fire at Emergency Situations Ministry personnel whom the hostage takers had given permission to remove the bodies of dead hostages from the school yard, while former Ingushetian President Ruslan Aushev told "Novaya gazeta" on 6 September that parents of hostages opened fire on the hostage takers. (RFE/RL)

SURVIVING HOSTAGE TAKER IMPLICATES CHECHEN PRESIDENT**7 September**

Russian Deputy Prosecutor-General Sergei Fridinskii said on 3 September that two of the hostage takers, whom he claimed included Arabs as well as Chechens, Ingush, and Ossetians, were captured alive. On 6 September, RTR broadcast footage of a man it identified as the sole surviving hostage taker, Nur-Pasha Kulaev. Kulaev claimed a man known as "Colonel" ordered him and his fellow hostage takers to attack the school in Beslan, and that "they told us this task had been set" by Chechen President Aslan Maskhadov and radical field commander Shamil Basaev. Kulaev apparently did not explain whom he meant by "they." The "Colonel" reportedly said the aim of the hostage taking was to unleash a war across the entire Caucasus. In an interview with RFE/RL's North Caucasus Service on 7 September, Maskhadov's representative Akhmed Zakaev said the confession of the man shown on Russian television was clearly obtained under torture. He said claims of Maskhadov's involvement in the hostage taking, and the allegations that the hostage takers also included Arabs and African mercenaries, are "part of a well-planned disinformation campaign." Zakaev said the hostage taking was carried out by "local radical groups" that are supported by people overwhelmed by the need for personal

revenge for the brutalities committed by the Russian Army. (RFE/RL)

RUSSIAN ELITE ANTITERROR UNITS SUFFER WORST CASUALTIES IN ITS HISTORY**7 September**

In the 6 September interview with RTR, presidential adviser Aslakhonov said that the Federal Security Service's (FSB) elite Vympel and Alfa antiterrorism units suffered their worst losses in a single operation in their 30 years of existence. Twenty officers of the units were killed and more than 20 others were wounded. Aslakhonov, who was a member of the operation staff in Beslan, added that the reason for the high losses was the fact that the storming of the building was not planned and there was no order to storm it. Everything happened spontaneously as two charges planted by the militants inside the building exploded and some of the hostages used the opportunity to escape, and the hostage takers opened fire. Federal forces returned fire to cover the escapees, Aslakhonov said. An unnamed wounded colonel of the Alfa unit told RTR, ORT, and "Komsomolskaya pravda" on 6 September that the first to open fire were Ossetian irregulars, among whom were many fathers of child hostages. At the time of the incident, Alfa officers were not wearing body armor in order to show the militants that they didn't intend to rush the school. During the fighting, Alfa officers were very reserved in using firepower as the hostage takers were using hostages as human shields at all times, the colonel said. (RFE/RL)

MOSCOW SAYS EU STATEMENT ON BESLAN NEARLY 'SACRILEGIOUS'**7 September**

Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov on 4 September described a 3 September comment about the Beslan hostage drama by Dutch Foreign Minister Bernard Bot as "insolent," RFE/RL reported on 6 September. Bot told an EU meeting that the union sympathizes with Russia's loss but "would also like to know from the Russian authorities how this tragedy could have happened." Deputy Foreign Minister Valerii Loshchin said on 4 September that Bot's remark "is offensive and borders on the sacrilegious." RFE/RL reported that Bot's office later said Bot had been misquoted. On 4 September, the website of the Dutch EU presidency quoted Bot as saying, "In order to better understand what happened at the school, we would like to learn more details from the Russian authorities so we can help each other to combat terrorism in any form anywhere in the world." RFE/RL reported that unnamed EU sources said that Bot had come under considerable pressure from some EU colleagues -- particularly the foreign ministers of Latvia and Finland -- to go beyond merely expressing sympathy for Russia's losses. (RFE/RL)

'IZVESTIYA' EDITOR LOSES JOB OVER 'BAD' BESLAN COVERAGE**7 September**

Raf Shakirov, the editor in chief of "Izvestiya," announced on 6 September that he has submitted his resignation because of differences with the newspaper's owners over coverage of the events in Beslan, RIA-Novosti reported. Shakirov told RFE/RL's Russian Service that the management of ProfMedia, the media-holding company controlled by oligarch Vladimir Potanin's financial-industrial group Interros, reprimanded him for the 4 September issue of the newspaper devoted to the hostage drama in Beslan "The management at ProfMedia and I disagreed about the format of presenting this material. It was considered too emotional and too poster-like, and [the publishers said] newspapers don't do that." The newspaper's executive secretary, Vladimir Borodin, will temporarily take his place, Shakirov said. Shakirov, who headed "Izvestiya " since November 2003, worked for various publications of the Kommersant publishing house from the early 1990s. Meanwhile, noted Marxist philosopher Sergei Kara-Mursa told RosBalt on 1 September that publishing photographs of terrorism victims should be banned as "it induces horror and in so doing promotes the goals of terrorists." (RFE/RL)

KAZAKHSTAN ASKS RUSSIA TO CONFIRM TERRORISTS' NATIONALITIES

7 September

The Kazakhstani Embassy to Russia has sent a note to the Russian General Prosecutor's Office with the request to confirm officially the participation of Kazakhs in a siege of a school in Beslan, the press service of the Kazakhstani Foreign Ministry reported. The reason for sending the note was several publications in Russian mass media sources with reference to Sergey Fridinsky, Deputy Prosecutor General for the South Federal District, who declared that Kazakhs had been among the terrorists in Beslan. Russian law enforcement agencies have not confirmed this information by now. According to the Kazakhstani Embassy to Russia, there were several Chechens and Ingushs born in Kazakhstan among the terrorists. It is stressed in the note that this fact cannot be considered the ground for stating that they are Kazakhstani citizens taking into account that almost all adult Chechens were born in Kazakhstan due to the deportation during the World War Two. (RBC)

