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EDITORIAL PRINCIPLES

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

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Analytical Articles:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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. 700-800 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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AZERBAIJAN-GEORGIA RELATIONS PUT TO THE TEST

Anar Valiyev and Yusuf Valiyev

In the past two months, Azerbaijani-Georgian relations have deteriorated. The killing of an Azerbaijani woman in the Kvemo Kartli region, a transport crisis between the two countries, delays to the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline as well as tough official rhetoric have led to increasing tensions between Azerbaijan and Georgia. Meanwhile, unfriendly hysteria inflamed by the mass media influenced the public. Both countries' leaders are urgently trying to solve those problems. Failing to do so could endanger the most important project in the modern history of both countries – the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline.

BACKGROUND: Ever since the demise of the Soviet Union, the relations between Azerbaijan and Georgia have been continually cordial. Both countries shared similar problems including ethnic separatism, an aggressive Russian policy in the South Caucasus, the rapid polarization and marginalization of both societies, as well as weak democratic institutions. The Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline project gave an impetus to the strengthening and deepening of economic, political, and cultural ties. Relations improved greatly during the presidencies of Eduard Shevardnadze and Heydar Aliyev.

Shevardnadze eagerly supported Ilham Aliyev in his quest for the presidency. During the political stalemate in Georgia, Aliyev junior officially supported Shevardnadze. Mikheil Saakashvili's rise to power was an embarrassment for Aliyev's government, but Baku was the third capital after Washington and Moscow that President Saakashvili visited. As the Georgian President said, "This shows that Azerbaijan is a close and strategic partner of Georgia." During the talks, issues discussed included the BTC pipeline construction, problems of aggressive separatism, and economic relations. However, the presidents did not dwell on the problems of ethnic Azerbaijanis in Georgia.

Since spring 2004, Georgian Azerbaijanis protested against an 'ongoing campaign of repression' by Kvemo Kartli's governor Soso Mazmishvili, who is a member of Saakashvili's ruling National Movement bloc. They

claimed the Georgian government was favoring ethnic Georgians in matters of land privatization leaving ethnic Azerbaijanis without land, or forced them to rent acres from Georgian farmers at high prices. The problem was ignored, leading to bloodshed. On December 3, an elderly ethnic Azerbaijani woman got killed and several others injured as a result of a clash between Azerbaijani villagers and a security guard on a horse farm in the Marneuli district of the Kvemo Kartli region. The clash was caused by a dispute over land ownership rights. Preventing an escalation of the conflict, the Georgian President dismissed his representative in Kvemo Kartli.

Simultaneously, a 'transport war' suddenly erupted between Georgia and Azerbaijan. By the end of November, Azerbaijani authorities introduced a limit on cargo transits to Georgia via Azerbaijan. The decision was motivated by the fact that a part of the cargoes were transported through Georgia to Armenia. In early December, as many as 900 carriages were detained on the Azeri-Georgian border. President Aliyev stated that the issue would be settled only after Baku was satisfied the cargos were not heading to Armenia. At the same time Badri Bitzadze, the Chairman of the State Border Guards Department, visited Baku in early December. During a meeting with President Aliyev both sides pointed to the absence of any serious problems. Yet some issues do require urgent intervention.

IMPLICATIONS: There is an erroneous perception among Azerbaijanis that the problems of the Azerbaijani

minority in Georgia emerged with the Saakashvili presidency. In fact, Azerbaijanis have been experiencing the same problems since the times of Gamsakhurdia. Azerbaijan and Georgia preferred, however, to shut their eyes to the problem. During the Shevardnadze regime, the rights and civil liberties of Azerbaijanis were limited. Fear of repression from the central government as well as the Aliyev government's ignorance of their interests hardly allowed ethnic Azerbaijanis to exercise their civil rights. The wind of change brought by Saakashvili and his pledges to enhance the lives of minorities incited hope among Georgian Azerbaijanis. Saakashvili's willingness to sack the governor of Kvemo Kartli because of the deadly incidents showed that the current Georgian government is building a real civil society in their country. In contrast to Shevardnadze, Saakashvili show a willingness to not hide or suppress but to resolve the issue. Importantly, Georgian Azerbaijanis feel comfortable with the new regime since the new government is not afraid to address problems openly while at the same time trying to come to terms with them by democratic means. The increased number of protests does not hint to an equally increased problem. Instead, it shows Georgia's Azerbaijanis are finally given a voice. Azerbaijanis do not see the need to conceal real issues for the sake of the Aliyev-Saakashvili friendship. Still, the main problem of Georgian Azerbaijanis is their low level of integration into Georgian society.

Despite the arrests of several Azerbaijanis, the anti-corruption campaign that has been carried out in Kvemo Kartli was not directed against the Azerbaijani minority. The Georgian central government in the past decade ignored cross-border smuggling, which benefited close relatives of ex-president Shevardnadze. Meanwhile, a high percentage of smugglers are Georgian Azerbaijanis, who end up on the wrong side of the law due to hard socio-economic conditions. The anti-corruption campaign also hurt certain political circles that now try to argue a supposed discrimination of Georgian Azerbaijanis to discredit the Saakashvili government.

As for the 'transport war', there may be several explanations. First, president Aliyev is trying to impress the public with his consistency and steadiness in his

policy toward Armenia. Secondly, the recent transportation crisis in the North Caucasus after the Beslan tragedy almost paralyzed Armenia's economy. It illustrated Armenia's vulnerability from a geographical standpoint. By diminishing Armenia's access to necessary goods, Azerbaijan exerts pressure on Armenia in order to achieve a favorable resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. It is worth mentioning that both the United States and the European Union pay specific attention to the TRACECA transport corridor from Central Asia to Europe. Yet the 'transport war' could jeopardize the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline. It should also be noted that neither the U.S. nor the E.U. castigated Azerbaijan's actions in relation to the transport crisis, raising the question whether Azerbaijan informed or coordinated its actions with external powers.

CONCLUSIONS: The recent tensions between Azerbaijan and Georgia will not have the power to undermine the relations of the two countries. The exposure of issues related to the Azerbaijani minority in Georgia followed by their gradual resolution will allow Azerbaijanis to fully integrate into Georgian society, which is getting increasingly democratic. The transport crisis, however, significantly hurt Azerbaijan and Georgia. Financially, both sides did not incur excessive deficits. But the crisis indicated to other countries that the transport corridor through Azerbaijan and Georgia to Europe may not be reliable. Both countries will need to work hard to get that confidence back and to make the corridor attractive again.

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IRAN AND AZERBAIJAN: TOWARD NORMAL RELATIONS?

Hooman Peimani

Azerbaijan's Minister of Internal Affairs Ramil Usubov recently called on Iran to increase investments in Azerbaijan, pointing out the favorable conditions for foreign investments. Usubov stressed Iranian President Mohammad Khatami's August 2004 signing of a security agreement in Baku with Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev as a development, which further consolidated bilateral ties, particularly in the "battle against narcotics, organized crime and terrorism." Against a background of tensions in Azerbaijani-Iranian relations dated back to mid-2001, Usubov's statements indicated the success of the two neighbours in tension-reduction and the creation of a constructive environment in bilateral relations, a result of the two countries' efforts and particularly the balanced foreign policy of President Ilham Aliyev.

BACKGROUND: Azerbaijan and Iran have a long common history ended when Iran lost the Caucasus, including Azerbaijan, to Russia as a result of two series of long and devastating wars. The Turkmanchai Treaty of 1828 heralded the end of Iran's influence in that region as the treaty formalized its annexation by Russia. The Soviet Union's collapse and the emergence of Azerbaijan as an independent state created high hopes both in Iran and Azerbaijan for close and cordial relations justified by their common history as well as many other commonalities such as cultural, social and religious. However, Azerbaijan did not enjoy close, warm and expanding relations with Iran during the first few years of its independence because of erroneous policies taken by both sides. Their relations were especially troublesome during the term of the first Azerbaijani President Abulfaz Elchibey, when hostility and not friendship became the defining characteristic of Baku-Tehran relations. However, the ascension to power in 1993 of the late President Heydar Aliyev helped change the course of their relations thanks to a more balanced foreign

policy towards Iran and Russia compared to his predecessor.

In the second half of the 1990s, the two neighbors sought to improve their relations damaged as a result of the legacy of the past and other issues, including Iran's exclusion – under American pressure – from the major oil development projects. While especially the latter served as a factor to instigate tensions in their bilateral relations throughout the 1990s, political, economic and security realities inclined the two sides to improve their relations as neither side facing regional security challenges saw a merit in pushing a potentially friendly neighbor into the enemy camp.

Large numbers of high-level official visits, including at the presidential levels, late in the 1990s and during the first three years of the 21st century indicated a significant improvement in Iranian-Azerbaijani relations. Yet, this period also witnessed serious deterioration of relations caused by a territorial dispute over the ownership of an off-shore oilfield in the Caspian Sea in late 2001. Although the incident, which showed a potential to

escalate into military conflict, damaged their improving relations, both Baku and Tehran made an effort to stabilize their relations in its aftermath as reflected in President Heydar Aliyev's visit to Iran in 2002. Those relations were on the track of improvement without experiencing new tensions when he passed away a year latter.

