

Central Asia-Caucasus Analyst

BI-WEEKLY BRIEFING VOL. 10 NO. 7 2 APRIL 2008

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*Central Asia- Caucasus Institute
Silk Road Studies Program*

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THE CENTRAL ASIA-CAUCASUS ANALYST

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The Central Asia-Caucasus 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 & Silk Road Studies Program Joint Center. 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 Key Issue 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. The ideal length of analytical articles is between 1,000 and 1,300 words. The articles are structured as follows:

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

BACKGROUND: 300-450 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: 300-450 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.

Field Reports: Field Reports focus on a particular news event and what local people think about the event, or about the work of an NGdO. 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: scornell@jhu.edu and suggest some topics on which you would like to write.

Svante E. Cornell

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BEFORE BUCHAREST: GERMAN POLITICS AND AFGHANISTAN

Cornelius Graubner

As the NATO Summit in Bucharest approached, pressure on the German government to increase its military contribution to the NATO mission in Afghanistan mounted. However, a significantly expanded mandate for the German Army appeared increasingly unlikely. With the recent surge of the leftist party Die Linke, which performed strongly in recent regional elections in some of Germany's Western states, and the looming parliamentary elections which determine who will be the next chancellor in Germany at the end of 2009, the issue of the Bundeswehr mission in Afghanistan is a political non-starter across all party lines.

BACKGROUND: The German public, who likes to envision the *Bundeswehr* abroad as some sort of development aid workers in uniforms, remains strongly opposed to the participation of *Bundeswehr* troops in combat operations anywhere in Afghanistan. Very few of the 613 members of the German parliament (*Bundestag*), which controls the terms of deployment of the *Bundeswehr*, have openly spoken out in support of broadening the mandate of the mission.

In a representative survey commissioned by the German weekly newspaper *Die Zeit* in August 2007, an overwhelming 86 percent of respondents said that in terms of politics, they considered themselves either to be left or center-left, while only 11 percent said that they would classify themselves right or right of the middle. The reason for this astonishing move to the left is very likely to be found in the economic revival that Germany has enjoyed in the last couple of years. While this revival has led to lower levels of unemployment, most Germans have not experienced a substantive increase in their pay-checks. Instead, they have the feeling that their welfare has been cut, the wealth distribution becomes ever more uneven, and that globalization presents a somewhat opaque threat to their economic well-being. The party that has most profited from this move towards the left is *Die Linke* (the Left), a coalition of the former Communist ruling party of the GDR (the SED, which was renamed PDS

in 1990) and splinter groups of the SPD (Social Democratic Party) frustrated with the policies of the latter.

While the party was long presumed to be without any importance outside the economically struggling areas of East Germany, it has for the first time won seats in regional parliaments in the Western states of Hesse, Lower Saxony and Hamburg. In Hesse, the success of *Die Linke* has led to a deadlock in the political process, because neither of the traditional two large parties, SPD and CDU (Christian Democratic Union), has so far been able to form a coalition capable of winning the majority without at least the tacit acquiescence of *Die Linke*. The party that has been hurt most from the resurgence of *Die Linke* is the SPD, which lost many traditionally dominated policy fields to *Die Linke* and has performed badly in the polls lately. It is likely that *Die Linke* will continue to gain influence in the Western part of Germany, which would make them a force to be reckoned with in the upcoming parliamentary elections in September 2009. A success of *Die Linke* in these elections would make for a number of interesting possible coalitions beyond the rather traditional combinations of SPD and CDU, CDU and FDP (Free Democrats), and SPD and Greens.

While the success of *Die Linke* has clearly been a result of its stances in domestic politics, the party's views on

foreign policy issues have shown to be very stark. Oskar Lafontaine, one of the parties' leaders and a former SPD candidate for chancellor in the 1990 elections, has called the *Bundeswehr* mission in Afghanistan a "participation in an unjust war, in which Afghan women and children bear the major burdens" and has called for a withdrawal of German troops from the NATO mission. However, suspicion to the German military engagement runs across all party lines. Only one of the 613 members of the *Bundestag*, Hans-Ulrich Klose (SPD), has publicly spoken out in support of a renewed mandate that would allow for German combat operations in the South of Afghanistan.



The sentiment of the parliamentarians in the *Bundestag* reflects the skepticism against the German engagement among the German public. In a poll commissioned by the news channel n-tv in February 2008, 45 percent of the Germans said that the *Bundeswehr* should leave Afghanistan as fast as possible, while 41 percent said that the *Bundeswehr* mandate should stay the same and only 10 percent said it should be expanded.

The feeling that the *Bundeswehr* should leave Afghanistan was especially strong among East Germans (60 percent), supporters of *Die Linke* (74 percent) and the SPD (46 percent). Most of the supporters of the CDU, the FDP and the Greens

answered that the *Bundeswehr* mandate should stay as it is (CDU: 52 percent; Greens: 50 percent; FDP: 49 percent), while in none of the parties was support for an expanded mandate higher than 12 percent.

IMPLICATIONS: The low public support for more involvement of German troops in combat operations in Afghanistan puts any German politician speaking out in favor of an expanded *Bundeswehr* mandate under suspicion of wanting to commit political suicide. It is therefore not surprising that both the SPD and CDU/CSU factions in the *Bundestag* have tried to avoid a discussion of the matter. It is a major concern of the CDU and of Chancellor Angela Merkel that the upcoming campaign for the parliamentary elections

could be a rendition of the 2002 campaign, when then-Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder got re-elected after focusing his campaign very much on the issue of his refusal to make German forces available for the war against Iraq, which was a looming issue at the time. While the SPD currently rules out the possibility of engaging in any kind of alliance with *Die Linke*, very few observers would be surprised if this attitude were to change ahead of the 2009 parliamentary elections.

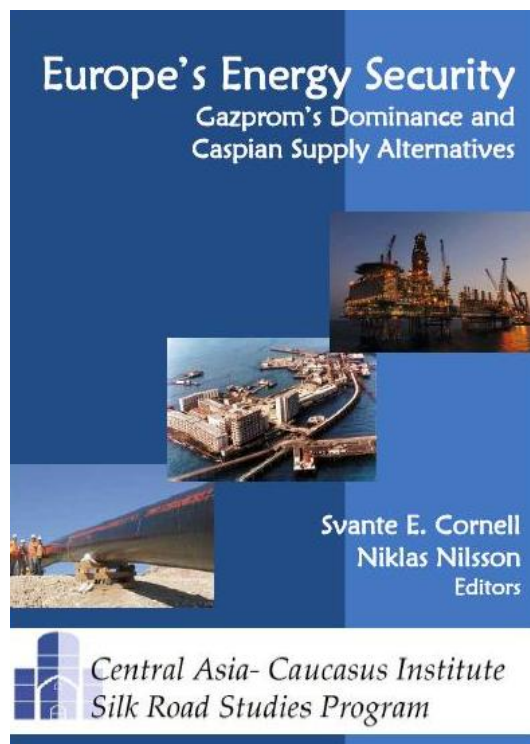
The recent French announcement to send troops for combat operations in Southern Afghanistan has somewhat eased the Allied pressure on Berlin to commit troops for combat operations beyond the original area of German operations in the North. Given the broad reluctance among German voters and in the *Bundestag* regarding an increased role of the *Bundeswehr* in Afghanistan, a voluntary commitment to send German troops to join anti-insurgency operations in the South is unlikely. However, smaller concessions will have to be made by Angela Merkel in Bucharest in order to not to threaten the Alliance's political cohesion and its collective capacity for action. A likely scenario would be the announcement of an increased German contribution to the training of Afghan military and police forces, NATO airlift capabilities in Afghanistan and air reconnaissance. This could be done within the limits of the current mandate and in cooperation with the French forces.

CONCLUSIONS: At the same time, the problem of increasing insurgent activity in Afghanistan is not going to go away anytime soon. The same holds for the discussion about burden sharing among NATO members in Afghanistan. German politicians should therefore consider explaining the necessity of a kinetic German military engagement in Afghanistan beyond the popular image of “development aid workers in uniform” to German voters, and within the political factions of the *Bundestag* well ahead of the parliamentary elections in late 2009, in order to raise awareness of the issue. They should not rely on arguments focusing on abstract terms such as “Bündnissolidarität” (solidarity within the alliance) or German national security being defended at the Hindukush (a statement made by former Minister of Defense Peter Struck (SPD) in December 2002), because the majority of Germans tend either not to understand or to disagree with these concepts. However, nobody in the German public or political parties seriously questions that societal and economic development in Afghanistan – including buzzwords immensely popular with the German public like better

education opportunities, poverty alleviation and women’s rights – can only be successful in a relatively peaceful and stable environment.

A study recently published by the Free University Berlin that surveyed more than 2,000 households in the area of operations of German military and development aid in Northern Afghanistan has shown that over 99% of the respondents feel more secure today than they felt two years ago, and that they mostly credit this to the presence of foreign troops. This is an argument that should be pressed in future discussions about the role of the *Bundeswehr* in Afghanistan.

