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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 article structure: Ideal length between 1000 and 1200 words.

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

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

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

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

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MOSCOW AWAITS A TURN OF THE REVOLUTIONARY TIDE

Pavel K. Baev

The forceful suppression of revolt in Andijan shocked but also alarmed most international observers and seasoned politicians: the loss of hundreds of innocent lives was appalling but the involvement of Islamist networks was worrisome indeed. Moscow, in contrast, expressed unambiguous support to the 'friendly Uzbek government' and added more criticism to Western NGOs that were fostering discontent. This sincere belief that the massacre was an acceptable price for restoring stability is based not only on the own decade-long experience in suppressing rebellious Chechnya which caused a sustained devaluation of human life in the society as a whole. Russia is convinced that the march of forceful regime changes in the post-Soviet states has to be stopped – and assumes that President Islam Karimov has accomplished this task.

BACKGROUND: The chain reaction of spectacular and mostly non-violent 'revolutions' started in late 2003 in Georgia when the attempt of the Shevardnadze regime to manipulate elections backfired with such a force that the unpopular president had to step down. Russia had no sympathy whatsoever to Shevardnadze but the new government was certainly far worse from its point of view and the method of regime change through street power was deeply disturbing. In only a few months, the next crisis ripened when Georgia's new president Mikhail Saakashvili challenged Aslan Abashidze, the autocratic ruler of Ajaria, and forced him out through demonstrations in Batumi backed by a show of military force. This provincial 'revolution' was probably even more important than the first one, since it swept away a Russian ally who could have received support from a military base sitting right next to his capital. Moscow tried to re-assert its influence in Georgia by getting its candidate elected president in the break-away Abkhazia, but this unnecessary and clumsy interference irritated the Abkhazians so much that they refused to oblige. Russia's stubborn pressure brought the crisis to the brink of explosion and the last-minute

face-saving compromise did little in proving that the Kremlin knew what it was doing.

The next and hugely significant breakthrough was achieved in Ukraine in November-December 2004 when Moscow's determined interference in the presidential elections, defined as the 'decisive test' for its ability to dominate the post-Soviet space, failed to secure the desired result. It was a bitter personal humiliation for President Putin but even more importantly, it showed how the colossal power of societal discontent could be mobilized and controlled so that violent outbursts were effectively precluded. The lessons from the Ukrainian 'orange revolution' were so clearly applicable to Russia that the Kremlin experts simply refused to draw any and sought instead to take revenge in Moldova. The ruling regime there, however, performed a remarkable turnaround subscribing to a pro-Western 'revolutionary' agenda and leaving Moscow even more frustrated.

The February parliamentary elections in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan were supposed to prove that Central Asia was immune to 'colored viruses', and in the former the case was indeed made – but in the latter the

revolutionary lightning stroke again. Two features set this event apart in the general trend: the uncontrollable violence, including looting in the capital Bishkek, and the astonishingly small effort it took to enforce the regime change – President Askar Akayev ran from a crowd that was hardly 10,000 strong. Kyrgyzstan has also shown that it is very hard to distinguish between the just cause advanced by ‘democratic opposition’ and the ugly struggle between regional clans competing for dividends in the all-penetrating narco-traffic. The unexpected but entirely predictable explosion in Uzbekistan added to this picture the strike potential of underground Islamic networks that have apparently recovered after the defeat of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) in Afghanistan in late 2001. The black smoke over Andijan was also a reminder that machine gun remained the ultimate instrument of crowd control. Shevardnadze and Abashidze, Kuchma and Akayev preferred quiet retirement, but Putin has made it clear that ‘extraordinary measures’ are entirely justified for rolling back the revolutionary offensive. He understands perfectly well that his own grasp on power is at stake in this contest between ruling bureaucracies and angrily awakened societies.

IMPLICATIONS: Russia’s counter-revolutionary plans are based on the evaluation of the post-revolutionary internal structures of government as highly unstable, and this is by no means a case of wishful thinking. One year after the victory parade in the streets of Batumi, the economic situation in Ajaria has turned to the worse rather than to the better. Moldova has so far failed to secure any new desperately needed aid from the EU and its renewed effort at negotiating a compromise deal with separatists in Transdnistria has brought few fruits, mostly due to Russia’s not very subtle sabotage. The defeated Eastern opposition in Ukraine is regrouping but symptoms of split among the various political camps in the ‘orange coalition’ are increasingly visible. The sensible plan to review the most blatantly rigged privatization deals has resulted in nasty squabbles for redistributing property, while the desire to assert the role of the government in regulating the energy market has transformed into politicized pressure on Russian oil companies. It was the recent public row between President Viktor

Yushchenko and Prime Minister Yulia Timoshenko that encouraged Moscow most of all, and indeed the prospects for cohabitation of these two highly ambitious characters until the parliamentary elections next year are very uncertain.

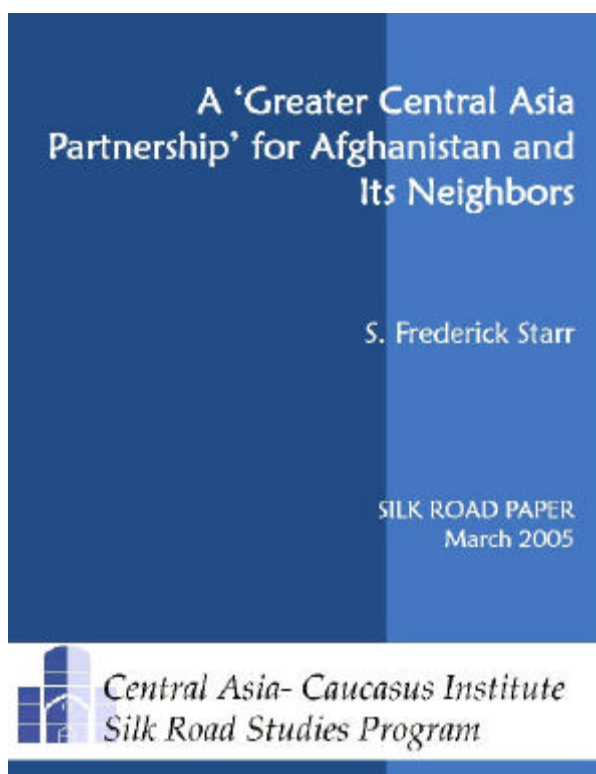
The anti-post-Soviet ‘revolutions’ may not quite deserve the term but they have certainly created huge expectations centered on releasing the entrepreneurial energy from the suffocating bureaucratic corruption so much resembling the worst patterns of ‘mature socialism’ in the USSR. Nowhere were these expectations higher than in Georgia – and the scale of disillusionment is in direct proportion. The gap between the tiny Westernized ruling elite and the impoverished society in this country is tremendous, and that makes President Saakashvili’s reform agenda very vulnerable. The tragic death of Prime Minister Zurab Zhvania has left the young president even more alone facing daily daunting tasks and it is nearly improbable that he would always be able to resist populist temptations. Moscow certainly has good reason to perceive Georgia as the weakest link in the newly-forged revolutionary chain and so it keeps testing Saakashvili’s patience in the dispute around the withdrawal of Russian bases. Any reckless move could trigger a crisis similar to the violent clashes around Tskhinvali, South Ossetia, last summer. In fact, conflict manipulation is a key element in Moscow’s plan for derailing the Georgian revolution and removing its flamboyantly independent leader. Any sequence of local clashes in the vicinity of Russian bases could give the Kremlin a chance to prove that its doctrine of ‘preventive strikes’ is not just a declaration of intent.