IMPLICATIONS: The election as president of Ilham Aliyev in October 2003 turned out to be a development with a positive impact of Azerbaijani-Iranian relations. Despite expectations to the contrary, he has since pursued a balanced foreign policy characterized by a clear effort to maintain reliable, predictable and tension-free relations with Iran and Russia, two of Azerbaijan's neighbors sharing a concern over Baku's expanding relations with the United States. Thanks to a constructive mood in Iran and Azerbaijan, apart from their growing economic relations, the two neighbors have embarked on cooperation on security-related issues, including anti-drug operations. The growing activities of drug-traffickers in their countries have been not only a source of health problems especially for their youth, but also a threat to their border security as a result of the illegal border crossing of traffickers.

Iranian President Mohammad Khatami's August 2004 visit to Baku resulted in the signing of a security agreement whose specifics are not fully known. A sign of good relations in itself, the visit was also significant for the success of signing the agreement, given expanding Baku-Washington ties in many fields, including military and security affairs. As acknowledged by both Baku and Tehran, the visit and its security agreement helped further consolidate Iranian-Azerbaijani relations, particularly in the struggle against narcotics, organized crime and terrorism.

Security cooperation aside, Iran and Azerbaijan have since undertaken many small-scale joint projects, including those facilitating land transportation between the two countries. As a recent example, on 3 December 2004 the ministries

of roads and transportation of Iran and Azerbaijan agreed to build two bridges between their countries for the total value of \$11 million, namely Pole Dasht-Shah Takhti bridge between Iran and Azerbaijan's Autonomous Republic of Nakhichevan and the Julfa bridge between Iran and Azerbaijan's mainland.

Within this context, apart from its diplomatic significance, the December meeting of the Azerbaijani minister of internal affairs with the Iranian ambassador to Azerbaijan demonstrated Baku's interest in expanding and consolidating ties with Tehran, as evident in his calling on Iranian investors to invest more in his country, while maintaining good relations with Washington.

CONCLUSIONS: As two neighbors with many commonalities, Iran and Azerbaijan do have the ingredients to build warm, predictable and tension-free relations for the good of their own nations and the security of the Caucasus, which has had more than a fair share of conflict since the Soviet Union's disintegration. There is a great potential for their extensive economic activities not limited to the oil industry in which the two countries have great stakes. Factors such as the growing American presence in Azerbaijan have been and will likely be a source of conflict between Azerbaijan and Iran. Nevertheless, long-term considerations should convince them as to the merit of making an extra effort to maintain close, friendly and constructive relations, which will certainly serve their national interests, added to their contribution to securing peace and stability in the Caucasus. As reciprocated by the Iranian government, the Ilham Aliyev administration has indicated an interest in that direction. One should hope that the two sides will continue to work towards that end despite their differences over issues such as ties with the United States and a legal regime for the Caspian Sea.

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DOES ARMENIA FACE A MAJOR CRISIS?

Stephen Blank

As Armenia enters 2005, a number of recent reports warn that it faces major crises and isolation. At home its government increasingly rules through a combination of corruption and forceful repression. These symptoms manifest themselves through the overt manipulation of elections and through the resort to violence to suppress internal opposition.

While it does not appear that the opposition commands mass political support as happened in Ukraine and Georgia, it is likely that the government headed by Robert Kocharian will strive to take no chances and ensure that it stays in power. But this government cannot overcome Armenia's crushing economic and foreign policy problems however it seeks to do so. As a result, a major crisis cannot be ruled out in the future.

BACKGROUND: The most important factor in Armenian politics is the continuing primacy of the Nagorno-Karabakh issue. While annexation of this territory commands mass support, it should be clear to more dispassionate observers that Armenia can only sustain this policy at the cost of its economic future and independence. These costs make their presence felt in several ways. First of all, this annexation still does not command international legitimacy. Azerbaijan refuses to accept it even though it is clearly unable to recover the territory by force. This stance denies legitimacy to Armenia's possession of those lands, makes it something of an international outcast, and precludes a settlement.

Because Armenia is holding onto disputed territory that it won by conquest, it has aroused fierce Turkish opposition and Ankara's diplomatic support for Baku. The entire Turco-Armenian agenda therefore remains stalled. Turkey has embargoed Armenia's land border, preventing land and rail traffic, and has refused to discuss the charge that the Armenian massacres of 1915 constituted a genocide. Therefore Yerevan's obduracy has brought about unrelieved major constraints on Armenia's economic development. The World

Bank has estimated that lifting the embargo in return for concessions to Azerbaijan would lift Armenia's GDP by 14 percent. Other studies suggest that transport costs would fall by 30-50 percent. Naturally these figures suggest the immense importance of the Turkish embargo in inhibiting Armenia's economic development and international integration.

The embargo has other costs. It deprives Armenia of access to the other rail, road, and pipelines that are developing in the region, meaning that it will likely be bypassed by future developments in regional infrastructure unless it changes its stance on Nagorno-Karabakh. Thus it will also incur future costs beyond those already in existence. The absence of openings to the West or to the sea have also forced it into reliance on Georgian Black Sea Ports and on Russia by rail link through Abkhazia. In view of the tense state of Russo-Georgian relations and the unresolved Abkhaz situation, these routes are always subject to interruption and there is also tremendous corruption all along these routes whether by Georgians harassing Armenian traders or by Russian officials.

IMPLICATIONS: Armenia has nowhere to turn but to Russia. It depends on Russia for weapons, for trade, and for diplomatic support on Nagorno-Karabakh and other issues. Naturally this comes at a severe cost. Russian businesses and defense industry have been steadily buying up shares in Armenia's industry in debt for equity swaps. And in alignment with this strategy of "liberal imperialism", these firms and behind them the Russian government are gaining the commanding heights of Armenia's economy and a permanent position in Armenian economics and politics. In turn Armenia has had to perform services for Moscow, e.g. being a dispatch point for weapons that Moscow does not care to admit it is shipping to rogue states or other unsavory actors across the world. It can only approach NATO and the United States within limits, despite clear efforts to improve relations with both. Armenia is now sending 56 soldiers to Iraq and even sending officers to study at American military colleges. Nonetheless its room for maneuver is severely circumscribed. And in view of Moscow's worsening position in the CIS as a result of the Georgian and Ukrainian revolutions, Moscow will fight hard to maintain control over Armenia.

As long as Armenia is marred by the hijacking of its politics by factions aligned with an unyielding position on Nagorno-Karabakh; externally imposed and permanent economic underdevelopment and international isolation, and corrupted and violent politics, Armenia's standing in the world remains precarious. Its interacting foreign and domestic developments provide a textbook example of how war and internal misrule combine to bring about an entrenched but unstable structure that keeps it and its neighbors in a state of permanent tension and instability. Armenia is vulnerable to changes imposed by external events over which the Armenian government has only limited control or influence.

If the rigidity of this brittle ruling structure inhibits or even precludes internally generated change, external forces are not so frozen and are already acting to transform the Caucasus as a whole. Even

if Turkey's negotiations with the EU will lead to pressure upon it to remove the embargo of Armenia, Turkey would not make this concession gratuitously. Armenia too will have to pay a price, and this requirement also tallies with both the EU's and NATO's rising interest in stabilizing the entire Black Sea and Caucasus areas as well as their interest in bringing Turkey into the EU. Either or both of these two Brussels-based organizations may hence compel change in the "externalities" that surround the Nagorno-Karabakh issue. Specifically, they may not only induce Ankara to remove the embargo, they may also coerce Yerevan into making major concessions to Azerbaijan as a *quid pro quo*. These organizations' continuing pressure for democratization, especially reinforced now by Kyiv's and Tbilisi's prior examples may also come into play.

Once the logjam on Karabakh breaks, the consequences of misrule and of economic deprivation may quickly become clearer to the Armenian population as a whole which faces dire socio-economic challenges, not least a declining population. While Moscow and the ruling elite may bridle at the idea of democratization; they ultimately cannot deliver a solution to the ongoing issues connected with the war or to Armenia's profound socio-economic challenges. A deeper analysis of Armenia's political deformations suggests that not only does the continuation of its obdurate position on the war inevitably entail economic poverty and subservience to Moscow, they also prevent the regime from acting to overcome these crises, ultimately pushing Western security organizations to take the initiative in overcoming the war.