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THE TULIP REVOLUTION: MIXED MESSAGES OF OFFICIAL MEMORY

Sally N. Cummings

This year a public holiday for the first time marked the day of Kyrgyzstan's 24 March 2005 Tulip Revolution. Parliament only ten days previously had accepted changes to the Labor Code to call March 24 a new red letter day, Revolution Day. But in the capital Bishkek celebrations were memorable less for the low-key Philharmonic concert or the military salute organized by the mayor of Bishkek Daniyar Usenov (2560 salvos in 10 minutes at a cost of 180,000 som) than for the large police presence. Security services from Kyrgyzstan's UGAI, GUVI and Ministry of Interior had been placed on a 24-hour alert.

BACKGROUND: This change to Kyrgyzstan's calendar had been previously debated by parliament; many deputies had rejected it, however, on what they termed were ethical grounds, unwilling to endorse as a national holiday an event more remembered for the losses to business from looting estimated at 10 million dollars and which otherwise created chaos across the country. According to one commentator, this legislation was passed thanks only to the parliamentary majority of pro-government Ak Zhol following the government's sweep of the 16 December 2007 parliamentary elections.

President Kurmanbek Bakiyev, on a trip to in Germany and absent from the country, sent his congratulatory messages to the 'people' since, he stressed, it is the 'people's courage' that is to thank for where Kyrgyzstan is today. He sent joint congratulations for the Central Asian New Year, Nooruz, and Revolution Day, conflating the two: while March 21 and Nooruz involved a 'spiritual reawakening', March 24 represented a process 'revitalizing politics' that would 'learn from past mistakes' and steer a 'path of renewal' (a refrain of many of the posters quickly hoisted around the city). Emphasizing that the standard of living had risen twofold since the revolution, he concluded that 'all these positive changes once more highlight the legitimacy and historic necessity of the March revolution.'

An opposition meeting convened on 19 March stated that '[t]he announcing of March 24 as Revolution Day does not carry popular support' not least as that day's events and 'subsequent acts of the new regime have not brought progress or prosperity to the Kyrgyz people.' Instead, the statement continued, the decision to make this an official holiday 'serves the interests of only a specific group of people, those who are now in power and who have every interest in confirming their position.'



IMPLICATIONS: The decision to make March 24 a public holiday can be seen as an attempt to legitimate the current regime, all the more needed because the parliamentary elections of 16 December 2007 are widely seen as having been manipulated. The main opposition party still continues to announce its plans to challenge them. Bakiyev's reference to people power, however, cuts both ways.

While the government's hope is that it reminds the country of how his subsequent election followed widespread dissatisfaction with the previous regime, it also brings back memories of an overthrow of power through violent means.

Undoubtedly, authorities were worried that the sanctioning of a free day would encourage the opposition to stage further meetings, not least given the opposition leaders' public unwillingness to accept the legitimacy of this date. For Omurbek Tekebaev, head of the opposition party Ata-Meken, its passing represents a big political mistake, 'electors now saying that it is not possible to change power in a legal way through elections' and concludes that '[i]f we continue the precedent of the establishment of red letter days ... we will not have any working days left in Kyrgyzstan.' Social Democrat MP Bakyt Beshimov stressed that the Kyrgyz revolution began not in 2005 but with independence in the 1990s.

The widespread interpretation by the opposition of March 24 as an 'unfinished revolution' and one leading to an illegitimate and ineffective government has created concerns that the country may see an acceleration of protests. Azimbek Beknazarov, a key actor in 2005 and head of the Asaba movement, stressed that 'even if what has happened since is another story', March 24 itself had been a day of revolution and needs to be celebrated as such. In this context the absence of any large-scale protest by the opposition was noticeable. Its main activity was a parade along the central streets of Panfilov and Chui, but that lasted for no more than 15 minutes. Protesters referred to March 24 as the 'Day of Consuming Manti' in reference to 'Bakiev's favorite national food'.

The timing of the legislation to make March 24 an official national holiday was probably deliberate. Its

proximity to the actual date excused the absence of huge celebrations and prevented meaningful debate, as well as depriving the opposition of the ability to prepare large-scale protests that have been widely expected since the December elections. Its timing just after Nooruz, for which elaborate public events were organized, ensured a people who were also not expecting a repeat of the March 21 spectacles. It gave a four-day weekend in lovely spring weather that followed the worst winter in sixty years, one marked by frequent public utility failures. Meanwhile citizens are skeptical that 2005 has led to real change; for the moment, however, fatigue around the effectiveness of large-scale meetings seems to have, at least temporarily, quieted the politics of the country.

CONCLUSIONS: Official billboards hoisted for the event enabled the government to frame the March events as bringing state, society and the individual together. 'The State - It is me, you and us together', read one on the central Manas avenue. Official statements stressed how on March 24, the people became 'the one and only decider of the fate of their government.' The conduct of the celebrations themselves, however, suggested a regime at once defiant and uneasy. In contrast to the Nooruz spectacle on the main Ala-Too square, celebrations of March 24 occurred behind doors with a concert by the National Philharmonic Orchestra. While thus keen to legitimate its power, the regime was equally keen to rush through this business; the billboards no sooner mounted than removed, and official statements of the event quickly brought to a close.

AUTHOR'S BIO: Sally N. Cummings is Senior Lecturer in the School of International Relations, University of St Andrews, United Kingdom.

GEORGIAN-RUSSIAN RECONCILIATION PROVES SHORT-LIVED

Richard Weitz

During his reelection campaign and the subsequent inauguration ceremony in January, Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili said he was eager to achieve a “thaw” in bilateral relations with Moscow. Russian President Vladimir Putin and other Russian officials also expressed hopes for a “normalization” of Georgian-Russian ties. Except for the resumption of direct civilian passenger flights on March 25, however, the relationship has deteriorated sharply as issues relating to Kosovo, NATO, and other third party concerns have reinforced perennial differences over how to manage the two Moscow-backed separatist regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

BACKGROUND: On February 21, Presidents Saakashvili and Putin met in the presidential residence of Novo-Ogaryovo, west of Moscow. The encounter occurred on the eve of Saakashvili’s participation in the informal summit of ex-Soviet leaders belonging to the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). Before the meeting, Saakashvili expressed his interest in achieving at least a limited Georgian-Russian reconciliation: “We are obliged to normalize our relations, to overcome previous difficulties. If we do not start over with a clean slate, we should at least give new momentum to our relations.”

Putin told Saakashvili that he perceived “a tendency towards improvement” in many dimensions of the bilateral relationship. He also suggested Moscow might reciprocate any Georgian concessions: “We have taken note of your statement, to the effect that the Georgian leadership is committed to developing relations with Russia. For our part, we will seek, as far as possible, to respond in kind.” At the summit, the two countries agreed to reestablish direct air links, which occurred on March 25.

In a reciprocal gesture, Georgia’s Deputy Minister of Economy announced that the two governments had reached a “preliminary agreement” in their two-year negotiations regarding Russia’s entry into the World Trade Organization (WTO). The Georgian

authorities have refused to endorse Russia’s WTO accession until Moscow allowed Georgian customs and border officers to operate with Russian personnel at joint checkpoints along Russia’s border with Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Georgian Foreign Minister Davit Bakradze indicated that progress on WTO could help overcome other Russian-Georgian economic disputes, including Moscow’s lifting of trade embargos on various Georgian goods: “We want Russia to be a member of the World Trade Organization because this organization, with its rules and regulations, will allow for civilized trade relations with Russia.”

Nevertheless, Putin cautioned his Georgian guest against following through with his announced plans to join NATO. Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov subsequently told reporters that Putin explained to Saakashvili that Moscow saw “no real reasons for that and warned of consequences of such a step to Russia-Georgia relations.” Putin also conditioned a full normalization of bilateral relations on “the need to strictly implement all available agreements on the settlement of the Abkhaz and South Ossetian conflicts with full account for the parties’ interests.”

Despite Russian warnings, Saakashvili reaffirmed Georgia’s desire to enter NATO throughout his official visit to the United States on March 17-20. He also criticized Russian attempts to disrupt

Tbilisi's efforts by threatening to dismember Georgia should it join NATO.

IMPLICATIONS: Despite their recent overtures, the two sides continue to differ on how to achieve such a settlement. Georgian authorities are willing to offer Abkhazia and South Ossetia – with populations of about 200,000 and 100,000 respectively – considerable autonomy in their internal affairs as long as Tbilisi controls their interaction with foreign entities and border security. The Georgian government's preferred settlement would also see the return of refugees and internally displaced persons to their region of origin and the transformation of the Russian-dominated CIS peacekeeping forces in these regions into a UN-authorized international peacekeeping force in which the Russian military contingent would have a considerably reduced role.

Recent Russian actions suggest that Moscow does not yet share the Georgian position. A few days after the meeting, the Georgian Foreign Ministry formally called in Russian Ambassador Vyacheslav Kovalenko to complain about the Russian government's unilateral decision to allow residents of Abkhazia and South Ossetia holding Russian citizenship to vote in the Russian presidential elections. Foreign Minister Bakradze stated that, "the holding of elections on the territory of Georgia without Tbilisi's permission is a manifestation of disrespect toward the country's sovereignty and a violation of international norms."