CONCLUSIONS: Georgia needs constant Western attention and support, perhaps aimed not that much on its armed forces as on modernizing the energy infrastructure and rehabilitating the once blossoming agriculture. Another and no less urgent demand for the same resources comes from Kyrgyzstan. The forthcoming presidential elections could mark an important step towards resolving the political crisis there, however, too many of the underlying problems remain unaddressed. The issue is not about the fragile character of the compromise between the northern and

southern clans, personified by the union between Felix Kulov and Kurmanbek Bakiev, it is rather that this compromise does not necessarily mean a more democratic power-sharing. A rather unusual double-dependency has emerged in Kyrgyzstan over the last few years: upon the Western aid (distributed largely by NGOs) and upon drug trafficking. In post-revolutionary turbulence, the mechanisms created for reducing the latter dependency – inefficient as they were – have been nearly completely abandoned. It is not impossible, however, to rebuild and strengthen those by using the multiple available entry points for boosting the grass-roots networks that facilitate democracy-building. That requires committed Western

effort and plenty of ungrateful hard work that returns little political dividend. It is certainly much easier to proclaim that Belarus is the next ‘revolutionary front’ and open credit lines for the opposition groups that would stage rallies in Minsk and gain much media coverage. The real question, nevertheless, is not about who is next but about the victories that could turn sour. Russia is counting on that but its counter-revolutionary strategy involves far greater risks of destabilization in the Caucasus and Central Asia than it is able to cope with.

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REVOLT AND REPRESSION IN UZBEKISTAN: THE DILEMMA OF WESTERN RESPONSE

Michael Fredholm

The forceful suppression of revolt in Andijan shocked but also alarmed most international observers and seasoned politicians: the loss of hundreds of innocent lives was appalling but the involvement of Islamist networks was worrisome indeed. Moscow, in contrast, expressed unambiguous support to the 'friendly Uzbek government' and added more criticism to Western NGOs that were fostering discontent. This sincere belief that the massacre was an acceptable price for restoring stability is based not only on the own decade-long experience in suppressing rebellious Chechnya which caused a sustained devaluation of human life in the society as a whole. Russia is convinced that the march of forceful regime changes in the post-Soviet states has to be stopped – and assumes that President Islam Karimov has accomplished this task.

BACKGROUND: Widespread repression of political opponents is a fact of daily life in Uzbekistan. So is the persistent problem of the country's weak Soviet-style economy which has caused living standards to fall for substantial segments of the population. As organized secular political opposition to Uzbekistan's president Islam Karimov is all but erased within Uzbekistan, the main remaining source of opposition to the government is based on Islam and often influenced by Islamic extremist thought.

With ordinary Uzbeks increasingly willing to challenge the authority of the government, the question remains how to interpret these challenges. Do we witness the emergence of a fundamentally secular political opposition, or something encompassing more violent and anti-Western attitudes? The evidence at this point remains ambiguous, yet a few facts seem clear.

First, there is growing support for Islamic extremism in Uzbekistan, often but not invariably caused by poverty and relative deprivation, and these sentiments are widely aimed at the removal of Karimov and the introduction of an Islamic state. Second, small but persistent networks of extremists,

variously known as *jamaats* or in a more organised form, the Islamic Jihad movement, exist in Uzbekistan and are at least in occasional touch with international terrorists in hiding in Pakistan and Afghanistan. The latter comprise two distinct but not fully separated groups: remnants of the fundamentally Uzbek terrorist group known as the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), but also Arab or Pakistani jihadists of the Al-Qaida network. Both groups support acts of terrorism committed in Uzbekistan.

Third, the cities in the Ferghana valley, where most recent violence has occurred, has a history of revolts and deep religious feelings that go back at least to 1885 when the first anti-Russian revolt broke out. In 1898, peasant unrest in Andijon was used by local religious and secular groups to challenge local administrators as much as Russian control. Other revolts followed the establishment of Soviet rule. In more recent years, the IMU originated in the Islamic movement called *Adolat* (Justice), a faction of a larger group called *Islom lashkarlari* (Warriors of Islam), which arose in the city of Namangan in the Ferghana valley in 1990 as a response to widespread corruption and social injustice exposed by the liberal

perestroika era. However, *Adolat* soon turned to violence and was banned in 1992.

IMPLICATIONS: As long as Uzbek president Karimov enjoys the full support of the international community, in particular the United States and Russia, he, or at least government authority, is likely to survive limited popular protests. Yet international support to a regime with falling legitimacy could also create hatred and resentment within Uzbekistan towards the West. Such resentment can be kept in check but not erased by repression. Realaxation of repression could therefore lead pent-up hatred to explode in popular unrest. In Uzbekistan, well-intentioned Western attempts to reduce oppression may therefore paradoxically serve to destabilize the government and ultimately encourage the very extremism that the outside world wishes to contain.

Following the 1953 coup in Iran, in which the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency in collaboration with Iranian army officers restored Shah Muhammad Reza Pahlavi to power, America remained a staunch supporter of the Shah despite periodic reports of killing of demonstrators, imprisonment of opposition activists, and torture of political prisoners. As long as U.S. financial, material, political, and military support was forthcoming, the Shah remained in power. After assuming office in January 1977, President Jimmy Carter stressed human rights as an integral part of his foreign policy. Carter also hinted that he might stop arms deliveries or aid, or both, to states that continued to violate human rights. Realizing his need for American support, the Shah in February 1977 responded by initiating a liberalization process, including concessions to the Islamic movement. But each concession brought further demands. The Islamic opposition, feeling a surge in confidence, adopted increasingly militant methods, positive that the security organs would not dare to suppress the protesters as ruthlessly as they had done in the past. Demonstrations, protests, and militant activities increased in number and intensity. Within two years, the Shah had fallen, and Ayatollah Khomeini had assumed control of the country. As Islamic

militants occupied the U.S. embassy and the Islamic revolution entered a fiercely anti-American phase, the U.S. responded to the aggression by turning as virulently anti-Iranian as Iran had turned bitterly anti-American.

The U.S. stance in Iran in 1979 could become an unfortunate precedent for the current Western stance toward Uzbekistan. Ironically, any attempt by the West to pressure Karimov into political liberalization might backfire just as easily as President Carter's policy towards Iran did in 1979.

CONCLUSIONS: By first supporting, then censoring Karimov, the West might eventually release the very same forces in Uzbekistan that overthrew the Shah of Iran a generation ago. Considering the intensity of the American-Iranian hatred and all violence this heritage has engendered in recent decades, the world hardly needs a new generation brought up on more of the same. The outside world, and in particular the West, accordingly needs to respond carefully to domestic developments in Uzbekistan. To issue blanket condemnations of the Uzbek government's admittedly violent attempts to maintain order and to sanction the Uzbek government for human rights violations might make Western leaders feel good, but such initiatives are unlikely to result in real improvements for the average Uzbek. A more constructive approach would be to enter into a dialogue with the Uzbek government, in effect offering full support while concurrently indicating which means to maintain internal order are acceptable and where the limit must be drawn. In other words, the message to Western governments is: look before you leap.

AUTHOR'S BIO: Michael Fredholm is a historian and defense analyst who has written extensively on the history, defence strategies, and security policies of Eurasia. He is currently affiliated to the Department of Central Asian Studies at Stockholm University, where he has made a special study of Central Asian geopolitics, Afghanistan, and Islamic extremism.

TBILISI SOFTENS TALK BUT NOT STANCE ON RUSSIAN BASES

Jaba Devdariani

On May 13, the Spokesperson of the Georgian president toned down the Parliamentary decision to outlaw the Russian bases and said the “interesting” proposals of the Russian side are under discussion. This sea-change comes after George W. Bush refrained from throwing his personal weight behind Georgia’s tough stance. The change in rhetoric, however, should not be mistaken for a change of policy. Georgia is shifting strategy to focus on discrete discussions behind closed doors rather than publicly announced policies. In so doing, it will more than ever require western support.

BACKGROUND: President Mikheil Saakashvili has attempted, but failed to normalize relations with Russia following his election in 2004. Frustrated at the lack of progress in political relations, as well as regarding the frozen conflicts in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, Saakashvili’s administration made the issue of Russia’s Batumi and Akhalkalaki bases a test of the Kremlin’s goodwill to improve bilateral ties. In March 2005, the Georgian parliament, with nuanced support from the government, passed a resolution laying out a plan for forcefully withdrawing the Russian bases, if no progress was reached in political talks.