CONCLUSIONS: The longer Moscow proves unable or unwilling to resolve these frozen conflicts in the Caucasus, the more likely it is that European security organizations, increasingly concerned by the security costs and threats that these frozen conflicts impose, will act unilaterally to transform the regional status quo. When that happens, this transformation will clearly be against the interests of those who now benefit from the status quo and

may well provoke another round of Russian irritation and fulminations against the West. But by making the continuation of a perverse status quo in the Caucasus the sign of successful policy, the Russian and Armenian governments are rapidly foreclosing all other options to regional progress. In the end Europe may have to step in because the Muscovite approach and its replication in the domestic structures of rule in Armenia are not viable solutions. As in the Georgian and Ukrainian cases, those bringing pressure to bear upon an unstable situation will necessarily look to the West

for support, progress, and security, not to Moscow or to its discredited satraps in Yerevan or other capitals.

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HOW WILL BUSH'S NEW FOREIGN POLICY TEAM HANDLE CHECHNYA?

Erin Mark

With a new foreign policy team taking shape at the White House, the issue of U.S. policy on the unresolved war in Chechnya is actualized. The conflict is gradually growing to pose a serious security threat to an area far larger than Chechnya itself, and there is a consensus that Russia's policies are only worsening the situation. Will Condoleezza Rice's foreign policy team confront Putin directly over Chechnya, address the conflict as a U.S. security interest, and push for a political solution, or will it continue Powell's policy of non-involvement? Some insights as to where U.S. policy toward Russia might be headed provide no conclusive indications.

BACKGROUND: The most recent war in Chechnya, though launched as a counter-terrorism operation, has done little to reduce the threat of violence. Conversely, it has spurred increasingly violent attacks and widened the chaotic space in which radicals can recruit and operate. Beslan was the most brutal illustration of this while simultaneously provoking an exception to the rule of ongoing international neglect of Chechnya. No negotiations have taken place since 1997, and no Western government or international regulatory body has consistently and unequivocally pressed for a political resolution.

With the conflict in its tenth year, the question is whether the United States will embrace an active position that moves the crisis closer to resolution or will continue to be cautious with Moscow on this and other issues in the Caucasus. Putin's ambitions to keep the Soviet Republics firmly within Russia's sphere of influence, and the tactics used to secure that position, have been eradicated by the recent elections fiasco in Ukraine. Putin's actions in these and other elections call into question his honesty and sincerity in commitments made with the US, EU, and other international institutions such as the

G8 on transparency, counter-terrorism intelligence sharing, energy security, and non-proliferation.

In addition, the prolonged deployment of Russian Federal Forces in Chechnya, as in Tajikistan, has contributed to their corruption, seen in the selling of arms to radicals, hostage profiteering, and drug trafficking, and must lead one to question their effectiveness as a security and peacekeeping force not only in the Caucasus but also in joint international operations.

Against the background of Ukraine and Georgia, the direction in Washington's engagement has tended less toward direct involvement in conflict resolution, and more toward the broader theme of democracy promotion, which the Administration sees as a universal aspiration. Its foreign policy is dedicated to the promotion of democracy, as part of the total package of economic, governance, and civil society development with long term global and U.S. benefits including peaceful conflict resolution and threat pre-emption.

This could be interpreted as a trend away from direct intervention in conflicts and instead toward investment in countries bordering on conflict areas. As the war in Iraq becomes more costly, there is necessarily an increased pre-occupation with the Middle East in the diplomatic sector and among NGOs. America will therefore have to devote the remainder of its resources not to costly crisis zones with desolate internal political landscapes, but to areas which have already manifested positive developmental trends. For example, there has been heavy investment in Georgia and Ukraine on the governmental and NGO fronts. However, other countries including Azerbaijan and Central Asian states have been ignored because of low expectations for the success of any efforts there. Similarly, there is little confidence in diplomatic or financial investment to Russia expressly devoted to ending the Chechen conflict.

This approach of targeted democracy building, when applied to Eurasia and the Caucasus, also serves the purpose of chipping away at Russia's dominance in the region. In effect, the promotion of

democracy and political independence in countries such as Ukraine and Georgia diminishes Russia's influence in the CIS without direct confrontation.

This could gradually raise the regional role of Ukraine and Georgia. But this is unlikely to lead to any change in Chechnya. Even with increased support from the United States. Ukraine and Georgia are not likely to antagonize Putin over Chechnya, as Yushchenko and Saakashvili will have to work with Putin to maintain their relationships in the gas industry, not to mention their territorial security. The fact that Russia has killed the OSCE northern border patrol mission also indicates that Georgia is not in a position to play an larger role in the Caucasus, as some have suggested.

Also underlying this is a reluctance on the part of the United States in taking on Russia directly, as well as a myopic view concerning security risks posed to the U.S. by the war in Chechnya. It is known that SS-21 SCARABs were launched from Mozdok (North Ossetia) in 1999. These short-range ballistic missiles are capable of carrying AA60 tactical nuclear warheads, which may also be in or near Mozdok. There is a credible fear that Shamil Basaev, or other radicalized Chechens, could take control of a ballistic missile site in an accessible region such as Tatischevo, near Rostov in southern Russia, partly through bribing members of the Russian Federal forces, as they did in practically all previous attacks. Vladimir Ustinov's proposal before Duma to legalize the practice of counter-hostage taking has also raised the stakes in the Chechen conflict.

The impact of a high-profile terrorist act involving such facilities would be tremendous. These weapons would not be used against the United States or Europe, but they could be used against Russia. Yet the effects would not be contained to Russia alone or even the immediate region. Such an event would be devastating in terms of human lives, medical and direct financial assistance, not to mention a sudden burgeoning of refugees from Chechnya and potentially Russia as well. Whatever pressures Georgia, Azerbaijan, and other states with Chechen refugee populations receive from Russia now would

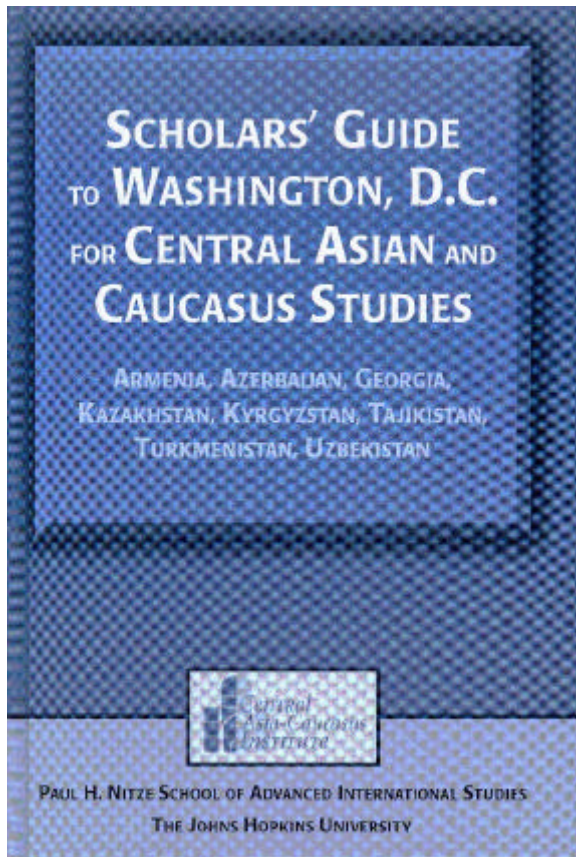
undoubtedly be magnified by such an event. If the past is any guidance, Russia would undoubtedly blame Georgia and possibly Azerbaijan, looking to the Pankisi Gorge and other pockets of refugees for terrorists. Its repression in the North Caucasus would increase, exacerbating the brewing unrest there. Moscow could conceivably blame Ukraine and Georgia for compromising regional security through defiance. The instability resulting from an enlarged open conflict area necessarily imperils U.S. energy security, economic interests, and the security of its presence in the Caucasus and neighboring Central Asia.

This is a worst-case scenario, but every passing year unfortunately makes a worst-case scenario more likely. The resources, efforts and attention resulting from such an event would be much greater than the investment required now to help resolve or manage this still relatively contained conflict.

CONCLUSIONS: While Condoleezza Rice will most likely not push for intervention in Chechnya,

she could toughen the Bush administration's stance on its relationship with Russia and question the value of its relationship with Putin based on intelligence sharing and counter-terrorism. With Moscow's dealings in Ukraine, the Caucasus, Central Asia, and the Yukos affair and in light of Beslan, Washington is increasingly uncomfortable with its relationship with Moscow, and doubtful about Russia's usefulness as a partner against terrorism. In seeking to redefine this relationship, there is an opportunity to re-evaluate the risks of a hands-off policy toward Chechnya? to Russia, the Caucasus region, and therefore to the United States. Georgia and Ukraine potentially open a pathway, via the CIS, for broader international efforts in Chechnya, by virtue of being (for now) out from under the thumb of Moscow-backed authoritarians.

AUTHOR'S BIO: Erin Mark works with the Reagan-Fascell Fellows program at the International Forum for Democratic Studies, National Endowment for Democracy.



The Central Asia-Caucasus Institute is proud to announce the publication of the Scholars' Guide To Washington DC for Central Asia-Caucasus Studies. The Guide was compiled by Tigran Martirosyan and Silvia Maretti and published by M.E. Sharpe, publishers.