In addition, the Russian Foreign Ministry issued a statement on February 27 explicitly denying that Putin had pledged to Saakashvili never to recognize the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. On the contrary, "the Russian side reaffirmed that although we would not "copy" the unlawful actions of a number of western states, we would certainly consider the unilateral declaration and recognition of Kosovo's independence in our subsequent policy line." The statement also declared that, in the Russian-Georgian discussions on WTO-related problems in Geneva, Russian government representatives "have unequivocally stressed that practical implementation of any customs control

mechanisms at the Gantiadi-Adler and Lower Zaramag-Roki check points depends entirely on the progress of the settlement of the Georgian-Abkhaz and Georgian-Ossetian conflicts and on the consent of Sukhumi and Tskhinvali, which are informed of our approaches."

On March 6, the Russian Foreign Ministry announced that Moscow had unilaterally lifted financial, trade, transport and other economic sanctions on Abkhazia imposed by a collective decision of the CIS Council of Heads of State on January 19, 1996. Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Grigory Karasin justified the decision on humanitarian and economic grounds: "The 12 years of the notorious embargo... only aggravated the complicated situation for Abkhazia's residents. Now we can offer socio-economic assistance to Abkhazia's people at a state level." Even so, the document explicitly blamed Georgia's supposed unconstructive approach toward its separatist regions as warranting the reversal, as well as justifying Russia's call that other CIS countries follow its example.

Karasin added that the Kremlin would continue to prohibit arms transfers to Abkhazia, and also planned to relax Russian measures limiting the region's trade with the rest of Georgia. Although he suggested that a decision by Tbilisi to lift its own sanctions on Abkhazia and South Ossetia would help advance the conflict settlement process, Saakashvili immediately denounced Moscow's action as "an immoral and illegal decision [and] a most serious provocation aimed at destabilizing the situation in the Caucasus that will lead to an unpredictable development of events."

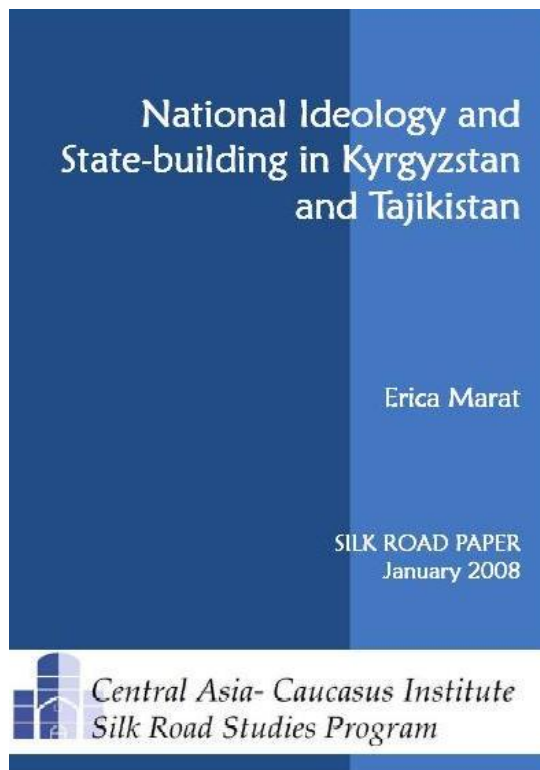
The speaker of the Georgian parliament, Nino Burjanadze, said Tbilisi could only interpret the Russian government's decision as a move toward formal annexation of Georgian territory: "When they [Russia] are saying they are stopping [the] economic embargo [against] Abkhazia, it means that they are going, step by step, in the direction of the annexation of this territory." Burjanadze also characterized the timing of the sanctions as an attempt "to create obstacles on our way to NATO."

One argument against granting Georgia NATO membership is that NATO governments would then become involuntarily engaged in conflicts involving former Soviet states. She added that Russian officials would do “everything, all the time, to keep these conflicts unresolved” in order to deter further NATO expansion in the former Soviet region.

CONCLUSIONS: On March 13, several Russian Duma deputies recommended that, in response to Kosovo’s independence, the Russian government open formal “missions” in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, as well as in Moldova’s disputed Transdnestr region. The legislators did not explain what precisely that would entail beyond granting the areas some form of official diplomatic recognition, a step the Kremlin thus far has always declined to take despite a subsequent Duma resolution urging formal consideration of the issue.

One Russian analyst, however, said Russia might follow the Taiwan model, in which Moscow would continue to recognize Georgia’s formal territorial integrity while developing close ties with self-proclaimed republics, perhaps elevating their status to that of an “associated free territory like Puerto Rico” if Georgia ever joined NATO. Although the commentator, Galina Zevelyova, did not mention it, the United States sells Taiwan billions of dollars worth of advanced conventional weapons and has indicated it might intervene militarily to defend the republic against a threat from the Chinese mainland – a stance Abkhaz and Ossetian nationalists might welcome even if most of the rest of the international community would not.

AUTHOR’S BIO: Richard Weitz is Director for Project Management and Senior Fellow at the Hudson Institute.



New Silk Road Paper:

National Ideology and State-Building in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan

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CO-CHAIR VOTE AGAINST UN RESOLUTION ON KARABAKH CONFLICT IMPERILS NEGOTIATION PROCESS

Emin Alisayidov

The recent voting on the General Assembly resolution tabled by Azerbaijan has demonstrated Baku's increasing frustration with the lack of progress in the prolonged peace talks with Armenia within the OSCE Minsk Group format. The vote by the three Minsk Group co-chairs against the resolution has strengthened Azerbaijan's skepticism about the Minsk Group format itself, and has in that sense muddled prospects for the negotiations.

BACKGROUND: When on March 14 the UN General Assembly adopted a resolution on the situation on the occupied territories of Azerbaijan, the United Nations added another document calling for the withdrawal of Armenian troops and reaffirming the world organization's support for Azerbaijan's territorial integrity. This particular document was also adopted just two months prior to of the fifteenth anniversary of the passing of the first UN Security Council resolution in April 1993, which, ironically, called for an "immediate" withdrawal following the occupation of the Kelbajar region of Azerbaijan. In the intervening years, both the Security Council and the General Assembly have passed several other resolutions on the subject.

While the 15 years passed after the adoption of the first resolution go a long way to demonstrate just how committed the Security Council is to enforcing its own resolutions, the debate and voting at the General Assembly this time around revealed some interesting details. With 39 votes for and 7 against, the resolution clearly reflects Azerbaijan's growing international profile. Among other, the resolution was widely supported by the members of the Organization of the Islamic Conference and members of GUAM – Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine. At the same time, the vote against the

resolution on the part of France, the United States and Russia - the three main mediators in the conflict who are the co-chairs of the OSCE Minsk Group – put them squarely on Armenia's side, along with one of its surprising companions, Vanuatu. The decision of the co-chairs to side with one of the parties to the conflict rather than abstaining, as most other European states did, has raised substantial doubt regarding the impartiality of the Minsk Group Co-chairs in Azerbaijan and elsewhere. By now, public opinion in Azerbaijan is so negative about the three co-chair nations that this self-inflicted damage may take them much longer to repair than, perhaps, initially envisioned. Indeed, this vote may carry more long-term consequences for the conflict resolution process than visible at first sight.

By trying to reassert their own, somewhat self-important, monopoly over the mediation process between Armenia and Azerbaijan, France, Russia and the United States have to Azerbaijanis only confirmed the wide-spread perception of bias on their behalf that was already growing before the resolution was passed. As a result, the co-chairs may have weakened their ability to function as effective disinterested brokers.

Of course, the silver lining is that the mediators, who have often disagreed on most important issues, produced a consensus even if that meant opposing a UN resolution based on the same fundamentals of international law they regularly defend; and although it meant siding with one party in the conflict that they are tasked to mediate. This is not the first time that mediators are more concerned with themselves than the problem they are tasked to resolve. As often happens with protracted conflicts, some things develop into a routine, be it the non-implementation of international documents or co-chairs too involved in their internal consensus-building.

There are considerable indications that the United States was inclined to abstain from voting, while the other co-chairs were adamant in their determination to vote against. Washington may have desired to maintain a semblance of neutrality, but as this inclination was not followed through, the matter is no of mainly academic interest.

IMPLICATIONS:

For Azerbaijan, the vote against the resolution by the co-chairs came in the wake of Kosovo's unilateral declaration of independence. The co-chair countries missed an excellent chance to dispel doubts about the Kosovo precedent. By adopting the resolution, the General Assembly exposed some rather confused approaches and ambiguous perceptions of international law in Moscow, Paris and Washington. This seeming confusion between the mediators' stated support of basic principles of international law and, at the same time, reluctance to vote in order to uphold them, was in fact highlighted in a speech by the Turkish representative at the debate.

Azerbaijan's, and for that matter Georgia's, sensitivities regarding their territorial integrity should not be underestimated. Evidently, more than any other issue, the attitude towards the nation's territorial integrity is the key element shaping strategic perceptions in Baku. A related general concern is the role that the international peacekeeping force, incidentally including both an Azerbaijani and a Georgian contingent, played in facilitating Kosovo's separation from Serbia, in spite of the early promises to respect Serbia's territorial integrity.