A handshake agreement was reached on April 25 between the foreign ministers of the two countries, foreseeing Russian withdrawal by the end of 2007. However, Russian defense minister Sergey Ivanov refused to follow through on the deal, and as a result no agreement between Vladimir Putin and Mikheil Saakashvili was signed at the May 9 Victory day celebrations in Moscow. In fact, Saakashvili chose not to attend the celebrations due to this issue.

Contrary to the Georgian public’s expectations, U.S. President George W. Bush did not throw his personal weight behind the Georgian demands for Russian withdrawal, and instead in his address advised Georgia to continue talks with Russia.

On May 12, the Georgian parliament’s speaker Nino Burjanadze reaffirmed that Parliament’s March decision would enter into force on May 15, and that the executive would implement it. However, on May 13, presidential spokesperson Gela Charkviani said the Kremlin “offered certain proposals, which constitute a chance for renewed negotiations and certain progress.” Foreign Minister Salome Zourabichvili agreed that the new document provides for significant rapprochement of the two sides’ positions. Despite the softened tone, the press office of the Georgian Foreign Ministry confirmed on May 17 that no visas will be issued to Russian servicemen starting from May 15.

IMPLICATIONS: Georgia’s tough stance on Russian military bases is not without a precedent. A similar position was taken by the Baltic states, with European and U.S. backing, and helped them to steer clear of traps in the wording of agreements with Russia, and to maintain a clear negotiating position. However, observers say, Western powers strongly urged the Georgian administration to refrain from upstaging the already rather irritated Vladimir Putin for yet another public relations fiasco.

Tbilisi fears the loss of Western support, and seemingly agreed to soften its rhetoric, albeit through gritted teeth. Saakashvili’s administration

fears that backtracking on its tough stance would be taken in Moscow as a lack of political spine. Foreign Minister Zourabichvili, who engineered the policy of pressure, should be the most disappointed. On the other hand, if the parliamentary decision is not implemented, speaker Nino Burjanadze may consider it a heavy blow to her own political credibility.

Some of Tbilisi's fears have already materialized: after a long silence, the Russian General Staff resumed talk of the funding needed for withdrawing its forces, and presented an unrealistic bill of US\$300 million.

Burjanadze unveiled one significant detail of the Russian proposals on May 16, saying Russia agrees to withdraw the bases by February 2008, which is in line with Georgia's preferred options. However, it is clear that the proposals remain vague on the schedule of withdrawal, which, Tbilisi fears, can be used by Russia to drag out a process citing various logistical obstacles. If the optimism of Georgian authorities regarding the proposals is exaggerated, Tbilisi risks finding itself back on square one, with a significant loss of political muscle in future diplomatic rows with Russia.

Seeing this peril, Tbilisi tries to present its new position as a change in attitude, but not in policy towards the bases. The Chair of the Parliament's Defense and Security Committee, Kote Gabashvili, said the parliamentary decision will enter into force, as foreseen, on May 15. However, the initial measures against the bases would be rather mild, including stricter visa requirements. The hawkish defense minister Irakli Okruashvili treads the government line, saying Tbilisi would be "as liberal as possible" on the bases, but also points out that his agency plans for other contingencies.

It now seems that if Georgia wants to resolve the issue, it must meet Russia midway. As Russia seems to have agreed to the Georgian vision of the deadline, there will be other areas where Russia will seek a tradeoff. Another option is to put the issue on the backburner and bide time, however this might be politically dangerous as the opposition

would make use of such backtracking during the parliamentary and presidential elections due in 2008-2009.

Still, objectively, Tbilisi has been successful in persuading Russia to withdraw and Saakashvili's administration can take due political credit. Foreign Minister Lavrov said on May 16 that "in principle" the decision to withdraw was taken by Russia's top political leadership. Only some months ago, the official Russian line walked carefully around even the term "withdrawal", saying the talks were about "the mode and the period of functioning" of the Russian military bases.

Nonetheless, the talks are hanging on a very thin thread, constantly tested by the inflammatory political talk both in Moscow and in Tbilisi. A total collapse of talks would be damaging in the medium term and more so for Georgia. In Russia, the parliament will be tempted to come up with hardliner retaliation scenarios. As the role and relevance of the legislature in Russia is in constant decline, this would provide the Duma with a welcome nationalist publicity.

Such moves are likely to cause a new wave of anti-Russian sentiment in Georgia, possibly dragging the hawkish wing of Saakashvili's administration along. Georgia's foreign policy team would need to keep a cool head and seal the deal without rushing into an agreement that they might regret in only a few years time.

CONCLUSIONS: Georgia has agreed to soften its tactics in talks with Russia as the wholehearted Western support it hoped for failed to materialize. By putting the centre of gravity on closed-door talks rather than publicly announced policies, Tbilisi is exposing itself to the tactics of the Kremlin and could be compromising its negotiating position. Pressure to agree on a less-than-perfect compromise might damage the faith of Georgians in Western support, and could make pro-Western democratic reforms harder to sell at home.

AUTHOR'S BIO: Jaba Devdariani is the founder of Civil Georgia (civil.ge) and works at the OSCE mission in Bosnia-Herzegovina.

NEW MILITARY TRENDS IN THE CASPIAN

Stephen Blank

Behind the headlines of revolution and counter-revolution in Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan major strategic transformations are not only taking place in Central Asia and the Caucasus, but are accelerating. For some time now, Russian, Iranian, and local media have consistently reported the formation of U.S. bases and even a military bloc in and around the Caspian even though such speculations had been groundless. Now in the wake of Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld's visit to Azerbaijan in April 2005, such reporting has intensified. Indeed, Moscow is now talking about the formation of a rapid reaction force to deal with threats to stability in Central Asia, and Iran recently welcomed this plan even though few, if any details have been released by Russia.

BACKGROUND: On May 16, Iran signed a non-aggression pact with Azerbaijan stipulating that the two countries are not allowed to provide a third country with bases to attack either of them, clearly an effort to forestall American bases there from which Iran can be attacked. Iran's role in these developments needs some clarification.

Several developments seem to have come together recently to move Iranian diplomacy to take a more active role in the defense agenda of the Caspian. Obviously America's growing capabilities in the Caucasus and Central Asia are the primary long-term force behind Tehran's reaction. But as the crisis over Iran's nuclearization intensifies, and as Russia's position weakens, Iran obviously has felt compelled to redouble its efforts here. As Iran's missile and nuclear programs have gathered steam it has also embarked on a large-scale conventional rearmament program, clearly as a response to U.S. presence in Iraq.

In late 2003, large-scale maneuvers took place in Iranian Azerbaijan to send a clear signal to Baku. But since then the situation around Iran has degenerated further. Russia is now being forced out of its Georgian bases by 2008 and while it may relocate them to Armenia, whose relations with Tbilisi have noticeably improved, this leaves Azerbaijan apprehensive about renewed Russian support for Armenia. At the same time the Baku-Ceyhan pipeline has just opened, giving Baku and

Tbilisi something enormous to defend and which may be at risk.

Therefore Baku has apparently turned to improve its ties to Washington as seen in Rumsfeld's visit. From Tehran's viewpoint, not only is the United States determined to see the war in Iraq through to a conclusion, America has established a long-term partnership with Afghanistan that is widely interpreted as providing for long-term U.S. bases there. Russian support for the Iranian nuclear program also look shakier than before.