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FIELD REPORTS

RUSSIAN-KAZAKH TANDEM: THE ALLIANCE OF THE DOOMED?

Marat Yermukanov

Can the Russian leopard change its spots? That is the question frequently posed by political observers in Kazakhstan after the January 11 surprise visit of the Russian President Vladimir Putin to Almaty. Although the conclusion of a border delimitation agreement and talks aimed at strengthening economic ties between Kazakhstan and Russia were high on the agenda many aspects of the top level meeting still remains hidden from the public eye in both countries.

Kazakhstan's official press this time diverted from the long-standing practice of previously announcing the visits of state leaders and did not write a word about Putin's trip to Almaty prior to the event. The enigmatic Putin broadly outlined the purpose of his visit in a very furtive manner naming joint development of energy resources, bilateral cooperation within the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and Single Economic Space as the main issues of the agenda. Kazakhstan's President Nursultan Nazarbayev added little to these statements. Cutting short his two-day visit Vladimir Putin left Almaty as unexpectedly as he appeared. It was rumored that he was urgently called back home by Kremlin officials worried by widespread public unrests over pension issues in Russia.

Surprisingly, Nazarbayev flew to Moscow at the beginning of the following week to sign the border delimitation agreement. Even this removal one of the major hurdles in bilateral relations provokes questions. Why was the border problem, the hardest knot to unravel at uneasy high level talks held

alternatively in Russia and Kazakhstan without perceptible progress over the last five years, so easily settled within last two months? The disputed border area with rich gas deposits in Aktobe region (West Kazakhstan) have been an apple of discord between the neighbors up to the last moment. Only a year ago President Putin stepped on the raw by commenting publicly that "we have very serious border problems". He did not differ much from its predecessor Boris Yeltsin in that he regarded Kazakhstan as the "underbelly of Russia" rather than an equal partner with an independent foreign policy.

However, over the last few years Moscow remarkably toned down its imperial rhetoric and abandoned, at the official level at least, its territorial claims on five border regions of Kazakhstan in the North planned to be annexed to Russia by former Soviet President Nikita Khrushchev. Many observers interpret this sudden change of mood in Moscow in the context of the Ukrainian orange revolution. Apparently the Ukrainian syndrome was mulled over at great length by the two leaders in an informal atmosphere at the alpine ski resort Shymbulak, inaccessible to journalists. Clearly, the threat of the orange revolution is the sole factor which can drive Astana and Moscow into each others arms. With presidential elections to be held next year, Nazarbayev faces increasingly tough problems in coping with the opposition. Last month the Supreme Court banned the main opposition party Democratic Choice of Kazakhstan. At the same time, under the pressure from opposition and

international organizations, the state granted enhanced powers to parliament in nominating officials for key government posts.

If presidential elections will repeat the Ukrainian scenario the main loser will probably be Putin and not Nazarbayev. Traditionally loyal to Moscow, Astana is seen as one of Russia's last bastions in the CIS. In its current position, Russia cannot afford displaying its usual 'big-brother' ambitions in relations with Central Asian states. But for Kazakhstan the time has not come yet to turn its back on Moscow. On the contrary, welcoming Putin with open arms President Nazarbayev stressed that "we recognize Russia as our main partner". This statement contradicts the official line of multi-vector diplomacy reiterated a few days prior to Putin's visit to Astana by Kazakh Foreign Minister Kasymzhomart Tokayev who stated that Kazakhstan favors "multilateral and balanced politics" among China, Russia and the United States.

Moscow's major political setback in Ukraine has shattered all hopes of integrating Belarus, Russia, Kazakhstan and Ukraine within the much-

publicized Single Economic Space. At the moment Putin and Nazarbayev seem to be two leaders really worried about the fate of the Single Economic Space. Belarus, grappling with its own economic problems, is not in a position to provide a reliable hinterland for its Slavic kin Russia. Pledging alliance with Russia in words, Kazakhstan is in fact striving for more economic independence from Russia. Part of this drive was the construction of the railway linking Khromtau in West Kazakhstan with Altynsarino in the North, whose planned route earlier passed through Russia. The Aktobe region of Kazakhstan drastically reduced its electricity imports from Russia after the construction of a high-capacity power station. Last week the Kazakh government raised the question of banning imports of foreign-fabricated chocolates and sweets, without mentioning Russia specifically as the main exporter. All these signal a widening, however imperceptible, rift in Kazakh-Russian economic relations which threatens to project itself on political ties. In this situation the orange revolution paranoia may serve as a factor contributing to warm relations between Astana and Moscow at least before the forthcoming presidential elections in Kazakhstan.

KYRGYZSTAN: PRE-ELECTION CONTROVERSIES

Nazgul Baktybekova

For the past several months, premier league politics in Kyrgyzstan has witnessed a number of political developments relating to the coming parliamentary and presidential elections scheduled for February and October 2005, respectively. A number of political forces and coalitions emerged, fierce controversy and mass protests have taken place. As elections are approaching, the political tension mounts.

In late 2004, the Kyrgyz Parliament adopted and later the President approved a law aimed at restraining election fraud. According to the new amendment to the election code, each voter will have the thumb of his or her left hand marked with an ink-like fluid when going to the polls. This is meant to prevent voters from voting repeatedly. The law was proposed by the opposition Civic Union for Fair Elections bloc, passed through the

Parliament after heated debates and unexpectedly receiving the President's approval. The law was welcomed by all opposition groups who saw the move as a step towards reducing chances for election fraud and vote-rigging. Pro-governmental forces such as the Public Council for Democratic Security established by the President himself as a democracy watchdog body, the Central Electoral Commission, and a number of pro-governmental deputies have attacked this change saying that it violates human rights, humiliates voters by doubting their honesty, undermines Kyrgyzstan's reputation and even arguing that the special marking ink could cause allergic reactions.

It is important to note that the new Kyrgyz law was supported not only by the opposition forces but also by the international community, which sees it as a promising sign for the country's democracy prospects. It is indeed important for a country, whose President has repeatedly declared that he would make every effort to ensure that the coming parliamentary and presidential elections are free and fair and consistent with international standards. At the same time President Askar Akaev, who has declared his intention to step down in October 2005, and his entourage have been strongly alarmed by the revolutionary changes of power in Georgia and Ukraine, and have vowed to prevent similar scenarios in Kyrgyzstan. Recent mass protests in Bishkek, organized in support of ex-diplomats critical of the government who were barred from running in the parliamentary elections, have reinforced the worries of the current regime. Ever since, it has been taking no chances. Consequently some positive political developments adopted earlier, which appeared to freshen up the pre-election atmosphere, have been overshadowed by the government's recent controversial decisions.

The Central Election Commission's decision to prohibit the registration of Kyrgyz ex-diplomats from running for Parliament on the basis of their prolonged residence outside the country was followed by another controversial decision of the

Bishkek City Council. According to the new rule, any meetings and public demonstrations that are not registered with authorities in advance are prohibited. The decision has immediately provoked criticism from NGOs and opposition forces. In the opinion of Edil Baisalov, leader of the Coalition for Democracy and Civil Society, this decision illegally limits the constitutional rights of the Kyrgyzstani people. "The right to meetings and demonstrations is granted by the Constitution. The decision of the Bishkek City Council exerts a permissive system of holding meetings and other protest actions. Therefore, we consider the decision as an attempt to limit our constitutional rights. We question the transparency and fairness of the upcoming elections", said Edil Baisalov in an interview to Deutsche Welle.

Despite this recent decision of the authorities, on 19 January Ata-Yurt and other opposition groups organized protests in Bishkek, gathering more than 400 people. The protestors demanded the government to permit ex-ambassadors to participate in the coming parliamentary elections. They put forward also more radical demands such as an end of the rule of President Askar Akaev and his family. The President's daughter Bermet Akaeva and his son Aidar Akaev have recently been registered as candidates for Parliament.

Currently the Pervomai District Court of Bishkek is considering a lawsuit brought against several opposition leaders: co-leader of Ata-Yurt movement Roza Otunbaeva, leader of Erkin Kyrgyzstan political party Topchubek Turgunaliyev and Ishengul Boljurova from the People's Movement of Kyrgyzstan. All of them are accused of organizing an unsanctioned protest in the capital. According to a representative of the law enforcement bodies, Petr Tyablin, the protestors breached public peace and infringed traffic regulations. The opposition leaders, however, oppose such accusations and view the government's move as the next political persecution and provocation of the opposition in the runup to the parliamentary elections.

EFFICIENCY OF ANTI-CORRUPTION ACT QUESTIONED IN AZERBAIJAN

Gulnara Ismailova

From January 1, 2005, the law "About struggle against corruption", signed by the President on January 13, 2004, entered into force. The president of the country also ratified in September the state program on struggle against corruption until 2006. According to the State Program, the Department on Struggle Against Corruption at the public prosecutor's office will carry out criminal prosecution connected with corruption. Besides, structures of internal control over the struggle against corruption will be created in the system of the central executive authority and in law enforcement bodies.