Given the experience with the Russian peacekeepers in Georgia and, most recently, with the NATO-led force in the Balkans, the co-chairs' decision to side with Armenia at the General Assembly is likely to make Azerbaijan more suspicious of accepting an



international peacekeeping presence as an element of a potential agreement. Overall, it is clear that the lessons to be learned in Eurasia from the Kosovo case deserve a more serious discussion than has so far been forthcoming. So

far, it seems, Azerbaijan's and Georgia's Western partners have neither been willing or prepared to enter into a meaningful dialogue regarding the impact of the Kosovo developments.

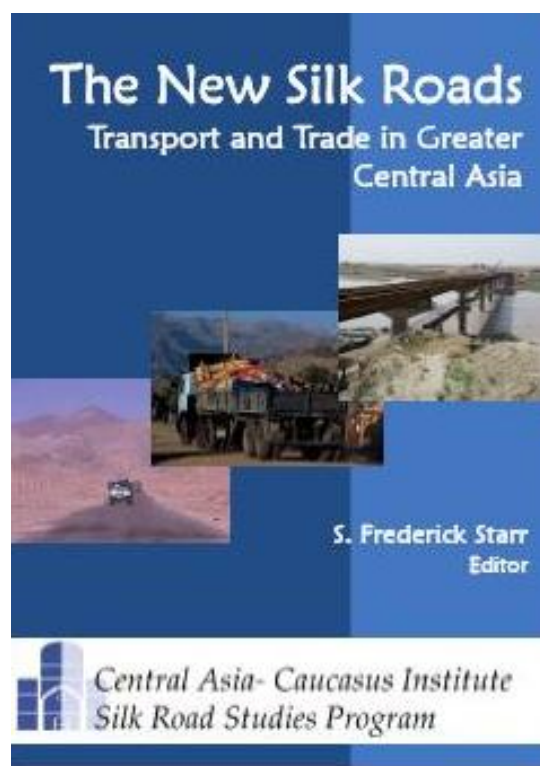
Moreover, the co-chairs voted against the resolution just as they had been showing remarkable reluctance to criticize Armenian authorities for using unprecedented levels of violence against protesters during the post-election confrontation in Yerevan. This relaxed attitude towards events in Armenia stands in sharp contrast to the harsh Western criticism of the earlier and less confrontational internal troubles in both Azerbaijan and Georgia. Armenia's political crisis affected Azerbaijan as

well, when the most significant armed confrontation in years occurred along the line of contact just as the political crisis was unfolding in the streets of Yerevan.

All this bodes well neither for the mediators' overall credibility, nor for the prospects of reaching a peaceful solution to the conflict. Armenia's reaction to the resolution illustrates this. During the debate at the United Nations, the Armenian representative called the UN General Assembly resolution a "sheet of paper," a stance that may be influenced by the mediators' condoning of Armenia's long-standing occupation of the Azerbaijani territories. An Armenian government spokesman in Yerevan described only those not voting in favor of the resolution as "civilized nations." This list, of course, included a significant number of UN member-states, including two of Armenia's neighbors – Georgia and Turkey.

CONCLUSIONS: In the aftermath of the General Assembly vote, voices in Baku calling for dissolution of the Minsk Group have become much louder and more numerous. Not surprisingly, these sentiments are now echoed by some official figures as well. Speaking in Baku, representatives of both Russia and the United States said that the UN resolutions are not really effective in resolving conflicts. While it is hard to disagree with them, none addressed the question whether these two permanent members of the Security Council bear part of the responsibility for this state of affairs.

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FIELD REPORTS

THE 'TULIP REVOLUTION' THREE YEARS AFTER: KYRGYZSTAN'S PYRRHIC VICTORY

Erica Marat

On March 24 Kyrgyzstan celebrated the Tulip Revolution's third anniversary. Although the day has gained a status of a public holiday, it was mainly the Kyrgyz government that celebrated the anniversary. For the majority of the Kyrgyz public the day is rather a mockery of their hopes to end endemic corruption in the state with the ouster of former president Askar Akayev.

Three years ago, both local and international observers regarded Akayev's ouster on March 24 as Kyrgyzstan's step towards democratization. However, today Kyrgyzstan's course towards democracy is often assessed as disrupted by president Kurmanbek Bakiyev's corrupt regime. Instead of a great leader that many Kyrgyz had expected after removing Akayev, Bakiyev turned out to be a great incubator of the previous regime's mistakes. Even Bakiyev himself avoids defining March 24, 2005 as the Tulip Revolution, rather referring to it as "March 2005 events".

During his first year in power, Bakiyev failed to clean up the Augean stables of Akayev's corruption, thus disappointing most of his supporters. For a few months after removing Akayev, Bakiyev enjoyed widespread popularity in the masses despite the fact that he was largely unknown before the removal of Akayev. He then quickly lost the support of his colleagues from the opposition who had risen against Akayev's regime. In January 2007, almost two years past the 'revolution', Bakiyev broke ties

with Felix Kulov, who then occupied the position of prime minister and enjoyed high popular approval ratings. Things became even murkier when Bakiyev announced a constitutional reform in September 2007 that allowed him to gain endless powers and entirely alienate the opposition.

At the March 24 celebrations last year, Bakiyev surprised the local public by spontaneously volunteering to dance at the central square in Bishkek. He cheered up to an Uzbek folk song, obviously changing the course of the celebrations' official protocol. However, this year, Bakiyev spent over a month in Germany, reportedly undergoing medical treatment. He missed this year's celebrations, provoking rumors about his health conditions. During Bakiyev's prolonged absence, the government and parliament functioned properly, even trying to cover up the president's absence. This showed Bakiyev's ability to maintain a firm control over the government even without his physical presence.

Compared to Akayev, Bakiyev's government seems to have far greater internal consolidation and loyalty to the president. While Akayev preferred to have the parliament filled with political actors with wealthy backgrounds, Bakiyev's Ak Zhol party is represented in the parliament mostly by politicians with weaker financial bases. While the parliament elected in 2005 during Akayev's reign was able to quickly change its loyalty to the new president

given its members' financial independence, Bakiyev's parliament is more dependent on the regime and appears interested in its continuity. Because the December 2007 parliamentary elections were conducted on the basis of party-list system, current parliamentarians rely more on the party as opposed to supporters at the local precinct level.

However, Bakiyev's regime appears to suffer from similar predicaments as the regime led by Akayev. Informal competition over sources of corruption is evolving among members of Bakiyev's family and political allies. This competition might weaken the loyalty of political and business actors to the regime, and strengthen the opposition.

On the international arena, Bakiyev strengthened relations with Russia and China, while most western officials think the situation in Kyrgyzstan has worsened in the past few years. Kyrgyz officials became more unpredictable for western partners, often failing to fulfill its commitments to international agreements. In 2005, then U.S. Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld visited Kyrgyzstan twice to reassure the status of the U.S.

military base's in the country. Furthermore, the constitutional referendum in October 2007 and the parliamentary elections of December 2007, as well as the banning of public demonstrations in central Bishkek, showed the Kyrgyz government's disregard of its commitments before the OSCE. Furthermore, the government's moves to block Ukraine from membership in the World Trade Organization and refusing to recognize Kosovar independence pointed at the Kyrgyz government's wish to please its largest neighbors – Russia and China.

Despite Kyrgyzstan's deteriorating democratic record, there is still a level of freedom of speech in the country. The NGO community in Kyrgyzstan remains vibrant and diverse. There are signs of local NGOs moving away from dependency on external financing and consolidating actions across organizations. Since the Tulip Revolution turned out to be a great disappointment in Kyrgyzstan, in coming years NGOs and opposition leaders will need to formulate a strategy to assure the transformation of Bakiyev's regime.

PERSIAN-SPEAKING UNION CREATED BY AFGHANISTAN, IRAN, TAJKISTAN

Sergey Medrea

On March 24-25, Dushanbe hosted a meeting where the foreign ministers of Iran, Afghanistan and Tajikistan made the necessary arrangements for the coming trilateral summit where the presidents will create the Economic Council of the Persian-Speaking Union. The project to amalgamate these countries sharing linguistic roots can be quite beneficial in the long term. Even now, with the venture at an early stage of development, it can provide signatories with geopolitical benefits.

Earlier in March, during the eleventh meeting of the Organization of the Islamic Conference in

Singapore, Tajikistan's President Emomali Rahmon gave a speech especially emphasizing the fact that Iran is becoming one of Tajikistan's main strategic allies, and assured that Tajikistan will make all efforts so that Iran will be taken into the Shanghai Cooperation Organization as a full member. The presidents of Iran, Tajikistan and Afghanistan agreed there to create an Economic Council of the three.

During the recent meeting in Dushanbe, questions of economic cooperation received attention above all others. For one, the construction of two railway

routes from Iran, via Afghanistan to Tajikistan was agreed on. The railway is planned to connect Iran, Afghanistan and Tajikistan, as well as Kyrgyzstan (Oloi) and China (Kashgar), as its final points. Moreover, the foreign ministers agreed to build energy transmission facilities from Iran's borders, via Herat and Mazar-i-Sharif in Afghanistan, all the way to the Tajik border. Lastly, issues of education, healthcare, science and culture were also widely discussed; including the idea of launching a common Persian-language television satellite network, with its headquarters in Dushanbe.