Thus Iran embarked on a new line in 2003-04 which has culminated in new support for Baku in regard to the war in Nagorno-Karabakh, support for the Russian rapid reaction force concept and the non-aggression pact with Baku. For Tehran it evidently is critical that Azerbaijan not veer decisively toward Washington, for the Baku-Ceyhan pipeline could provide competition for Iranian energy supplies while America could establish what Tehran believes is a lasting military presence there. Undoubtedly both Tehran and Moscow view the recently announced program of \$100 million for Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan to build a comprehensive maritime surveillance, command and control and quick reaction capability in the Caspian as the beginning of an anti-Russian and anti-Iranian security bloc as well as possibly the groundwork for bases against Tehran. While these American-subsidized facilities are hardly a threat to anyone and provide monitoring of terrorists, drug and arms trafficking, proliferation,

etc., Iran obviously views them as such. Therefore it approached Azerbaijan and may well secretly have offered it military assistance in return for the non-aggression pledge. Since it is unlikely that Baku would ever let Washington or anyone else use potential bases for purposes other than self-defense, it clearly stood to gain from enhanced ties to both Washington and Tehran as its Russian connection weakened and stake in the pipeline grew.

IMPLICATIONS: Meanwhile Iran is relying on a combination of military and political means to keep Washington out of the Caspian. Agreement with Russia on this rapid reaction force is one policy line and the agreement with Azerbaijan is a second line. A third line is Iran's recent call for a convention of confidence-building and stability measures for all the littoral states of the Caspian.

That proposal is clearly intended to generate a consensus on excluding any non-littoral state, i.e. America from a regional or maritime presence in the Caspian. Militarily Iran is not only continuing its nuclear program and an expanded missile and conventional rearmament program, it is expressly putting its priorities into naval, air, and air defense capabilities to deter an expected American threat. Of particular significance here are the newly announced Ghadr class midget submarines which will be used to defend both the Persian Gulf coast and Iran's Caspian coast. These submarines possess the capability to transport troops from place to place and will also be equipped with capability for firing torpedoes and rockets of undisclosed caliber. We can also expect more deals with China and Russia for conventional weapons, if not also more clandestinely with North Korea. All this activity therefore points to a strategic decision to try and obtain a naval base on the Caspian coast and find lasting ways to keep Washington from the area.

The tumultuous events in Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Ukraine have overshadowed the deepening strategic rivalries among the major players over the Caspian zone and given them an ideological cast. But this process of sharpened rivalry is leading to a stage of heightened militarization as rival security blocs come into being. On June 2, the Russian,

Indian, and Chinese Foreign Ministers meet in Vladivostok and undoubtedly Moscow and Beijing seek to revive Evgeny Primakov's 1998 proposal for a strategic triangle against American influence in Asia and globally, not least Central Asia. Similarly Russia proposes this rapid reaction force even as it is being compelled to leave its bases in Georgia and Iran has embraced that proposal while building up its own forces. America too, as we see is actively supporting the local states' capability to defend themselves against all manner of threats.

CONCLUSIONS: Iran's combined military-diplomatic reaction presents a dangerous potential in this game because it has previously used its regional conventional capabilities to threaten Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan over energy issues in the Caspian Sea. At the same time Iran's capabilities to generate new terrorist threats cannot be dismissed. It possesses links with Al-Qaida and the most recent reports indicate that it is trying to strengthen Syrian resistance to the United States in Lebanon and incite Palestinian violence to disrupt the peace process with Israel. The incitement of subversive and even terrorist activities in the Caucasus and Central Asia is hardly beyond the imagination or capability of the government in Iran should it deem such activities necessary. And all these considerations do not even take into account the fact that within two years Iran is expected to have a usable nuclear weapon. Its stonewalling attitude at current negotiations with the EU and its systematic twenty-year deception of the IAEA and violation of the NPT can hardly inspire confidence about its intentions in Central Asia, the Caucasus, or the Middle East. As tension ratchets up between it and Washington, and possibly the EU, it is clear that the Caspian will be one of the political and diplomatic battlegrounds of this struggle. But now events are transpiring in such a way as to make the possibility of these areas becoming a military battleground as well.

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FIELD REPORTS

BAKU-TBILISI-CEYHAN OIL PIPELINE IS PUT INTO OPERATION

Gulnara Ismailova

The Azerbaijan section of the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) oil export pipeline was inaugurated on May 25 in an official ceremony held at the BTC head pump station in the Sangachal Terminal, 40 km south of Baku. This event marks the official celebration of first oil entering the Azerbaijan section (about 450 km) of the 1,700 km main export pipeline. From the Sangachal Terminal, the first oil will reach the Azerbaijani-Georgian border in six weeks. In mid-August, a first tanker will load Azerbaijani oil at the Turkish port Ceyhan.

The Presidents of Turkey, Georgia, Kazakhstan, the U.S. Energy Secretary, the head of British Petroleum, as well as many other high-ranking officials from foreign countries came to Azerbaijan to participate in the opening ceremony, and together with Azerbaijan's President Ilham Aliyev started up the compressor to inject oil into the pipeline.

This year, a significant increase in oil production is expected in Azerbaijan, reaching 20 million tons per year. The capacities of the Sangachal Terminal will be expanded, turning it into the largest throughout the Caspian region. The investments made in oil production and transportation projects will total up to US\$14 billion. The pipeline will make it possible to export up to 1 million barrels of oil daily, or 50 million tons per year, to world markets. This is expected to include ca. 20-25 million tons of Kazakhstani oil yearly.

At the ceremony, President Ilham Aliyev stated that although many thought BTC would never be built and others wanted to impede it, they failed. "The BTC project will be of benefit to Azerbaijan as

well as to neighboring countries. If not for the support of the United States, we would never have made these plans reality".

Turkey's President Ahmet Necdet Sezer stated that the commissioning of BTC plays a significant role for the independence, stability and security, as well as economic growth and economic independence of the region's countries. In turn, the President of Georgia, Mikhail Saakashvili, said that the realization of the project is above all a geopolitical victory of Azerbaijan and its allies, including Georgia. "The implementation of other regional projects will significantly change the political environment in the South Caucasus, and that will bring prosperity and strengthen independence of the countries in the region", Saakashvili stressed.

Kazakhstan's President Nursultan Nazarbayev is convinced that with start-up of BTC, the export potential of Kazakhstan will increase; he even proposed to add 'Aktau', Kazakhstan's port on the Caspian sea, to the name of the pipeline. "BTC is one of the key elements that

ensures multidirectional export capacity of energy resources from the Caspian region. Huge energy resources of the Caspian Sea will definitely bring prosperity and success to all countries and peoples located around it", Nazarbayev emphasized.

In a letter of congratulation to the Azerbaijani people, U.S. President George W. Bush wrote that "BTC opens a new epoch in the development of countries of the Caspian basin. Caspian oil will be supplied to the European and other markets through a commercially beneficial and ecologically safe

route.”. The U.S. also welcomed Kazakhstan’s joining of the project. U.S. Energy secretary Samuel Bodman stated at the ceremony that “the BTC pipeline will play a crucial role in global energy politics and have a considerable impact on global energy resources”. The UK’s Prime Minister Tony Blair, as well as his counterparts Koizumi of Japan, Berlusconi of Italy, and Bondevik of Norway also sent letters of congratulation on the occasion of the pipeline’s commissioning.

The same day in the Sangachal Terminal, the Presidents of Azerbaijan, Georgia and Turkey signed an agreement of constructing a Kars-Akhalkalaki-Tbilisi-Baku international transportation railway, whose cost is estimated at ca. US\$600 million. The project comprises

the construction of the 98 km Kars-Akhalkalaki railway, as well as the reconstruction of the

railway from Akhalkalaki to Tbilisi. At the end of the ceremony, the foreign ministers of Azerbaijan, Georgia and Kazakhstan, as well as Turkey’s Minister of Oil Resources and the U.S. Secretary of Energy signed an ‘East - West’ Baku Declaration.