The state program assumes free access to information. Among measures in the struggle against corruption, the adoption of an antimonopoly code, measures on regulation of competition, and transparency in the field of privatization are all included. Following the law, governmental officials are not allowed to be in direct supervision of close relatives. The law forbids officials to receive gifts worth more than approximately US\$56.

Political expert and social democrat leader Zardusht Alizadeh commented that the struggle with corruption in Azerbaijan should have been initiated a long time ago. It is required by society, and for the integration of Azerbaijan into the world community. "There are several powerful methods of struggle against corruption, namely decentralization, public control and transparency of accepted decisions, control over incomes and transparency of the budget as well. The most effective method for the struggle against corruption is democracy." Mr. Alizadeh argued that struggle against corruption was hampered by the gradual suppression of democracy in Azerbaijan.

In the opinion of Member of Parliament Aydin Mirzazade, the fact that the initiative for the creation of the commission was the president's indicates that the presidential administration is attentive to the struggle against corruption. Of course, members of the commission will receive a high salary in order to refrain from taking bribes. Mirzazade conceded that the commission will not reveal all cases of corruption. Therefore, he said, society and media should actively participate in this process.

Despite a series of reforms in the government, legislation, development of civil society and business, corruption still remains a serious problem for Azerbaijan. According to annual ratings prepared by leading international organizations, Azerbaijan remains among the countries with the highest level of corruption.

In a recent study, the Heritage Foundation characterized the banking system in Azerbaijan as weak, and the share of the private sector to be limited. The legal system does not provide essential protection of private property, while corruption is widespread among the judiciary and law enforcement. Corruption is the main method to solve tariff problems and disputes.

Rena Safaraliyeva, Transparency International's representative in Azerbaijan, said the adoption of this act will not significantly help to curb corruption in the country. "We have also taken part in the development of the program and have no specific complaints regarding its contents. However, we deplore the fact that only the three branches of power are represented in the newly created commission. NGOs and media representatives should also be represented in this commission, as

well as representatives of business. With the present structure, the state will

supervise itself without participation of society. Effective struggle with corruption requires transparency before anything else. And I don't see a mechanism providing for transparent work by this commission at present”.

According to Vasif Movsumov, Executive Director of the Foundation for the Struggle Against Corruption, the law is an insufficient base in the struggle against corruption. According to Movsumov, a reasons for widespread bribe-taking in the country is the lack of legal awareness in society. Therefore, one of the primary goals of the Foundation is legal education. “A strong economy

and properly constructed system of social security is necessary to decrease corruption levels. But most importantly, we should be guided by the rule of law and public interest”, Movsumov declared.

Implementing the struggle against corruption requires the rule of law. Mosvumov argues that a law on the declaration of the incomes of government officials is direly needed.

Meanwhile, institution-building is proceeding. President Ilham Aliyev recently established a department of internal investigation and safety at the Ministry of Internal Affairs. Its main objective is to combat unscrupulous and corrupt policemen, and toughening of struggle against policemen acting beyond the law.

ABKHAZ RE-ELECTION CREATES MORE QUESTIONS THAN ANSWERS

Kakha Jibladze

Despite the civil unrest leading up to the January 12 re-run election in Abkhazia, the result was anti-climatic. Sergey Bagapsh won the election despite attempts to invalidate it due to low voter turnout. Now that the election is over, the real question is what Bagapsh means for relations between Abkhazia and Georgia.

The Georgian government is now offering a new plan for a federal system between the two entities and Abkhaz Foreign Minister Sergei Shamba has reportedly stated that the Abkhaz side is ready to resume talks in March. Despite the perceived eagerness on both sides for a peaceful outcome, experts are saying the real challenge may lay in the great distrust Georgian and Abkhazian citizens have for each other.

Although Bagapsh officially won the October 3 election, he eventually agreed to a Moscow-brokered compromise after the tension over the election escalated nearly to the point of civil war. As part of

the deal, his former rival, Raul Khajimba, became his running mate and received a great deal of power in the relationship. While the Georgian government was largely silent about the elections as a whole – and the scandal that followed – President Saakashvili spoke out in favor of Bagapsh as the rightful winner of an illegal election. Following the revote in January, the Georgian government strongly protested Russia's involvement. Saakashvili reportedly did not offer congratulations to Bagapsh, and was quoted in the Georgian newspaper “The Messenger” as saying “We will congratulate ourselves when the territorial integrity of our state is restored.”

Until the December compromise between Bagapsh and Khajimba, Russia was portraying Bagapsh as a villain, placing all their support behind Khajimba. The fact that Bagapsh has a Georgian wife and once reportedly worked in Georgia also gave some hope he would be a more accessible partner in conflict

resolution. But Bagapsh has gone out of his way – particularly since being voted into office with over 90% of the vote – to quiet any fears Moscow may have over his allegiance. He promised to increase Russian investments in Abkhazia and thanked the country for their help in maintaining peace. According to reports in the Georgian media, Bagapsh has made no comments favorable to the federal system being proposed by Tbilisi, and has repeatedly insisted that any meeting between Sokhumi and Tbilisi must be seen as a dialogue between two equal, independent nations. He also has maintained that no talks will take place as long as Saakashvili continues making bellicose statements.

The idea of a federal system is not completely popular with the Georgian population, either. Experts have been coming out of the woodwork for the past month, expounding on the system's pluses and minuses, but average Georgians seem unconvinced it is the right path. Adding to the confusion is the pervasive opinion among citizens that former president Shevardnadze actually sold Abkhazia and South Ossetia to Russia for large sums of money.

The day before the revote, ethnic Georgians were kidnapped in an alleged attempt to invalidate the election by low voter turnout. Some of the victims were even taken from a village on the Georgian side

of the Inguri River, which serves as a border between Abkhazia and Georgia. The eleven villagers taken from Ganmukhuri village in Georgia were quickly returned, but that did nothing to pacify their families or neighbors. Georgian troops were sent to patrol the border, in addition to local police. Villagers interviewed after the event reported that such events are commonplace and people live in fear of their Abkhaz neighbors across the river. The overriding view in Ganmukhuri was that no one will know peace – or have peace of mind – until Abkhazia is 'returned'.

Recently more editorials have been published in Georgian media advising the government to be patient, expressing the viewpoint that the best way to win over Abkhazians is to present a strong economy and the chance for rewarding economic ties. David Darchiashvili, the director of the Open Society Institute in Georgia, recently wrote that while neither side wants a federal system, it is the best of the possible options. But he added that until Georgians and Abkhazians learn to trust each other again, there will be no chance for a compromise of any sort. In Ganmukhuri, villagers distrust their Abkhazian neighbors across the river to the extent they are even afraid to fish in the Inguri. In such an atmosphere of fear, a happy outcome in the near future seems unlikely.



NEWS DIGEST

KAZAKH PRESIDENT ORDERS INQUIRY INTO BORDER SHOOTING

15 January

President Nursultan Nazarbaev on 15 January ordered an investigation into an incident on 14 January that left one Uzbek citizen dead on the Kazakh-Uzbek border. A Kazakh Foreign Ministry press release on 14 January stated that an Uzbek citizen identified as Muhammadov was shot and killed by Kazakh border guards as they attempted to "thwart contraband activities." The press release noted that Kazakh border guards briefed their Uzbek colleagues on the incident and that the two sides were set to start a joint investigation on 15 January. (Interfax-Kazakhstan)

TAJK ELECTION COMMISSION BEGINS REGISTERING CANDIDATES

17 January

Tajikistan's Central Election Commission (CEC) has begun to register candidates for participation in 27 February parliamentary elections. Muhibullo Dodojonov, head of the CEC secretariat, told the news agency that the CEC has registered 21 party-slate candidates for the ruling People's Democratic Party, 15 for the Islamic Renaissance Party, nine for the Communist Party, seven for the Social-Democratic Party, and four each for the Socialist and Democratic Parties. Another 209 candidates have been nominated for races in single-mandate constituencies. The CEC will complete the registration process on 6 February. (Asia Plus-Blitz)

ASIAN DEVELOPMENT BANK PRESENTS FEASIBILITY STUDY FOR TRANS-AFGHAN PIPELINE

17 January

Turkmenistan's government announced in a press release that the British company Penspen has completed a feasibility study of the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan pipeline and presented it to the energy ministers of Afghanistan, India, Pakistan, and Turkmenistan. The 1,680-kilometer pipeline, running from Turkmenistan to Fazilka, India on the Indian-Pakistani border, will cost \$3.3 billion and have an annual transport capacity of 33 billion cubic meters of natural gas. According to the press release, the TAP steering committee will discuss the feasibility study at its next meeting in February in Islamabad, with construction tentatively scheduled to begin in 2006 if all legal hurdles are successfully cleared. (turkmenistan.ru)