However, some endeavors agreed on in the meeting are too impractical to be realized and could raise all kinds of disagreements. Specifically, this concerns the project of a common Persian-language television network. Although people in the three countries speak the same language, their values, interests, tastes and state policies vary. In secular Tajikistan, a lot of people will be dissatisfied and worried to see women in headscarves leading a program, whereas in religious Iran it is mandatory. The number of such instances instills public skepticism about the project. Nevertheless, most Tajik experts cherish the idea of improving relations with Iran and consider the Economic Council a beneficial development.

Russian experts claim that the birth of the Persian-Speaking Union would not have been possible without the recent "cold" relations between Russia and Tajikistan. There are fewer Tajik-Russian top-level meetings between presidents, fewer economic cooperation ventures, and more importantly, unstated mutual dissatisfaction. For example, Russia's support for the Uzbek position on the use of trans-boundary rivers is seen to be against Tajikistan's interests. As Tajikistan is a small geopolitical actor, highly dependent on Russia given the large numbers of Tajik labor migrants in Russia, it cannot openly express its dissatisfaction. Instead,

Dushanbe is gradually turning away from Russia and instead orienting itself toward strong allies in the region such as Iran. The cooperation with Iran promises not only the support of a strong state, but can help improve relations with Russia. Playing geopolitical games such as providing benefits to one strong country over another has achieved that in the past: in 2004, when Iran offered Tajikistan a quarter of a billion dollars to build hydroelectric stations and launch a number of smaller-scale projects, the Russian press was at first upset and dissatisfied. However, later that year, Russia initiated a series of projects in Tajikistan, promising to invest two billion dollars and thus re-established its dominance over Tajikistan.

For Tajikistan, membership in the Economic Council of the Persian-Speaking Union can improve relations with Russia and earn its benevolence; on the other hand, for both Iran and Afghanistan, joining the union can bring different benefits. Later this year, in Dushanbe, the yearly meeting of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization will take place, and some experts already predict that it will coincide with the meeting of the Economic Council of the Persian-Speaking Union. Iran has already applied for full membership in the SCO, and close relations with Tajikistan via the Persian-Speaking Union helps its chances to be accepted. As for Afghanistan, a country that for many years remained politically isolated, membership in the Persian-Speaking Union is an important step away from international isolation.

Although it is too early to make any assessments on the success of the Economic Council of the Persian-Speaking Union, geopolitically, it seems to benefit all its members.

THE ROLE OF PEACE AND DEMOCRACY IN THE FATA

Zahid Anwar

A two-day workshop on 'The Role of Peace and Democracy in the FATA' [Federally Administered Tribal Areas] was held at the Area Study Centre, University of Peshawar on 12-13 March 2008. The German Hanns Seidel Foundation, Islamabad and the ASC jointly organized the workshop in which former officers from the political administration of tribal areas, security specialists, Maliks (tribal leaders), diplomats, journalists and research scholars participated.

Dr. Azmat Hayat Khan, Director of the Area Study Centre, welcomed all the guests and in his paper discussed internal and external threats to Pakistan. Richard Asbeck, Resident Representative of the Hanns Seidel Foundation, talked about the 15 years of collaboration between the two institutions.

Khalid Aziz, former Chief Secretary of the NWFP, said we were encouraged to adopt a separatist way of life by eulogizing Pukhtunwali, the Pashtun code. This kind of thinking kept the NWFP, FATA and PATA aloof from the mainstream development and fossilized Pukhtuns like Egyptian mummies, and the Pukhtun region became a fertile ground for movements with a global agenda. Pakistan is a casino economy, the U.S. is the most frequent user of this casino, and we draw all money after play. There is no development without democracy. The Pashtun-majority province is called NWFP as if no human being lives there. FATA and NWFP have no identity, and in the absence of identity, development is highly unlikely.

Brig. (Ret.) Mahmood Shah, Former Secretary of the FATA, stressed the introduction of democracy in the FATA and working out an administrative system which copes with democracy. No development or democracy will take place until the Frontier Crimes Regulation (FCR) is amended or removed. Everybody agrees that something should be done, but there is a lack of consensus on the

mechanism. The best way to change the system is to go with it and gradually change it. The issues should be addressed through tribal traditions.

Mr. Abuzar, a security specialist, in his comments said that FATA's current problems are closely related to the war on terror and the broader Afghanistan problem. Pashtuns are labeled as pro-Taliban and pro-terrorists. There is a perception among the people that Pakistan is fighting a war on behalf of others. The social development component is missing.

Prof. Ijaz Khan said that the FATA system is the legacy of a colonial mindset. The FATA problem is not just related to the Afghanistan problem, but also closely connected to governance in the settled areas. People in the FATA have changed with the passage of time by receiving education, obtaining employment in the Middle East, and with the war in Afghanistan. For the success of democracy, the existence of certain conditions are essential, and those conditions should be provided so that democracy takes root in the FATA. In the last 60 years, we have left a vacuum for extremists to come and exploit the situation.

Col. (Ret.) Yakub Masod from Waziristan said that the Government writ has vanished in Waziristan. More than 300 pro-Government Maliks have been killed. It is difficult to fight those who seek death. Pakistani retired ambassador Ayaz Wazir, also from Waziristan, said that before 9/11, the FATA were more peaceful than the settled areas of the country. The youth is unemployed, and need employment, education, health services, playgrounds. Yahya Effendi in his paper pointed out that we can learn from British India's policy in the FATA. Prof. Sarfraz said that the special status of the FATA is the root cause of the problem.

Samina Afridi in her paper pointed out the absence of women in the whole system of FATA. The

whole population except Maliks, smugglers, drug barons, and criminals are victims of the system. Ahmad Ali, from the Civil Secretariat in Peshawar, discussed the Sustainable Development Plan for FATA. He said that development projects in FATA in the past were focused on physical infrastructure rather than human resource development.

Wali Khan, a Lawyer from the FATA, in his paper focused on the FCR and proposed the extension of Local Government Ordinance to FATA. He said the powers of article 199 (fundamental rights) of the 1973 constitution should be given to the FCR Tribunal and that the judiciary should be separated from the executive branch.

In the discussion, it was noted that the role of Political Agent in the FATA administration is much criticized, but its positive role must not be neglected. There is a need for a focal person in the

agency. Though there may be much criticism, 80 percent of FATA inhabitants support the government's policy. The fabric of society is not broken. Women have problems in the FATA, while addressing their problem one should keep in mind the dichotomy between the western view, which considers the individual as the unit while the Muslim view regards the family as the unit.

It was also said that Pukhtunwali is not a barrier in the development of Pashtun society. The whole tribal system revolves around a Jirga system; if that is removed, there will be chaos. The remedy is gradual reforms, consistent with checks and balances in the system. Since there is no policing mechanism in the FATA, so before extending the constitution to the FATA it is essential to develop a policing mechanism. People change with education, socialization and development.

UZBEKISTAN IS BACK IN THE COLLECTIVE SECURITY TREATY ORGANIZATION

Erkin Akhmadov

The Thirteenth plenary session of the Senate Oliy Majlis of the Republic of Uzbekistan started in Tashkent on March 27, 2008. At the 28 March session, the Parliament ratified a document reinstating Uzbekistan's membership in the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO). The signatories of the treaty cannot join other military alliances or other groups of states, while an aggression against one signatory would be perceived as an aggression against all.

Besides ratification of the treaty, senators ratified laws "On Uzbekistan's joining of the protocol on prolongation of the Collective Security treaty", "On Uzbekistan's joining the CSTO Charter", "On Uzbekistan's joining the Agreement on the legal status of the CSTO", "On Uzbekistan's joining the Agreement on the mutual provision of secret

information safety in the framework of the CSTO", "On Uzbekistan's joining the Agreement of the main principles of the military-technical cooperation among the states-members of the CSTO", "On Uzbekistan's joining the Protocol on the control of the targeted use of produce for military purposes provided in the framework of the Agreement about the basic principles of military-technical cooperation among the states of CSTO".

The senators noted that ratification of the documents that go along with the CSTO provisions constitutes Uzbekistan's obligation under the treaty. Overall, there are seventy-seven agreements that need to be ratified in the framework of CSTO membership, covering a wide range of activities for cooperation in the sphere of security. Their ratification manifests Uzbekistan's commitment to

the principles of peace and stability, strengthening regional and international security, non-use of force or threat of force in interstate relations, the protection of independence on the basis of collective action, and the territorial integrity and sovereignty of the members-states of the organization.

The head of the foreign policy committee of the parliament, Sadyk Safaev, noted in this respect that “ratification of these documents will favor improved cooperation with the member-states of the CSTO and serve the national security interest”.

Initially, Uzbekistan joined the Collective Security Treaty back in 1992. However, it withdrew from the organization (along with Azerbaijan and Georgia) in 1999 by not signing the prolongation treaty. On December 13, 2006, President Islam Karimov signed the law on reinstatement of Uzbekistan in the organization. Currently, the organization includes Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia and Tajikistan.