The pipeline’s security is a vital issue. The U.S. representatives emphasized America’s readiness to assist the security of the pipeline, given BTC’s place in America’s energy strategy, but cautioned that U.S. assistance should not be overestimated, as it is unlikely to go beyond consultations and trainings. The pipeline’s protection will be provided by special joint military forces from Azerbaijan, Georgia and Turkey, whose main objective will be to protect the pipeline from terrorists. The Ministers of Defense of the three countries will meet shortly to discuss the details of this issue. In this context, Turkey will support Georgia and Azerbaijan with respect to NATO integration issues.

According to experts, the commissioning of the BTC pipeline has weakened Russia’s influence in the countries of the Caspian basin and stimulated the establishing of a new ‘East-West’ transportation corridor. From now on, the countries of the Caspian region are finally and directly incorporated into the World Economy.

TURKMENBASHI FIRES DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER *Chemen Durdiyeva*

Two days after the state holidays of National Revival, Unity and Day of Poetry, Turkmenbashi the Great convened an expanded meeting of the Cabinet of Ministers on Friday May 20, 2005. Besides speaking on ongoing economic reforms in the country, Mr. Niyazov largely addressed the problem of cadre reorganization in the Cabinet of Ministers of Turkmenistan and dismissed Yolly Gurbanmuradow, Deputy Chairman of the Cabinet of Ministers for “serious flaws in his work and abuse of government position.”

At the meeting, the General Prosecutor, Ms. Gurbanbibi Atajanova listed a number of

individuals who got involved in the major crime of corruption. She announced that among the leading individuals in large-scale corruption was Yolly Gurbanmuradow, Deputy Prime Minister for the oil and gas sector, which constitutes the main source of economic growth in Turkmenistan.

Mr. Gurbanmuradow is accused of having misappropriated state funds for a number of years by blatantly abusing his high position in the government. As the prosecutor’s investigative report indicates, Mr. Gurbanmuradow embezzled state funds amounting to US\$60 mln. Among the leading Cabinet members, Mr. Gurbanmuradow has

been a close associate of President Niyazov in many matters including building foreign economic relations with neighboring countries since independence. In this regard, he has been one of the longest serving Cabinet members under Niyazov's presidency. Starting from 1993 till 2001, Mr. Gurbanmuradov held the position of Chief Director of the Foreign Economic Relations Bank of Turkmenistan and as deputy Prime Minister in the Cabinet since 2001.

While working as deputy Prime Minister, Mr. Gurbanmuradov is accused of working through front companies managed by his own associates for his and his relatives' personal enrichment. As the General Prosecutor's office reported, he opened a private company, "Gash", by appointing a certain Mr. Nigmatulin at its head and unlawfully issued a US\$600,000 loan indirectly to his own company. Mr. Gurbanmuradov is accused of buying luxurious apartments in Ashgabat for his relatives and wives as well. He is also accused of falsifying the true costs of planting trees in the vicinities of the grand 20,000 capacity mosque in Gypjak, the birthplace of President Niyazov. Instead of claiming US \$62-65 for each tree imported, he indicated US \$158 on top of the actual price. In addition, he has also been accused of polygamy, having three wives simultaneously – a crime under the civil code of Turkmenistan.

Appearing on state television, Mr. Gurbanmuradov confessed that he takes all the responsibility for the charges issued against him. Mr. Niyazov issued a decree replacing Mr. Gurbanmuradov with

Guychnazar Tachnazarov as Deputy Chairman of the Cabinet of Ministers. In relation to the allegations against Gurbanmuradov, the President also dismissed Begmurat Gurbanmuradov, a relative of Yolly Gurbanmuradov and Mayor of the coastal town of Turkmenbashi. In addition, Mr. Niyazov accused the mayor of Ashgabat, Amangeldi Rejepov for neglecting the ongoing illegal distribution of apartments for Yolly Gurbanmuradov, his close relatives and charged him removal of three months of salary. The mayor, Amangeldi Rejepov, is now on probation to improve all the wrongdoings for his time in Ashgabat.

Mr. Niyazov ordered the General Prosecutor's office to hold extensive investigations on Gurbanmuradov's case and the circle of other individuals involved in it. This has created a somewhat twitchy situation among officials in other big cities of Turkmenistan as well.

The meeting was broadcast on national television channels and for the first time exposed major factors of corruption among high state officials close to President Turkmenbashi. Making almost biannual large-scale changes in government positions is not new in Turkmenistan. But Yolly Gurbanmuradov's case raised many questions. This major reshuffling is also viewed as a result of the internal power struggle in the Cabinet as the President Niyazov announced the possibility of presidential elections in 2008.

ASTANA STICKS TO MULTI-VECTOR OIL POLICY

Marat Yermukanov

Carefully balancing between great powers competing for its rich hydrocarbons, Kazakhstan seemingly was a passive onlooker in the global oil battle. In recent weeks, the Kazakh government took major steps, purchasing a stake in the

Kashagan oil field and joining the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil pipeline project. The latter move can be construed as Kazakhstan's resistance to Russian-imposed Caspian Pipeline Consortium (CPC).

After a long series of hard negotiations, Kazakhstan's state-owned oil producer Kazmunaygaz succeeded in purchasing an 8.33% share of the British BG company in the Kashagan oil field development project. In an apparent euphoric mood, the minister of energy and mineral resources Vladimir Shkolnik described the transaction as an "unprecedented deal in world practice" and remarked, as if casually, that Kazakhstan's government did not resort to administrative leverages to pressure the British company into selling its stake in Kashagan, Kazakhstan's largest oil field deposits ever discovered in the past 30 years.

Indeed, the deal came as a surprise to experts in the field. Negotiations were going on for nearly two years without visible success for Kazakhstan's government. Obviously, British Gas was reluctant to lose its share in Kashagan, which is three times larger than the equally famous Tenghiz oil deposits. But what nourishes speculations around the large-scale deal are the \$913 million paid to purchase half of the 16.67% stake of BG in the Kashagan oil deposits development project, the second half of the share being purchased by other Agip KCO oil consortium companies which incorporate oil giants ENI, Total, ExxonMobil, Royal Dutch Shell (each holding 18.52% stakes in Kashagan project), ConocoPhillips (9.26%), and Inpex (8.33%). With its 8.33% bought from BG, Kazmunaygaz now will be able to play a greater part in the oil business in the Caspian, making the declared goal of joining the ten largest oil-producing nations by the year 2015 more real for Kazakhstan. The impressive deal with BG left many observers guessing how the national company Kazmunaygaz, with shaky financial resources, could so readily dish out hundreds of millions of dollars to purchase the stake. The mystery shrouding the transaction bring back to memory the year 1997, when the government sold off Kazakhstan's 14.3% share of Kashagan for the low price of \$560 million. The government motivated the sale with the economic and financial crisis in the country.

What is trumpeted as an "unprecedented deal" turns out to be nothing more than a pyrrhic victory for Kazakhstan, for over the last two years oil share prices in Kashagan went up 44% and the government lost \$353 million buying back part of its erstwhile share. Why did the government not use foreign loans to tide the country over the crisis that time instead of selling its Kashagan share? In Kazakhstan, memories are still alive of the shady oil deal concluded with American companies under former prime-minister Nurlan Balgymbayev when the government sold first 20%, then 5% of Kazakhstan's shares in the Tenghiz oil field amid strong criticism from the opponents of the transaction which led to the "Kazakhgate scandal".

Kazmunaygaz announced its plan to invest \$1 billion in the Kashagan oil project by 2008, the year the commercial oil production, initially scheduled for 2005 but then postponed, should start. In anticipation of large oil output and in a bid to join BTC pipeline project, the Kazakh government this year activated talks with Georgia and Azerbaijan, earlier deadlocked by divergences over oil transportation tariffs. On his visit to Astana and subsequent trip to Baku, Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili removed the last hurdles on tariff issues. President Nursultan Nazarbayev clearly articulated Kazakhstan's decision to participate in this costly project in Baku where he traveled to attend the launching ceremony of the BTC.