GEORGIAN ECONOMISTS END HUNGER STRIKE

17 January

Six Georgian economists have abandoned the hunger strike they began last week to protest the government's plans to sell several major enterprises to foreign investors. But they pledged to continue their efforts to prevent those privatizations, which they termed short-sighted. The six specifically expressed concern at the prospect that Russian companies might acquire Georgian assets, arguing that "Russian special services will use the privatized companies to cause political and economic destabilization and put political pressure on Georgia." And they accused Prime Minister Zurab Zhvania and State Minister Kakha Bendukidze of promoting Russia's economic interests to the detriment of Georgia. (Caucasus Press)

U.S. GRANTS ASYLUM TO 1999 APARTMENT-BUILDING EXPLOSION VICTIM

18 January

Alena Morozova, who survived a 1999 terrorist explosion in her Moscow apartment building, has been granted political asylum in the United States after claiming that her investigations into the possibility that the Federal Security Service (FSB) carried out the bombing had put her life in danger. Morozova's lawyer, former FSB officer Mikhail Trepashkin, was sentenced to four years' imprisonment by a Moscow court in May, in what many believe was a trumped-up case intended to punish him for attempting to implicate the FSB in the 1999 bombings. "I know the material collected by Trepashkin, for which he is being persecuted by the Russian government, would leave even the most skeptical bureaucrat in the [U.S.] immigration service in no doubt that the Russian authorities will stop at nothing to hide the truth about the apartment-building explosion," Morozova told Ekho Moskvyy. She said that she intends to ask U.S. President George W. Bush to raise Trepashkin's case with President Putin at their 24 February summit in Slovakia. (RFE/RL)

PENSIONERS CONTINUE TO TAKE THEIR COMPLAINTS TO THE STREETS

18 January

Protests against the monetization of in-kind benefits continued on 18 January in various Russian cities for the 10th consecutive day. In Moscow Oblast there have been

24 unauthorized rallies involving some 10,000 people in 14 districts since 9 January. St. Petersburg experienced three days of unauthorized rallies starting on 15 January. On 16 January about 1,500 people blocked Nevskii Prospekt, the city's main thoroughfare. In Samara, a rally was held for the sixth consecutive day on 17 January. In the Siberian city of Angarsk, some 2,000 people blocked traffic along the main streets and gained access to the city administration building. A map on [gazeta.ru](http://www.gazeta.ru) depicting areas where protests have taken place shows that the demonstrations have not been concentrated in any particular federal district, but have occurred throughout Russia

(<http://www.gazeta.ru/firstplace.shtml>). Among the latest cities experiencing unauthorized rallies since 14 January are Orel, Kaluga, Stavropol, Vologoda, Kazan, Novgorod, Khabarovsk, Angarsk, Nalchik, Cherkessk, Perm, Saratov, Tyumen, Novosibirsk, Naberezhnyi Chelny, and Yuzhno-Sakhalinsk, according to [gazeta.ru](http://www.gazeta.ru). "Nezavismaya gazeta" on 17 January argued that although some people have already dubbed the protests as the "chintz revolution" (chintz is a cheap material often worn by pensioners) the real revolution will take place in February when people start to receive bills for their utilities and rent. According to the daily, in a majority of regions, rates will increase an average of 35-40 percent. (RFE/RL)

SAUDI ARABIA CRITICIZES AZERBAIJANI GOVERNMENT OFFICIAL OVER HAJJ PROBLEMS

18 January

The Saudi Arabian Embassy in Baku released a statement on 18 January rejecting as untrue media reports blaming the embassy for the inability of a group of would-be pilgrims from Azerbaijan to perform the hajj. The statement pointed out that the people in question were refused Saudi Arabian visas because they had not received endorsement from the Muslim Spiritual Board of the Caucasus, which has a quota of 2,500 pilgrims from Azerbaijan. The statement further accused Rafiq Aliev, chairman of the Azerbaijan State Committee for Religious Affairs, of organizing the 10 January protest outside the embassy by those would-be pilgrims who had been refused visas. (Turan)

KYRGYZ PRESIDENT'S DAUGHTER PREPARES TO RUN FOR PARLIAMENT DESPITE OPPOSITION PROTESTS

18 January

Bermet Akaeva, the daughter of President Askar Akaev, has submitted all necessary documents to run in 27 February parliamentary elections in Bishkek's University District. Roza Otunbaeva, co-chairperson of the Ata-Jurt opposition movement, was recently barred from running

in the same electoral district. On 17 January, Ata-Jurt released a statement saying, "Using state-controlled media that are subordinated exclusively to the interests of the [presidential] family, the president praises his daughter to the whole country and at the same time lambastes the opposition. Meanwhile, all of our attempts to call on the authorities simply to observe the laws the president has signed are viewed as ideological extremism," RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service reported. The Kyrgyz NGO Civil Society Against Corruption had earlier accused the authorities of putting pressure on students in the University District to sign a petition in favor of Bermet Akaeva's candidacy. (RFE/RL)

KYRGYZ OFFICIAL WARNS OF 'EXTREMISTS' IN UPCOMING ELECTIONS

18 January

Kalyk Imankulov, head of Kyrgyzstan's National Security Service, told journalists on 18 January that extremists could try to influence the outcome of the 27 February parliamentary elections. "Extremists may hire a candidate, lobby laws through him, and turn Kyrgyzstan into a base for conquering the entire Ferghana Valley," Imankulov said. He also warned of possible terror attacks by the banned Islamist group Hizb ut-Tahrir. Finally, Imankulov commented on the prospects of the country's opposition. "I have not heard a single opposition leader say in clear terms how our country should be run," he said. "The only group our 'revolutionaries' may rely on is indolent and idle young people who cannot name a single political party," but will gladly take to the streets for money and for mere fun. "Two or three provocations are enough to spark bloodshed," Imankulov added. "This is where the danger lies." (Interfax)

AFGHAN CALL FOR ANTI-DRUG FUNDS

19 January

The man heading Afghanistan's campaign against drugs production has called for more funds to support cash crop alternatives for the country's farmers. Counter narcotics minister Habibullah Qaderi wants incentives to help wean farmers off poppy and onto other crops. According to UN statistics, poppy cultivation now accounts for 60% of Afghanistan's economic activity. Experts have warned that after emerging from nearly 25 years of war Afghanistan could become a "narcocriminal" state. Drugs, in particular the production of opium and heroin, is fast becoming the biggest priority for Afghanistan's leaders. After he was sworn in late last year, President Karzai declared a holy war against drugs. Habibullah Qaderi is the man who he has appointed to work out the tactics. Mr Qaderi believes, in the short-term at least, that subsidies and incentives to persuade farmers off poppy and onto other cash crops, like wheat and cotton, are the answer. Afghanistan accounts for almost 90% of

the world's consumption of heroin and opium. It is a natural location for growing poppy, which needs little water and can survive in rough terrain. And, with some poppy growers earning around \$1,500 a month, compared to the \$100 or so they would get cultivating conventional crops, it is easy to see why they turn to it. The effort to wean them off is international, and now a much bigger priority for the Americans than it was before. They and the British have pledged tens of millions of dollars to eradicate poppy cultivation. On Wednesday, the British minister for international development, Hilary Benn, had talks with President Karzai, during which he, too, emphasised the need to stimulate cash crop alternatives. (BBC)

OSCE TO SEND 200 OBSERVERS TO MONITOR KYRGYZ ELECTIONS

19 January

Lubomir Kopaj, who will head the OSCE observer mission to monitor Kyrgyzstan's parliamentary elections on 27 February, told a news conference in Bishkek on 18 January that the mission will include a total of 200 observers. The mission will consist of 12 international staff members, 18 long-term observers, and 170 short-term observers. (Interfax)

ARMENIAN PEACEKEEPERS LEAVE FOR IRAQ

19 January

Forty-six noncombat military personnel (including 31 drivers, 10 sappers, three doctors, and a liaison officer) left Yerevan on 18 January for Kuwait, where they will undergo two weeks of training before beginning their six-month tour of duty with the international peacekeeping force in Iraq, Noyan Tapan and RFE/RL's Armenian Service reported. The proposed deployment aroused considerable domestic political opposition. Addressing the contingent at a farewell ceremony at Zvartnots Airport, Defense Minister Serzh Sarkisian stressed that their mission is "strictly humanitarian." U.S. Ambassador to Armenia John Evans said Armenia's participation in the international peacekeeping operations will serve to strengthen the two countries' already close cooperation in security issues. (RFE/RL)