The Secretary General of the CSTO, Nikolai Bordyuzha, claims that the CSTO is transforming from a military-political bloc into a universal international structure, capable of collective reaction to various challenges and threats. For instance, in the framework of this agenda, a coordination council of ministers for emergency situations was established providing counteractions to natural catastrophes. There is also a coordination council on counteracting migration, which conducts special operations for the detection of illegal human trafficking channels. The latter would deal with the elimination of consequences of emergency situation, their prevention and monitoring. It will provide measures for control and reduction of illegal migration and trade in humans.

Besides the benefits of joining an organization that tackles such vital issues for the region, another

prominent advantage of returning to the CSTO is the ability to buy military equipment and weaponry from Russia for internal prices of the Russian Federation – a privilege given only to members of the organization.

It is often argued that Uzbekistan took the decision to rejoin the CSTO in 2006 to seek closer ties with Russia. In the aftermath of the Andijan violence of 2005, when Western states heavily criticized the government of Uzbekistan its lack of respect for human rights, Russia came to be Uzbekistan’s major ally. Relations with the West worsened, and American military bases were asked to leave the country. Hence, Uzbekistan’s return to the CSTO was logical on two accounts: First, it reinforced ties with Russia; second, it provided a framework of regional cooperation for security.

The further development of CSTO activities included the conduct of common military exercises in 2005, as well as a major expansion of the organization in 2007 that would create a CSTO peacekeeping force capable of deploying under a UN mandate, or without one in its member states. In October 2007, the CSTO signed an agreement with the Shanghai Cooperation Organization in the Tajik capital, Dushanbe, to broaden cooperation on such issues as security, crime, and drug trafficking. Joint action plans between the two organizations are to be signed in 2008 in Beijing.

Security issues always occupy a special place in the internal and external policies of the states of Central Asia. For Uzbekistan, they are of particular vitality because of its geostrategically important location in the centre of the region. Therefore, Uzbekistan’s return to the CSTO not only provides a framework for cooperation in security spheres, but also an opportunity to develop closer and stronger ties with Russia.

NEWS DIGEST

THIRD ANNIVERSARY OF TULIP REVOLUTION IN KYRGYZSTAN

24 March

The third anniversary of the "Tulip Revolution" will be marked in Kyrgyzstan on Monday. The republic's parliament recently decided to turn March 24 into a People's Revolution Day Holiday. A festive meeting will be held on the occasion at the Bishkek Philharmonic Society and a salute will be fired in the central square of the capital on Monday evening. Prior to this, March 24 was marked in Kyrgyzstan only in compliance with a presidential decree, which lacks the power of a law. However, not all the population of Kyrgyzstan are pleased with the decision to turn March 24 into a nationwide holiday. The public opinion polls, carried out by the local mass media among the citizens of Bishkek, show that only fifty per cent of the capital's population acclaim this novelty. Three years ago, a crowd of several thousand people stormed and seized the Government House here. Soldiers and policemen had not put up any notable resistance to the opposition. They simply gave up their weapons and went home. President Askar Akayev was forced to leave the country. Seizure of Government house was preceded by several arsons and by a successful attack of opposition supporters on some administrative buildings and also on offices of prosecutors and of home affairs in the regional centre of Jalal-Abad. (Itar-Tass)

ARMENIAN OPPOSITION RESUMES PROTESTS AFTER STATE OF EMERGENCY EXPIRES

25 March

Some 2,000 supporters of former President Levon Ter-Petrosian congregated in central Yerevan on March 21 to pay their respects to the eight people killed during clashes on March 1-2 between police and security officials and Ter-Petrosian supporters. Police sought again on March 21 to prevent the

protesters marching through the city center and detained several of them, but minor scuffles did not escalate into major violence. Outgoing Armenian President Robert Kocharian told journalists on March 20 that he would not extend the state of emergency he imposed following the March 1 clashes, and which expired on March 20, but he warned at the same time that he has ordered police to take "strict measures" to prevent further mass demonstrations, RFE/RL's Armenian Service reported. Kocharian again rejected international calls for an independent investigation into the March 1 violence, which was the culmination of 10 days protests by Ter-Petrosian supporters against the official results of the February 19 presidential ballot that identified Prime Minister Serzh Sarkisian as the winner with 52.8 percent of the vote, followed by Ter-Petrosian with 21.51 percent. Ter-Petrosian claims to have polled 65 percent of the vote. (RFE/RL)

TBILISI DENIES INVOLVEMENT IN TERROR ATTACK IN S. OSETIA

24 March

Georgian State Minister for Reintegration Temur Yakobashvili has dismissed Tskhinvali's accusations that Georgia was involved in the car explosion incident the day before, which injured a North Ossetian peacekeeper and a local resident. Tskhinvali officials earlier stated that the explosive device that was disguised as a household item was given to the Ossetian peacekeeper by a Georgian national in the village of Okona in the Georgian-Ossetian conflict zone and detonated several minutes later. The peacekeeper and the local resident who were injured in the explosion in South Ossetian are in critical condition, both are being treated at local hospital for severe injuries. Tskhinvali blamed Georgian security forces for the terror attack. "The de-facto authorities in Tskhinvali are trying every method to draw the

Georgian authorities into their provocations. Georgia has never resorted to terror attacks," State Minister Yakobashvili told journalists on Monday. This is not the first case when Tskhinvali is trying to accuse Georgia of terrorism, he said. "Several days ago Ossetian militants opened fire on Georgian posts in the conflict zone from the positions of Russian peacekeepers in order to cause return fire and draw them into a confrontation," Yakobashvili said. The Georgian authorities want to settle the conflict in the Tskhinvali region peacefully, he said. (Interfax)

TRILATERAL MINISTERIAL SUMMIT ENDS IN TAJIKISTAN

25 March

At the conclusion of a two-day summit in Dushanbe, the foreign ministers of Tajikistan, Afghanistan, and Iran signed on March 25 a joint 12-point communique pledging tripartite cooperation in the energy and transport sectors and vowing to expand economic cooperation, Avesta reported. The three hailed the meeting as an important step toward "economic integration" and greater regional cooperation, adding that they also agreed to establish a new Dushanbe-based Persian-language television channel to broadcast in each country. Addressing reporters following the signing, Tajik Foreign Minister Hamrokhon Zarifi added that they confirmed their readiness "to intensify economic and humanitarian cooperation," but stressed that the trilateral summit was not directed against any third party. The trilateral summit was intended to bolster new efforts at "trilateral cooperation" and establishing a Tajik-Iranian-Afghan "economic council." Iran is actively engaged in developing several hydroelectric power plants in Tajikistan and is also working to complete construction of a planned Tajikistan-Afghanistan-Iran highway. A related project envisions the construction of a new railway link connecting Iran, Afghanistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, and China, aimed at boosting trade, increasing exports, and easing transit costs in the region, as well as expanding passenger traffic. (ITAR-TASS)

KAZAKH, RUSSIAN SPECIAL SERVICES STOP ARMS SMUGGLING CHANNEL

25 March

According to a press release issued in Astana, a joint Kazakh-Russian operation on March 25 targeted an arms-trafficking network. The operation involved

units from the West Kazakhstan Oblast branch of the Interior Ministry, the Kazakh National Security Committee, and the Russian Saratov Oblast branch of the Interior Ministry and "liquidated an underground workshop and international channel for the illicit production, smuggling, and trade of military weapons in Uralsk," the administrative capital of West Kazakhstan Oblast. The release added that the operation also resulted in the arrests of an unspecified number of suspects in both Uralsk and Saratov. In a separate operation the same day, Kazakh police launched a sweep aimed at rounding up illegal labor migrants, arresting 135 laborers without legal work permits, 60 of whom were Uzbek citizens, 40 were from Kyrgyzstan, and another 35 were from Turkey. Kazakh police have conducted regular sweeps of major urban centers aimed at stemming the influx of illegal laborers, resulting in the deportation of 476 foreign workers since the beginning of the year. (Interfax-Kazakhstan)

DAGHESTAN BROADCASTING HEAD ASSASSINATED

25 March

Unidentified gunmen opened fire on and killed Gadji Abashilov, chairman of Daghestan State Television and Radio, in the evening of March 21 as he was getting into his car in Makhachkala after buying groceries in a local supermarket, "Kommersant" reported. His driver was seriously injured. A former editor of the weekly "Molodyozh Dagestana," Abashilov was named to head the state broadcasting company in January 2007 by President Mukhu Aliyev, with whom he was close. A reward of 10 million rubles (\$420,221) has been offered for "reliable information" about the identity of those who ordered and carried out the killing. Just hours before his death, Abashilov conveyed his condolences to the family of another journalist from Daghestan, Ilyas Shurpayev, who was found stabbed to death earlier on March 21 in his apartment in Moscow, where he worked for Channel One television. Moscow police do not suspect any link between Shurpayev's killing and his work as a journalist, according to kavkaz-uzel.ru. Lenta.ru on March 22 quoted Andrei Melamedov, former editor in chief of the Daghestan paper "Nastoyashchee vremya" as saying that the names of both Shurpayev and Abashilov figured on a "blacklist" given to him by the paper's general director, Rizvan Rizvanov, of people whose names were not under any account to be mentioned in that

paper. Melamedov quit the paper on March 13 after a major falling out with Rizvanov. Shortly before his murder, Shurpayev reportedly noted in his blog his amazement at discovering that his name was on Rizvanov's blacklist. On March 18, kavkaz-uzel.ru reported that Rizvanov, a Lezgin, had issued orders to the paper's journalists to exercise no restraint in their criticism of the republic's leaders, and of President Aliyev in particular. (RFE/RL)