It was not an easy choice for Astana. Kazakhstan's bias toward the BTC project was obviously provoked by prolonged disputes with Russia over Caspian Pipeline Consortium routes. A few weeks before the BTC pipeline was put into operation, Kazakhstan's prime-minister Danial Akhmetov casually mentioned that the issue of increasing the capacity of Caspian Pipeline Consortium (CPC) discussed with Russia have led practically nowhere, and Kazakhstan will focus its attention on maritime routes. However, in every aspect the Russian route is the cheapest one for pumping Kazakh oil to Europe. First, Kazakhstan will either have to create its own shipbuilding industry to build oil tankers

needed to bring oil to the Azerbaijani terminal of Sangachal which is economically unreasonable, or buy tankers from Russia. Second, even the lowest possible transportation tariff of \$3.3 per barrel offered buy BTC project shares is considerably higher than transportation tariffs fixed for any other route. This indicates that Kazakhstan's option is largely motivated by the changing geopolitical climate in the region.

Economic interests and the uncertain political prospects in the Caspian region make Kazakhstan vacillate between the Russian-favored CPC and the American-supported BTC routes. With its huge oil reserves and clash of geopolitical interests in the Caspian region, Kazakhstan has many reasons to be judicious in its choice. It is safer for Astana to sustain its time-tested multiple oil route policy.

OLIGARCHS DECLARE A CEASE-FIRE IN AZERBAIJAN

Anar Kerimov

“The score is tied now!” That is the general conclusion that Azerbaijani analysts come to when discussing the ongoing struggle between the Minister of Economic Development Farhad Aliyev (no relation to the President Aliyev) and the head of the State Customs Committee Kamaleddin Heydarov. Farhad Aliyev seems to have tied the score in their personal fight, known as the “battle of oligarchs” after President Aliyev forced Heydarov to lower the prices for imported goods.

The struggle between Aliyev and Heydarov, perhaps the most powerful oligarchs in the country, escalated after the election of President Ilham Aliyev in October 2003. During President Heydar Aliyev's presidency, both officials kept a low profile and did not dare to have an open struggle for economic influence in the country. Yet, after 2003, having received more freedom in their actions, Aliyev and Heydarov launched a fierce fight against each other, using both media outlets and local businesses.

Specifically, Aliyev accuses his rival of hindering the economic development of the country by imposing a monopoly on the import and export of goods, which in turn ruins the competitive nature of the market economy in the country. Indeed, the majority of businessmen in Azerbaijan complain that the export and import of goods is monopolized by Heydarov, his companies and close associated

and that average businessmen do not have a chance to enter this business. Controlling exports and imports, Heydarov is also able to artificially increase the prices of goods in the country, reaping maximum profits. As a result, domestic production suffers and the population complains about price inflation.

At first, President Aliyev seemed to have sided with Heydarov. In December of last year, the President signed a decree on taking out some of the functions of the Ministry of Economic Development, such as the control over industrial development, and transferring them to the Ministry of Energy. Local experts viewed this as a victory by Heydarov over Farhad Aliyev and the President's desire to calm down the Minister of Economy. Indeed, the struggle between them was getting out of control and media outlets were covering it very broadly.

Nevertheless, the struggle did not calm down. Meanwhile, the price inflation in the country reached its peak at the end of 2004 and the beginning of 2005, with the general public openly protesting against it. The matter was even discussed at an emergency session of the economic council, chaired by the President himself. It became clear that the skyrocketing prices started hurting the political ratings of the ruling party, which could have very dangerous consequences considering the upcoming parliamentary elections in the country.

At the same time, Farhad Aliyev has skillfully used the influence of the powerful businessmen and media outlets to further ruin the standing of Heydarov. The council of entrepreneurs, which consists of major businessmen in the country and is chaired by Farhad Aliyev, organized a conference in which accusations against Heydarov rained. Some international financial institutions and media outlets followed suit.

The results of these attacks did not take too long to materialize. President Aliyev reportedly ordered Heydarov to control the actions of the customs officials and make sure that inflation is curbed. Furthermore, Heydarov was left in a difficult situation with an increasingly negative image.

Perhaps in an effort to manage the situation, Heydarov took immediate action, similar to those

taken by Farhad Aliyev. Within one week, Heydarov gathered the same entrepreneurs and created a new council with them and the Custom's committee as well as speaking in several TV programs regarding the performance of the Customs officials. Such frequent appearances on TV and meetings with journalists during self-initiated press conferences is known as a feature of Heydarov.

Meanwhile, the *Azadlig* newspaper reported that a cease-fire has been declared between the powerful officials. Yet, rumors circulate in the press that Heydarov is planning to open a TV channel of his own as well as fund the election campaign of dozens of candidates in order to gain support in the new Parliament, so one should definitely expect another round in the struggle between Azerbaijan's oligarchs.



NEWS DIGEST

OPPOSITION TAJIK ISLAMIC PARTY OFFICIAL COMMENTS ON RECENT UNREST IN UZBEKISTAN

19 May

In a published interview, opposition Islamic Renaissance Party of Tajikistan Deputy Chairman Muhiddin Kabiri stated that the recent unrest in Uzbekistan was caused by internal social and economic problems and a lack of political freedom. Kabiri criticized Russia for attempting to "link the Uzbek unrest to Islamic fundamentalists" and condemned "the West for relying on authoritarian regimes as guarantors of stability in Central Asia." Commenting on ways to stabilize the region, he added that "the legalization of the activities of Islamic political parties in any of the Central Asian countries would make it possible to reduce the influence of radical sentiment and the emergence of all kinds of extremist currents." (Asia-Plus)

TALKING ABOUT GEORGIA'S JOINING NATO PREMATURE - NATO OFFICIAL

19 May

It would be premature to talk about Georgia's joining NATO at the present time, said NATO Special Representative for the Caucasus and Central Asia Robert Simmons. Speaking at a press conference at the Izvestia media center in Moscow on Thursday, Simmons said NATO believes it should derive as much benefit from cooperation with Georgia as possible, but it does not really think the time has come to talk about intensifying the dialog on that country's accession to NATO. The alliance believes partnership relations could also be beneficial enough, he said. Talking about Georgia's prospects for becoming a NATO member, Simmons said much will depend on Georgia's achievements. (Interfax)

GOVT SHOULD ENCOURAGE ETHNIC RUSSIANS TO RETURN TO CHECHNYA - ALKHANOV

19 May

Chechen President Alu Alkhanov has called on the federal government to develop a set of measures to encourage ethnic Russians to return to the Chechen republic. Speaking at a government session on Thursday, Alkhanov recalled that 300,000 Russian-speaking people and some 300,000 Chechens have

left the republic since 1991, when Dzhokhar Dudayev came to power in Chechnya. As a result, Chechnya has turned into a mono-ethnic region in the North Caucasus, he said. "It is necessary to think how to return people there - not only Chechens but also Russians, because otherwise we will face the same events in the next 5 to 7 years," Alkhanov said. (Interfax)

FOURTEEN MILITANTS KILLED IN CHECHNYA IN FOUR DAYS

20 May

Several successful special operations conducted in Chechnya over the last four days have resulted in the elimination of 14 militants, some of them commanders, Chechen Interior Ministry spokesman Ruslan Atsayev told Interfax on Friday. Among those killed was Alash Daudov, regarded as the second most important militant after Shamil Basayev, and also Rasul Khidirlezov and Isa Tsakalayev, he said. In addition, 12 people wanted for major crimes were arrested and five active militants were detained, he said. Arms and ammunition caches were also seized during the operations. (Interfax)