RUSSIA'S CLAIMS ABOUT GEORGIA SHELTERING TERRORISTS ARE GROUNDLESS – MINISTER

19 January

Georgian Foreign Minister Salome Zourabichvili has called Russia's claims that Georgia is sheltering terrorists absolutely groundless. On Monday, the Russian Embassy in Tbilisi issued a statement saying that "the threat of terrorism coming from Georgian territory and constituting a serious challenge to the security of both Russia and Georgia remains." The

statement also said that Russian officials have made a number of public statements lately about the presence of Chechen militants and terrorists in Georgia's Pankisi Gorge. "Unfortunately, instead of taking additional effective steps, the Georgian side responded with mere assurances that the Pankisi Gorge is free from terrorists," the statement says. (Interfax)

RUSSIA SAYS GEORGIA'S PANKISI GORGE STILL A PROBLEM

19 January

Russian Defense Minister Sergei Ivanov told reporters on Wednesday that the Pankisi Gorge in Georgia "gives us certain anxiety, and has done so for more than one year." Russia has repeatedly claimed that militants, including guerrillas from Chechnya, take refuge in the gorge and has been demanding intervention from the Georgian government. In an interview with Interfax earlier on Wednesday, Georgian Foreign Minister Salome Zourabichvili dismissed the Russian allegations as "absolutely groundless." (Interfax)

ANOTHER AZERBAIJANI KILLED IN CLASH IN GEORGIA

19 January

One Azerbaijani was killed on 18 January and several people were injured in a fight in Georgia's Gardabani Raion between Georgian police and Azerbaijanis who were apparently trying to smuggle electronic equipment into Georgia from Azerbaijan. Local Azerbaijanis began throwing stones at police, injuring at least one of them, and police reportedly responded by firing into the air. It is the second fatal incident in a predominantly Azerbaijani-populated district of Georgia within the past two months; no one has yet been arrested for the killing of an elderly Azerbaijani woman in December. (Turan)

CHECHEN PRESIDENT ASSAILS LACK OF SUPPORT FROM WORLD ISLAMIC ORGANIZATIONS

20 January

In a statement pegged to the Muslim festival of Kurban-Bayram and posted on 20 January on chechenpress.com, Aslan Maskhadov expressed his disappointment at the "silent complicity" of world Islamic organizations such as the League of Arab States and the Organization of the Islamic Conference in the face of what Maskhadov termed the "terrible genocide" perpetrated by Russia against the Chechen people. Maskhadov argued that in accordance with their statutes, such organizations are obliged "to defend the rights of all Muslims of the world," including the Chechens. (RFE/RL)

ARMENIANS PROTEST U.S. DIPLOMAT'S KARABAKH GAFFE

20 January

Pro-government Armenian newspapers expressed outrage on 19 January over Assistant U.S. Secretary of State Elizabeth Jones's inclusion of the leadership of the unrecognized Nagorno-Karabakh Republic in a list of what she termed "criminal secessionist regimes" on the territory of the former USSR. At a 13 January news conference with Russian journalists, Jones argued that the removal of such regimes in Transdniestria, Georgia's unrecognized republics of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, and Nagorno-Karabakh is in Russia's interests. Vahan Hovannisian, who is a leading member of the Armenian Revolutionary Federation-Dashnaktsutiun, a junior partner in the three-party ruling coalition, said he does not believe Jones's statement accurately reflects Washington's policy vis-a-vis Nagorno-Karabakh. Aram Sarkisian of the opposition Democratic Party of Armenia told journalists on 19 January that Jones's statement has seriously damaged Armenia's negotiating position in the ongoing search for a solution to the Karabakh conflict. (RFE/RL)

KAZAKH POLICE DETAIN ALLEGED HIZB UT-TAHRIR DEMONSTRATORS

20 January

Police detained 40 alleged supporters of the Islamist Hizb ut-Tahrir organization after the latter held an unsanctioned rally in Almaty on 20 January. Almaty city police told the news agency that demonstrators gathered in the morning outside the city's central mosque with placards bearing extremist and anti-American slogans. According to a report in "Liter" on 21 January, the demonstrators condemned abuses committed against Iraqi Muslims. "The police have detained almost all the participants in the rally, about 40 people," a police spokesperson told Interfax. "Administrative measures have been applied to them for holding an unauthorized rally." Kazakh officials have warned recently that the group, which is unregistered in Kazakhstan and banned elsewhere in Central Asia, is growing more active. On 19 January, a court in Shymkent sentenced Hizb ut-Tahrir activist Serik Tulepbergenov to one year in prison for "active participation in an unregistered organization," Kazinform reported. (Interfax-Kazakhstan)

U.S. DIPLOMAT APOLOGIZES FOR KARABAKH GAFFE

21 January

Speaking on Armenian Public Television on 21 January, Foreign Minister Vartan Oskanian said that U.S. Assistant Secretary of State Elizabeth Jones telephoned him earlier that day to apologize for the furore caused by her comments on 13 January at a press conference with

Russian journalists. Jones was quoted as branding the authorities of the unrecognized Nagorno-Karabakh Republic, along with the leadership of Transdniestria, Abkhazia, and South Ossetia, as "criminal secessionist Regimes." According to Oskanian, Jones explained that she "did not and could not" mean to include the Karabakh leadership in the category of "criminal regimes." Also on 21 January, U.S. Ambassador to Armenia John Evans told Arminfo that Jones made two separate points: first, that the United States and Russia should cooperate more closely to resolve the conflict in Abkhazia, and second, that there are "extremist criminal elements" in unspecified territories bordering on Russia. Evans also said that two international principles of conflict resolution collide in the Karabakh peace process, that of territorial integrity and the right to national self-determination. Evans said that contradiction does not, however, make a settlement of the conflict impossible given flexibility and readiness for compromise. (Arminfo)

KYRGYZ PARLIAMENT VOTES TO LET EX-ENVOYS RUN FOR PARLIAMENT

21 January

Kyrgyzstan's Legislative Assembly passed an amendment to the country's election law on 20 January permitting former diplomats to run for office whether or not they meet the five-year in-country residency requirement, RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service reported. The amendment, which still needs President Askar Akaev's signature to become law, would come too late to help several would-be candidates from the diplomatic corps who have been barred from running in 27 February parliamentary elections because they have not resided in Kyrgyzstan for the past five years; the deadline for submitting applications to run was 17 January. The in-country residency requirement has eliminated several potential opposition candidates from contention this year, including former Foreign Minister Roza Otunbaeva and ex-envoys Mambetjunus Abylov, Medetkan Sherimkulov, and Usen Sydykov. (RFE/RL)

ABKHAZIA CALLS ITS INDEPENDENCE FROM GEORGIA A VITAL ISSUE

24 January

The Abkhaz Foreign Ministry said that at the current stage of relations between Abkhazia and Georgia, the problem of recognizing Abkhazia's independence reflects the interests of both parties. "Undoubtedly, in the long-term perspective, the recognition of Abkhazia's independence will be more important for regional stability than attempts to unite Abkhazia with Georgia, which, at the current stage of Georgian-Abkhaz relations, would only spark another fierce conflict," says an Abkhaz Foreign Ministry statement

circulated on Monday. The statement was made ahead of Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili's visit to Strasbourg, where he is to address a session of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe. (Interfax)

KYRGYZ ELECTION COMMISSION REVIEWS CANDIDATES

24 January

A spokesperson for Kyrgyzstan's Central Election Commission (CEC) told akipress.org that the deadline for submitting applications to run in the 27 February parliamentary elections expired on 22 January. The spokesperson said that the CEC is currently reviewing applications and will complete the registration process on 1 February. As of 24 January, the CEC has received nominations for 469 candidates, 73 of them put forward by political parties, akipress.org reported. The CEC has registered 378 candidates and denied registration to seven. Nineteen would-be candidates have removed their own candidacies and nine submitted incomplete documentation. (akipress.org)

GEORGIA DOUBLES MINIMAL MONTHLY PENSIONS TO \$15

24 January

In accordance with President Saakashvili's election pledge one year ago, as of January 2005, the minimal monthly pension has been raised from 14 to 28 laris (\$15). Finance Minister Zurab Nogaideli told a government session on 24 January that sufficient funds have been transferred to the regions to begin payment of the higher pensions. (Caucasus Press)

BESLAN RELATIVES END PROTEST

24 January

Several hundred parents and grandparents of victims of the Beslan school hostage taking dispersed on 23 January, three days after they first blocked traffic on the main Rostov-na-Donu-Baku highway, Russian media reported. The protesters were demanding the resignation of North Ossetian President Aleksandr Dzasokhov and an independent investigation into the circumstances of the hostage taking. Dzasokhov met with the protesters on 21 January but failed to persuade them to disperse; the decision to do so was taken after a telephone call to the protest organizers from presidential envoy to the Southern Federal District Dmitrii Kozak, who promised to meet with the protesters on 25 January. (RFE/RL)

KYRGYZ OPPOSITION ON TRIAL FOR DEMONSTRATION

25 January

Court proceedings against Ishengul Boljurova, deputy chair of the opposition People's Movement of

Kyrgyzstan, began in Bishkek on 24 January, RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service reported. Boljurova faces administrative charges in connection with an unauthorized demonstration on 19 January. In court, Boljurova maintained her innocence, saying that Kyrgyzstan's constitution guarantees the right of assembly. The court will reconvene on 25 January.