KAZAKH PRESIDENT'S FORMER SON-IN-LAW SENTENCED TO 20 YEARS IN PRISON IN ABSENTIA

26 March

A court has found the Kazakh president's former son-in-law Rakhat Aliyev and former National Security Committee chief Alnur Musayev guilty of planning a coup and sentenced them to 20 years in prison in absentia, an official from the Kazakh Prosecutor General's Office said at a news briefing on Wednesday. It was reported earlier that the trial of Aliyev, Musayev and other people, which had been taking place at the military court of the Akmola garrison since January 23, was closed to public to prevent the disclosure of classified information released during the proceedings. (Interfax)

FORMER ARMENIAN PRIME MINISTER CHARGED

26 March

Opposition Hanrapetutian party leader Aram Sargsian, who served as Armenian prime minister from November 1999-May 2000, was summoned on March 25 to the Prosecutor-General's Office and formally charged with organizing mass unrest and seeking to seize power. He was not taken into custody, but signed an undertaking not to leave Armenia. He told RFE/RL that he refused to testify. Sargsian backed the presidential bid of former President Levon Ter-Petrosian and played a key role in organizing the protests by Ter-Petrosian's supporters against the perceived falsification of the results of the February 19 presidential ballot. The official results proclaimed Prime Minister Serzh Sarkisian the winner with 52.8 percent of the vote, followed by Ter-Petrosian with 21.51 percent. Also on March 25, police arrested Arshak Banuchian, a deputy director of the Matenadaran institute of ancient manuscripts and likewise a committed Ter-Petrosian supporter, after searching his Yerevan apartment the previous evening. On March 24 and 25, residents of a village near the town of Hrazdan

in central Armenia staged protest to demand the release from custody of local parliamentarian Sasun Mikaelian, a third prominent Ter-Petrosian supporter arrested in the wake of the March 1-2 violent clashes in Yerevan between police and Ter-Petrosian supporters, RFE/RL's Armenian Service reported. Opposition journalists who sought to cover that protest were harassed by police who desisted only after the journalists telephoned the Yerevan office of human rights ombudsman Armen Harutiunian, whose staff came to their assistance. (RFE/RL)

VOLUNTEERS RALLY TO PAY FINE IMPOSED ON INDEPENDENT ARMENIAN TV STATION

26 March

The Giumri-based independent GALA television channel has succeeded over the past week in raising almost 27 million drams (\$87,700) to pay a fine imposed on it on March 19 for alleged tax evasion, RFE/RL's Armenian Service reported. Up to 10,000 residents of Giumri and the surrounding Shirak region donated money to enable the channel to avoid closure. One donor gave 5,000 drams, one-fifth of his monthly pension, while a second told RFE/RL: "GALA is the only Armenian TV station that had the courage to be independent of the government. I want my kids to grow up in a free country and to be able to freely express their views." GALA fell foul of the authorities last fall after it ignored instructions not to air footage of Ter-Petrosian's September 21 indictment of the Armenian leadership. (RFE/RL)

ARMENIAN POLICE STEP UP EFFORTS TO DETAIN PROTESTERS

27 March

In the wake of the expiration of a 20-day state of emergency in Armenia, police units stepped up on March 26 efforts to deter and detain daily public gatherings of demonstrators and opposition supporters in central Yerevan. The municipal police force adopted obvious measures of heightened security and reasserted control over public places with aim of preventing spontaneous gatherings and nearly daily silent walks by groups of people. A number of people were subject to an almost random series of arrests, with many people detained for hours before being released after simply walking through public areas and main thoroughfares. Defending the new police tactics, Artyom Babayan, the head of the Yerevan police force's criminal

investigations unit, told reporters that such measures were necessary "to clear things up" and claimed that the detainees were all opposition supporters who "may commit crimes," adding that the police believed that there could be "wanted criminals" among them. Nearly 50 people were arrested on March 26 in the latest police roundup of people walking in public. Opposition legislator and former human rights ombudsman Larisa Alaverdian warned that "with such steps, the authorities further escalate the situation." (RFE/RL)

U.S. URGES UZBEKISTAN TO OPEN UP FOR DIALOGUE

27 March

The United States urged Uzbekistan on Thursday to engage in a dialogue which it says would benefit the Central Asian nation long at odds with the West over human rights issues. Uzbekistan's relations with Washington have been chilly since 2005 when the United States and other Western nations condemned its deadly crackdown on a protest in the eastern town of Andizhan. But, in a possible sign of political relaxation in a country the West says tolerates little dissent, the government has pardoned six jailed human rights activists this year. President Islam Karimov, ruling Central Asia's most populous nation since 1989, has also promised to liberalize Uzbekistan's rigid financial system and he has softened his critical stance towards the West. Some Tashkent diplomats have linked the shift in Uzbekistan's stance to Karimov's bid to emerge from global isolation. Uzbekistan has large gas and oil reserves and is also among the world's top 10 gold producers and the No. 2 cotton exporter. Acting U.S. Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Central Asia Pamela Spratlen was due to arrive in the Uzbek capital Tashkent for talks later on Thursday, an embassy statement said. "We are convinced that the involvement of the Uzbek government in a discussion on a broad range of topics that are on our bilateral agenda," the statement quoted U.S. Ambassador to Uzbekistan Richard Norland as saying. He listed potential topics as regional safety, trade and investment, cultural exchange and human rights. "We can see now that, unlike calls for isolation, international interest and interaction with the Uzbek authorities can lead to positive steps." Uzbekistan, previously a U.S. ally in its so-called war on terror, evicted U.S. troops from a local military airbase after Washington strongly criticized the violence in

Andizhan, which President Karimov blamed on Islamist rebels. (Reuters)

TBILISI COURT SENTENCES OKRUASHVILI IN ABSENTIA TO 11 YEARS

28 March

The Tbilisi city court on Friday sentenced former Georgian defence minister Irakly Okruashvili in absentia to eleven years' imprisonment. Okruashvili, 35, is found guilty of massive bribe taking committed by an organised group with extortion when he was defence minister (2005-2006). The ex-minister was arrested in Tbilisi on September 27, 2007. He faced charges of power abuse, negligence at the post of defence minister, bribe-taking committed by an organised group with extortion and money laundering. On October 9, he was released on bail. He flew out for Munich on November 1. On November 28, Okruashvili was arrested in Berlin, and on January 9 he was conveyed to Paris, since he entered Germany with a Schengen visa granted by France to him. On January 30, the Paris court of appeal satisfied the appeal of French lawyers and released him on a French family's bail. Okruashvili's attorneys and supporters hope France will give a positive answer to his application for political asylum and would not extradite him to Georgia. Okruashvili, who is in Paris at present, denies the accusations brought against him. (Itar-Tass)

NO ONE MAY TEAR AWAY ABKHAZIA FROM REST OF GEORGIA - SAAKASHVILI

28 March

Georgian President Mikhail Saakashvili said Friday, "No one may ever tear away Abkhazia from the rest of Georgia." "Let everybody know, including in Moscow, that no forces can separate the Abkhazian region from the remaining part of Georgia," Saakashvili said at a conference in the Georgian foundation of strategic and international studies. "I state with responsibility that any attempts of certain forces in Moscow to blackmail Georgia that if our country enters NATO, Georgia will allegedly lose control fully over the Abkhazian region, are destined to failure," the Georgian president said. (Itar-Tass)

PEOPLE FROM CENTRAL ASIA MOST FREQUENT TARGETS FOR ETHNIC CRIMES IN RUSSIA - HUMAN RIGHTS ACTIVIST

29 March

People from Central Asia are the most frequent

victims of attacks by radical nationalists in Russia, Moscow Human Rights Bureau Director Alexander Brod told Interfax on Saturday. "From January to March 2008, 86 attacks motivated by aggressive xenophobia were recorded in Russia, in which 49 people were killed and at least 80 others injured," Brod said. The most frequent victims of these attacks were natives of Kyrgyzstan (9 dead and 4 injured), Tajikistan (6 dead and 22 injured), and Uzbekistan (8 dead and 1 injured), he said. Most of these ethnically-based crimes happened in Moscow and the Moscow region (28 killed and at least 57 injured) and St. Petersburg (8 killed and 6 injured), he said. Law enforcement agencies have stepped up their actions against xenophobia and ethnically-based crimes of late, Brod said. Several dozen people were convicted for such crimes in January-March 2008, he said. According to human rights activists' estimates, there are up to 70,000 skinheads in Russia, Brod said. (Interfax)

PRESIDENT TERMS AZERBAIJAN A 'ZONE OF TOLERANCE.'