U.S. SECRETARY OF STATE URGES UZBEKISTAN TO AGREE TO INTERNATIONAL INQUIRY

21 May

U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice called on the Uzbek authorities on 21 May to agree to an international inquiry into the recent unrest in the eastern city of Andijon. Rice called on Uzbekistan "to respond positively to the international community's justified concerns" and warned that "Uzbekistan does not want to endure further isolation from the international community." Rice went on to reaffirm the link between U.S. aid and the human rights situation in Uzbekistan, and stressed that Washington withheld \$11 million in aid to Tashkent last year after Uzbekistan failed to meet certification standards in the protection of human rights. The statement bolsters earlier calls by the British foreign secretary, the European Union and the United Nations for an independent investigation into the violent unrest of 13-14 May. (ITAR-TASS)

U.S. TO DEPLOY MILITARY BASES IN AZERBAIJAN - NEWSPAPER

21 May

The U.S. and Azerbaijani governments on April 12 agreed on the deployment of U.S. military bases in Azerbaijan, the Azerbaijani newspaper Echo reported, citing the U.S.-Israeli strategic analysis and forecast center Stratfor. "These forces will start to be brought into the country this year, and taking into account the huge significance of the Caucasus region for the U.S., the American military presence here will be long-term. Moreover, the first U.S. units will arrive in Azerbaijan within the next several weeks," reads an article published in the Saturday issue of Echo. Citing sources in the Azerbaijani government, Stratfor analysts said Washington and Baku reached the final agreement on this issue during U.S. Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld's low-profile visit to the Azerbaijani capital on April 12. Under the agreement, the U.S. forces will be deployed in Kurdamir, Nasosnaya and Guyullah. Various types of aircraft will be deployed at all the three bases, which have runways modernized for U.S. military needs. (Interfax)

AZERBAIJANI POLICE BREAK UP OPPOSITION RALLY

21 May

Police in Baku resorted to arrests and violence on 21 May to prevent isolated groups of would-be participants in an opposition rally from convening at the designated venue. Police beat hundreds of would-be participants and detained at least 149. Several journalists attempting to cover the rally were assaulted and beaten. Police also forcibly dispersed some 100 opposition supporters who congregated outside the U.S. Embassy to request Washington's support for democracy in Azerbaijan. The Baku municipal authorities last week refused permission to stage the rally, organized by the Ugur (Success) opposition election bloc, and on 20 May Baku Mayor Hajibala Abutalibov warned the organizers that police would take the necessary measures to prevent it. Ali Kerimli, chairman of the progressive wing of the Azerbaijan Popular Front Party which co-organized the rally, said on 21 May that the authorities' reaction showed that "the authorities are not ready to hold democratic elections but want to usurp power again." (Turan)

GOVERNMENT MINISTER ASSASSINATED IN DAGHESTAN

21 May

Daghestan's minister for nationality policy,

information and external ties, Zagir Arukhov, was killed on the evening of 20 May when a bomb exploded at the entrance to an apartment building in Makhachkala. Arukhov's bodyguard died later of his injuries; four children were also hospitalized. Experts from the Russian Interior Ministry flew to Makhachkala on 21 May to investigate the killing. Arukhov's predecessor as minister, Magomedsalikh Gusaev, was killed two years ago by a bomb placed on the roof of his car. (Caucasus Press)

NORTH OSSETIAN LEGISLATURE ABOLISHES POST OF PRESIDENT

21 May

The parliament of the Republic of North Ossetia unanimously approved on 21 May in the third and final reading amendments to the republic's constitution that downgrade the title of its leader from president to head of the republic. Opening the debate, parliament speaker Teimuraz Mamsurov argued that Russia should have just one president, and that to have dozens of presidents in a single state does not make legal or political sense. The amendments will take effect as of 1 January 2006, just weeks before incumbent President Aleksandr Dzasokhov's second term expires. (Interfax)

KYRGYZSTAN HANDS 84 REFUGEES OVER TO UZBEKISTAN

22 May

Kyrgyz border guards have handed 84 refugees over to the Uzbek authorities, a Kyrgyz law enforcement source told Interfax on Sunday. "Eighty-four Uzbek citizens, who illegally crossed into Kyrgyzstan, have been handed over to the Uzbek authorities from May 13 to 22," the source said. He also said that Kyrgyz border guards have handed 26 Kyrgyz citizens of Uzbek origin, who were in the temporary residence center in Suzak district in Dzhahal-Abad region, over to the Osh regional national security department. "Following identification procedures they will be transferred to their relatives residing in the Osh region," the source said. "The situation on the Kyrgyz-Uzbek stretch of the border is relatively quiet," he said. But a new wave of tensions is being anticipated on the Kyrgyz-Uzbek border near the Kyrgyz town of Kara-Suu, bordering on the Uzbek towns of Kara-Suv and Ilyichevsk, where, according to some sources, organizers of the May 14 disturbances are still being detained and arrested. Checkpoints are being removed in the Uzbek city of Andizhan, but the curfew is still

in force and the military are patrolling the streets. (Interfax)

KAZAKH OPPOSITION HOLDS RALLY TO DEFEND FREEDOM OF THE PRESS

22 May

Kazakhstan's opposition parties held an authorized rally in Almaty on Sunday to demand an end to reprisals against newspapers which criticize the authorities. Opposition leaders and mass media managers spoke about the importance of developing independent and opposition media. They argued that alternative viewpoints positively influence democratic processes, an Interfax correspondent reported. The demonstrators also demanded strenuous measures to combat corruption and more journalist investigations into corrupt deals. "The Prosecutor General's Office and law enforcement must defend the citizens' rights and liberties, instead of protecting the interests of corrupt bureaucracy," they said. The rally adopted a resolution saying that "the authorities must appropriately respond to facts of corruption and bribery quoted in the press, and prosecute those whose corrupt conduct is damaging the state." The rally was organized by the freedom of the press public committee and by the opposition newspaper Respublika, banned by the Kazakh authorities. Kazakh Journalists' Union Chairman Saitkazy Matayev, who is a leader of the Congress of Kazakh Journalists, said that the Congress is prepared to offer legal support to the newspaper which had appealed the authorities' moves. Despite rainy weather, the rally had been joined by about 1,500 demonstrators. It lasted for about 90 minutes. No incidents were reported. Police watched the rally and did not intervene. (Interfax-Kazakhstan)

KAZAKH PRESIDENT LOOKS AHEAD TO BAKU-TBILISI-CEYHAN EXPORT ROUTE

23 May

President Nursultan Nazarbaev told journalists in Aktau on 23 May that Kazakhstan's plan to export oil through the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil pipeline is a "necessity." Noting that Kazakhstan already exports oil through the Caspian Pipeline Consortium and the Atyrau-Samara routes, Nazarbaev added, "Now we are opening a new branch -- through the Caspian to Russia and Baku, which goes on to the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline. This is a great necessity for us." Kazakhstan is expected to formalize its decision to join the BTC pipeline project during Nazarbaev's 24-25 May visit to Azerbaijan. (Interfax-Kazakhstan)

AZERBAIJAN CONVEYS CONCERN TO MOSCOW OVER REDEPLOYMENT OF GEORGIAN BASES

23 May

Azerbaijani Foreign Minister Elmar Mammadyarov summoned Russian Ambassador Petr Burdykin on 23 May and handed over a formal note expressing Baku's concern at the prospect that the Russian forces currently stationed at two military bases in Georgia may be redeployed to Armenia. The note warned that such a redeployment could undermine both regional stability and the friendship and mutual trust that are hallmarks of Azerbaijani-Russian relations. (daily.az)

CHECHENS PROTEST ACQUITTAL OF RUSSIAN SERVICEMEN ON MURDER CHARGES

23 May

Chechens rallied in Grozny on 20 May to protest the acquittal the previous day by a Russian military court in Rostov-na-Donu of four Russian servicemen who killed six Chechen civilians in January 2002, Russian agencies reported. Participants at the rally adopted an appeal to the Russian government expressing "incomprehension" and "outrage" at the jurors' "callous" decision. Pro-Moscow Chechen administration head Alu Alkhanov released a similar statement on 20 May protesting what he termed the court's "illegal" decision. Alkhanov argued that the verdict will undermine Chechens' collective trust in Russian justice. (RFE/RL)