Proceedings are set to begin on 26 January against Roza Otunbaeva, deputy chair of the opposition bloc Ata-Jurt, and Topchubek Turgunaliyev, head of the Erkindik party. They face administrative charges over the same 19 January demonstration, which was part of a series of rallies to protest Otunbaeva's exclusion from 27 February parliamentary elections. (RFE/RL)

OSSETIANS RELEASE GEORGIAN POLICEMAN

25 January

Following talks on 24 January mediated by the Joint Control Commission that monitors developments in the South Ossetian conflict zone, the South Ossetian authorities released Major Lado Chalauri later that day. Chalauri was apprehended in the conflict zone on 20 January. Chalauri identified his abductors as Ossetian "criminals" but failed to explain why they delivered him to a jail in the South Ossetian capital Tskhinvali. The Georgian side reciprocated by freeing two Ossetians whose release Tskhinvali had demanded and transferring Alik Pukhaev, an Ossetian suspected of murdering two Georgians last year, into the custody of the Russian peacekeepers deployed in the conflict zone. Georgian residents of South Ossetia protested Pukhaev's release. On 22 January, Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili ruled out the exchange of the three Ossetians for Chalauri. (Caucasus Press)

THREE OPPOSITION PARTIES CRITICIZE GEORGIAN PRESIDENT

25 January

The Conservative Party, the Labor Party, and the New Right Wing (AM) have issued separate critical evaluations of President Mikheil Saakashvili's first year in power. Conservative leaders Zviad Dzidziguri and Koba Davitashvili (who is a former close associate of Saakashvili) told journalists on 25 January that Saakashvili has not kept the promises he made prior to his election. They argued that the recent 100 percent increase in pensions does not benefit the recipients as prices have risen drastically. Labor Party Chairman Shalva Natelashvili compared Saakashvili to "a devastating tsunami" that destroyed much of what former President Eduard Shevardnadze accomplished. Natelashvili too pointed to rising prices, and he further claimed that the birthrate has declined and the suicide rate has risen in the 12 months since

Saakashvili was sworn in as president. Natelashvili challenged Saakashvili to a televised debate with the aim of demonstrating his incompetence to the Georgian people and forcing him to resign. (Caucasus Press)

RUSSIA, GEORGIA SIGN DEBT SETTLEMENT AGREEMENT

25 January

The governments of Russia and Georgia have signed an agreement on restructuring Georgian debts to Russia, the Russian Finance Ministry press service informed Interfax on Monday. The deal covers overdue debts and payments not settled in the framework of the Paris Club as well as payments due between June 1, 2004 and December 31, 2006. This means a significant part of payments due under the January 17, 1997 agreement will be restructured. The sum total of consolidated debts is \$94.43 million. The consolidated debts will be paid in two stages: 50% of overdue debts will be paid between December 2004 and December 2006 and the rest of the overdue debts together with sums due between June 1, 2004 and December 31, 2006 over a period of 23 period including a six year period of grace. (Interfax)

SYRIAN PRESIDENT HOPES FOR RUSSIA REGAINING ITS POSITIONS IN INTERNATIONAL ARENA

25 January

Syrian President Bashar al-Assad hopes that Russia will regain its standing in the international arena. "We support Russia's policies in the world. Its political policies are balanced and logical," Mr. Al-Assad said delivering a lecture at the Moscow State Institute of International Relations (MGIMO). According to the Syrian president, the "Third World" nations peg high hopes on Russia reclaiming its positions in the international arena. Mr. al-Assad thinks the fight against terrorism should focus on eradicating its causes. "Now, the fight against terrorism overlooks weeding out its causes. First and foremost, it is the causes that should be eradicated when countering terrorism," Mr. al-Assad said. The Syrian president noted that if a patient is treated the way terrorism is being fought, "there will be no success". According to Mr. al-Assad, a solution to the Middle East conflicts has to be found first. "Achieving peace in the Middle East, resolving the conflict in Iraq and launching a dialog are necessary in the first place," Mr. al-Assad said, having emphasized that security issues should be dealt with at the same time. The war in Iraq, the Syrian leader said, poses an immediate threat to his country. "The situation in Iraq jeopardizes Syria not only due to the US military presence there, but due to the repercussions of the war as well," the Syrian president said. Responding to the question about a possible US aggression against Syria, he

underlined that the problem boiled down not so much to military action, as to the very politics the United States pursued. "The problem has not to do with an aggression against Syria. The United States is a strong power enjoying an obvious military superiority," the Syrian president said. Mr. al-Assad noted that Syria was concerned about the situation in the world. "As a small country, we view the current situation in the world with concern. When a country pursues a policy running counter to those of the most of other countries, no options can be impossible, which causes our greatest concerns," Bashar al-Assad said. (RIA Novosti)

BUSH TO SEEK \$80BN FOR WAR FUNDS

25 January

The White House has confirmed it plans to ask Congress for an extra \$80bn (£43bn), mainly to fund military operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. Most of the money will go to the army to pay for salaries and to fund the replacement or repair of equipment. Congress has already approved \$25bn in emergency funds for this tax year. In a related development, a top US general has said the US army expects to keep about 120,000 troops in Iraq for at least two more years. The number of US troops in Iraq rose to 150,000 last month in an effort to bolster security ahead of Iraq's election on Sunday. The new money being sought would push war spending to almost \$300bn since the 11 September 2001 attacks. That is in addition to the Pentagon's annual budget, which already totals more than \$400bn. Some of the \$80bn will go to help pay for the training and equipping of Iraqi and Afghan forces and the construction of a new US embassy in the Iraqi capital, Baghdad, estimated to cost \$1.5bn. Significant sums are likely to be allocated to help the new Palestinian and Ukrainian governments. A senior administration official said the request "may be slightly above" \$80bn. On top of that, the package that Mr Bush will eventually put to Congress is also expected to include money for Asian nations hit by last month's tsunami. In previous years, \$120bn has been made available for Iraq and \$60bn for Afghanistan. The White House had not been expected to reveal details of spending request until after the release of the federal budget on 7 February. But it decided to do so after congressional officials argued that withholding the costs from the budget would leave the administration open to criticism. The US is running a budget deficit of close to \$500bn a year. (BBC)

BRITISH AMBASSADOR HIGHLIGHTS ELECTION AID TO KYRGYZSTAN

26 January

James Sharpe, Britain's ambassador to Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, told a news conference in Bishkek on 25 January that the British government will provide \$92,000

to ensure free and fair parliamentary elections in Kyrgyzstan on 27 February, Kyrgyz Television reported. Stressing that the aid is not intended to influence the election outcome, Sharpe said that the money will go to Kyrgyz NGOs. Sharpe explained that Britain has supported a number of programs, including the training of 2,000 independent observers, information campaigns for voters, and exit polls, RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service reported. Noting that Kyrgyz officials "have promised full cooperation with the OSCE in the conduct and monitoring of elections," Sharpe added, "The hope is, of course, that Kyrgyzstan will, again, lead the way in the region, not just in the conduct of elections, but also in us witnessing a peaceful transition of power in this country." (RFE/RL)

EX-SOVIET STATES SEE DIFFERENT "TERRORISTS" TO WEST

26 January

Russia and other ex-Soviet states said on Wednesday they wanted to fight international terrorism but disagreed with the West on whom to brand "terrorist". At a meeting of the U.N. Security Council's Counter-Terrorism Committee, the ex-Soviet Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) said it was eager to fight terrorism, but called on its Western partners to avoid "double standards". "We propose denouncing double standards applied to those involved in terrorist acts but

frequently referred to as 'religious fighters' or advocates of a 'national liberation struggle'," said Vladimir Rushailo, a former Russian interior minister heading the CIS delegation. Russia frequently accuses the West of using double standards in fighting terrorism. Javier Ruperez, head of the U.N. Counter-Terrorism Executive Directorate, told reporters at the conference in the Kazakh commercial capital Almaty that the U.N. General Assembly had for years not been able to find a definition for terrorism which would satisfy all sides. "But my approach is that this lack of definition shouldn't prevent us from fighting terrorism," he said. Campaigners say that much "anti-terrorist" activity in former Soviet states involves trampling over human rights. "Russia's government treats the ongoing conflict in Chechnya as a counter-terrorism campaign," New York-based Human Rights Watch said in a statement. "While it faces a genuine danger of terrorism, the government has itself committed atrocities such as murders of civilians, forced disappearances, the use of indiscriminate force, incommunicado detention, and torture and ill-treatment of prisoners -- all in the name of the war on terror." It called on post-Soviet states to bring their fight against terrorism "in line with human rights". The U.N.'s Ruperez said the two-day meeting was expected to agree on measures to combat the financing of terrorism and illegal trafficking of arms and hazardous materials. (Reuters)