30 March

In his address to the nation to mark March 31, which is observed in Azerbaijan as the "Day Of The Genocide Of The Azerbaijanis," Ilham Aliyev used the term "Armenian nationalists" or "aggressive Armenian nationalists" four times, but stressed that "we have no intention of using the fact of the genocide to fuel enmity and hatred toward other peoples." Aliyev described Azerbaijan as "a zone of cooperation and tolerance" where "social and national-religious harmony reign." Aliyev further claimed that "by its aggressive policy Armenia has isolated itself from all regional economic and energy projects." Aliyev concluded by assuring the people of Azerbaijan that "we shall achieve our goals, including restoring our territorial integrity and sovereignty and revealing those who committed genocide and who sow enmity and hatred" between peoples. (day.az)

AZERBAIJAN OFFERS NATIONAL COACHING JOB TO BERTI VOGTS

31 March

Azerbaijan has offered Berti Vogts the job as coach of its national soccer team. Azerbaijan soccer federation spokesman Mikail Narimanoglu said Monday that he expects the 61-year-old German to sign a contract in the next few days. Vogts, who led Germany to the 1996 European Championship title, resigned as coach of Nigeria last month because of

differences with the country's top soccer official during the African Cup of Nations.

AZERBAIJAN, IRAN, RUSSIA DISCUSS NORTH-SOUTH TRANSPORT CORRIDOR

31 March

The heads of railroads in Azerbaijan, Iran and Russia were meeting in Tehran to discuss the North-South international transport corridor project, the press service of Azerbaijan State Railway Department (ASRD) said. The three countries signed a trilateral memorandum on construction of Rasht-Gazvin- Astara (Iran) Astara (Azerbaijan) railroad within the project. Russia will conduct a feasibility study of the project within six months to report the results to Azerbaijan and Iran. (Asia Pulse)

ABKHAZIA REJECTS GEORGIAN OFFER OF 'UNLIMITED AUTONOMY'

31 March

Speaking in Tbilisi on March 28, Georgian President Saakashvili unveiled the new peace proposal for Abkhazia he announced 10 days earlier. The proposal largely duplicates one that Saakashvili floated two years ago, but in addition to granting Abkhazia "unlimited autonomy" within Georgia and introducing the position, to be held by an Abkhaz, of vice president, it also entails establishing a Georgian-Abkhaz free economic zone in the Gali and Ochamchira raions of Abkhazia. It would, however, require that the Abkhaz police force lose its autonomy and be subsumed into the Georgian police. Abkhaz President Sergei Bagapsh rejected Saakashvili's offer the same day as "unacceptable" and "propaganda" in the run-up to the April 2-4 NATO summit in Bucharest, apsnv.ru reported. Bagapsh pointed out that Abkhazia had autonomy within Georgia prior to the 1992-93 war, and that when the Abkhaz proposed a federation, Georgia responded by invading Abkhaz territory. The very term "autonomy" is anathema to the leaders of unrecognized republics because under the Soviet territorial-administrative system it was devoid of any substance. Abkhaz Foreign Minister Sergei Shamba for his part told kavkaz-uzel.ru on March 29 that Abkhazia has no intention of embarking on any talks with Tbilisi on "political issues," and ruled out talks on other issues "until the last Georgian soldier leaves the territory of the Kodori Gorge." Tbilisi deployed additional forces to Kodori in July 2006 to suppress a threatened insurrection by renegade local governor Emzar Kvitsiani. (RFE/RL)

MOSCOW CALLS ANTI-ISLAMIC FILM FITNA PROVOCATIVE

31 March

Russia condemns the anti-Islamic film *Fitna* as provocative. "Russia invariably supports dialog between civilizations, mutual respect and account of traditions and customs of various religions and strongly condemns the film as a provocation that may have negative consequences, similar with those of the Prophet Muhammad cartoons published by certain European media," the Foreign Ministry said on Monday. "Moscow is worried about the anti-Islamic film *Fitna*, which actually presents Islam as a synonym of terrorism, produced by Dutch parliamentarian Geert Wilders known for his ultra-right views. The film was shown despite numerous appeals and warnings," the ministry said. UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon, the European Union, the Council of Europe, the Organization of the Islamic Conference and the Dutch authorities have criticized the film and its producer, the ministry said. "We regret that a number of Western representatives have tried to defend the Dutchman with references to the inadequately interpreted 'freedom of speech and self-expression'," the ministry said. (Interfax)

UZBEK TRADERS MOUNT RARE PROTEST

1 April

A big demonstration has taken place in Uzbekistan - the first since huge protests were suppressed by government forces three years ago. Hundreds of market traders took to the streets on Monday to oppose a decision to relocate a local bazaar in the western town of Urgench. A government official denied many people were involved in the protest. In 2005, troops opened fire on crowds of anti-government protesters in the town of Andijan, killing more than 100. The government said Andijan was an attempted uprising by Islamic radicals and said 187 people were killed. But those who escaped the crackdown say troops opened fire on innocent civilians, and rights group put the death toll nearer to 1,000. Since then protests of any sort have been unheard of in Uzbekistan. But reports say hundreds of traders - mainly women - took to the streets on Monday, annoyed at the decision to move their market stalls from the centre of town to the outskirts. Russian news agency Ferghana reported that the traders were also unhappy at the distribution of stalls at the new location. Officials

said the move was necessary as the old market needed rebuilding. The protesters made their way to a nearby council building in Urgench. But Ferghana reported that they were stopped by soldiers wearing helmets and bullet-proof vests, and the protest eventually fizzled out. (BBC)

KYRGYZ OPPOSITION ASKS BAKIYEV TO HELP ORGANIZE ITS CONGRESS

1 April

The For Justice opposition movement has asked Kyrgyz President Kurmanbek Bakiyev to help organize its national congress. "We ask you as a guarantor of the Constitution to stop pressure and remove barriers created by local officials and the central authorities and to assist the people's congress on April 12," an opposition letter sent to Bakiyev, which was published on Tuesday, says. "It would be good if you and members of the government, as well as other central and local authorities take part in the congress," the document says. The national congress of the opposition movement was postponed from March 29 to April 12. "Given that you [Bakiyev] were on vacation outside the country and given that one lacked timely, accurate and authentic information, which prompted rumors about your health, we postponed the congress because we did not want to exacerbate the political situation while you were outside the country," the letter says. The For Justice movement is going to hold a congress entitled *Kyrgyzstan: Yesterday, Today, Tomorrow* on April 12. Initially the movement spoke for the resignation of Bakiyev. It has given up this demand recently; however, it has continued to criticize the government. One of the leaders of the movement Alikbek Dzhekshenkulov states that the opposition has its own economic development program and is ready to voice it within the framework of the congress. (Interfax)

TWO NATO SOLDIERS KILLED IN AFGHANISTAN

2 April

A blast struck a NATO patrol in southern Afghanistan, killing two soldiers, the alliance said in a statement Monday. The troops were caught in an explosion during a routine patrol Sunday in the volatile region, where Taliban fighters are active, the statement said. The two soldiers were airlifted to a military hospital where both died of their injuries, NATO said. The nationalities of the soldiers and further details on the location of the

blast were not revealed. More than 8,000 people were killed in the insurgency in 2007, the deadliest year since the 2001 U.S.-led invasion. (AP)

TURKISH PRESIDENT SAYS NO PLANS TO BOOST AFGHANISTAN FORCE

2 April

Turkey has no plans to send combat troops to Afghanistan despite a US call for NATO allies to beef up their military presence there, President Abdullah Gul said Wednesday. "We have no intention to send a combat force" to Afghanistan, Gul told reporters before flying to Romania for a NATO summit, the Anatolia news agency reported. "However, our policy of expanding our relations with Afghanistan ... and increasing our assistance will continue," he said. Mounting instability in southern Afghanistan, where Canadian, British and US troops have suffered significant casualties against the Taliban, is high on the agenda of a NATO summit in Bucharest. US President George W. Bush warned earlier Wednesday that "innocent civilians will pay the price" if NATO fails to send more troops to the country. Turkey, which has had historically close ties with Afghanistan, has twice led the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force there. It increased the number of its soldiers, stationed in Kabul, to 1,150 last year. The

contingent is involved only in peacekeeping missions. General Yasar Buyukanit, the Turkish chief of general staff, has said he is against sending combat troops to Afghanistan because the army is already busy fighting separatist Kurdish rebels in southeast Turkey. (TurkishPress.com)

POLICE: IRAN MOST SUCCESSFUL COUNTRY IN DRUGS CAMPAIGN

2 April

An Iranian police official said here Tuesday that Iran has been the most successful country in fighting drugs. "Iran is the most successful country on earth in terms of campaign against narcotic drugs. It has lost 13,000 of its citizens in the way," Deputy Police Chief for Legal and Parliamentary Affairs General Mehdi Mohammadifard told IRNA here on Tuesday. Mohammadifard said other countries want to share experience with Iran in the anti-drug campaign. He added that other countries now take Iran's drugs campaign strategy as the model and example. In terms of preventing and curing addiction too Iran has acted successfully, said the police official. "In a matter of few years, 15,000 addicts have received medicare coverage and about 4,000 to 5,000 of whom have gained full recovery and reunited with their family," he concluded. (IRNA)