GIANT CASPIAN OIL PIPELINE OPENS

25 May

Oil is set to flow from the Caspian Sea direct to the Mediterranean for the first time after a \$3.6bn (£2bn) pipeline opened on Wednesday. Starting in Azerbaijan, the 1,600km (1,000 mile) pipeline will pass through Georgia to the Turkish port of Ceyhan. The project has taken more than 10 years to finish and will unlock one of the world's biggest energy reserves. It has not been without controversy, however, and there have been protests about the impact on the environment. Wednesday's inauguration at the Sangachal oil terminal near Baku was attended by presidents from Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Georgia and Turkey. US Energy Secretary Samuel Bodman also was present at a ceremony where the taps were turned on. The pipeline has been an international effort and was built by a consortium led by UK oil giant BP, which has a 30% stake. Other consortium members include Azerbaijan's state oil company Socar, Amerada Hess, ConocoPhillips, Eni, Inpex, Itochu, Statoil,

Total, TPAO and Unocal. David Woodward, the head of BP's operations in Azerbaijan, said that the opening marked the former Soviet state's "rebirth as an important country for the oil industry, just as it was more than a century ago". Azerbaijan's President Ilham Aliyev said that "this pipeline first of all will help solve economic and social problems" but also will play a role in "strengthening peace and security in the region". The oil in the pipeline will initially come entirely from Azerbaijani fields, but Kazakhstan is expected to participate in the project before the end of the decade. (BBC)

AZERBAIJANI PRESIDENT MEETS WITH GEORGIAN, KAZAKH COUNTERPARTS

25 May

Ilham Aliyev and Mikheil Saakashvili held talks in Baku on 24 May on the eve of the ceremony to mark the pumping of the first Caspian oil into the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) export pipeline, Georgian and Western agencies reported. Saakashvili said during those talks that the BTC pipeline, together with the gas pipeline from Baku via Tbilisi to Erzerum that will export natural gas from Azerbaijan's offshore Shah Deniz field, is "very important for our independence and development," and will put an end to the dependence of the entire South Caucasus, including Georgia, on external energy supplies. Aliyev also met on 24 May with Kazakhstan's President Nursultan Nazarbaev, who again affirmed his country's commitment to export part of its Caspian oil via the Baku-Ceyhan pipeline. Representatives of the two countries did not, however, sign the anticipated agreement on transporting crude from Kazakhstan via the Baku-Ceyhan route. Azerbaijani presidential administration head Ramiz Mekhtiev told journalists that experts "continue to work" to resolve unspecified problems connected with that agreement. The two sides did sign an Agreement on Strategic Partnership together with several other bilateral agreements on inter-governmental cooperation. (RFE/RL)

COURT ACQUITS ULMAN TASK FORCE

25 May

The North Caucasus military district court has acquitted four men led by Capt. Eduard Ulman, who were charged with killing six civilians in Chechnya. The sentence, in particular, reads: "Taking into account the circumstances established by the jury, the men are proclaimed not guilty and acquitted for the absence of corpus delicti." Due to the acquittal, the court left civil lawsuits without consideration that the

relatives of the victims had filed against the commandos. The court also ruled that the legal fees in the amount of 719,000 rubles be born by the federal budget. (Interfax)

MOSCOW TO BUILD NEW MOSQUES

26 May

Five new mosques are scheduled to be built in Moscow in the next few years, bringing the total in the capital to 11, Council of Muftis Chairman Ravil Gainitdin announced on 26 May. He noted that the city's central mosque is currently undergoing renovation to double its size, in a project that is being funded by Russia and several unspecified Islamic states. (ITAR-TASS)

RUSSIA, KAZAKHSTAN TO BUILD NEW LAUNCH COMPLEX

27 May

Russia and Kazakhstan are set to complete construction on a new unmanned spacecraft launch complex by 2008-2009, the top Russian space official said Friday. Anatoly Perminov, the head of Russia's space agency, also said that would-be U.S. space tourist Gregory Olsen is unlikely to travel to space this October on the next Soyuz trip, although he has passed the necessary medical exams. Kazakhstan and Russia have agreed to jointly develop Baiterek, a new launch complex on the Baikonur cosmodrome in Kazakhstan, which Russia leases from the Central Asian nation. Baiterek is designed for the environmentally friendly Angara unmanned rocket, an alternative to the Soyuz booster now in use. The Kazakhs have long campaigned to minimize pollution from rocket launches from their territory. Perminov said Baiterek will be completed in 2008-2009. (AP)

AKAYEV'S FAMILY CAUSED BILLIONS IN DAMAGES – OFFICIAL

27 May

The damage caused by former President Askar Akayev and his family to Kyrgyzstan runs to billions of soms, Daniyar Usenov, acting deputy prime minister and head of the commission probing Akayev's property, told reporters on Friday. "The damage caused by the president's family through tax evasion, the violation of privatization rules, duty evasions and other offenses is estimated at billions of soms," he said. Speaking in parliament, Usenov said the list of companies and facilities affiliated with the president and his family has grown to 178. (Interfax)

U.S. STATE DEPARTMENT DESIGNATES UZBEK GROUP A TERROR ORGANIZATION

27 May

The State Department announced in a press statement on 26 May that it has designated the Islamic Jihad Group (IJG) a terrorist organization. Describing IJG as a splinter group of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, the State Department said that IJG members attacked the U.S. and Israeli embassies and the Uzbek Prosecutor-General's Office on 30 July 2004. The statement also blamed the IJG for a series of bombings and shootouts in Bukhara and Tashkent in March-April 2004 that claimed 47 lives. The statement noted that "those arrested in connection with the attacks in Bukhara have testified to the close ties between the IJG leaders and [Al-Qaeda and Taliban leaders] Osama bin Laden and Mullah Omar." (RFE/RL)

RIGHTS GROUPS WARN OF POSSIBLE UZBEK CRACKDOWN

27 May

International rights groups voiced fears of a crackdown in Uzbekistan as rights defenders in Uzbekistan cited increasing harassment in the wake of violence in Andijon on 13 May, RFE/RL's Uzbek Service and the United Nations' Integrated Regional Information Networks (IRIN) reported on 26 May. Bakhtiyor Hamroev, a Jizzakh-based human rights activist, said that a crowd of 70 people came to his house, calling him a "mercenary" and "terrorist" for providing casualty figures from Andijon that differed from official information, the BBC's Uzbek Service reported. Meanwhile, representatives of international rights groups told IRIN that the Uzbek government is tightening controls in the wake of the unrest in Andijon. Rachel Denber, acting executive director of Human Rights Watch's Europe and Central Asia division, said, "We are concerned over a possible further crackdown and have already seen the beginnings of it." Representatives of Amnesty International, the International League of Human Rights, and the International Helsinki Federation for Human Rights echoed Denber's comments. (RFE/RL)

RUSSIA HAILS GEORGIAN PRESIDENT'S FOREIGN BASES PLEDGE

27 May

Russian Foreign Ministry spokesman Aleksandr Yakovenko lauded on 26 May Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili's statement during his address earlier that day to mark the anniversary in 1918 of Georgia's independence that Georgia will not host any

foreign military bases after the closure of the two remaining Russian bases on its territory, according to the Russian Foreign Ministry website (http://www.in.mid.ru/brp_4.nsf/sps/A50484DC1A4EA251C325700D003F18C5) Yakovenko added, however, that Moscow would like Tbilisi to provide formal legal written confirmation of its intention. In late February, Georgian National Security Council Minister Gela Bezhuashvili said that during recent talks on bilateral relations, the Russian side had demanded that a clause be added to the draft Russian-Georgian framework treaty formalizing Georgia's commitment not to host foreign military bases in future. Georgian Foreign Minister Salome Zourabichvili similarly told ITAR-TASS on 26 April she sees no need to include that stipulation in the framework treaty. (RFE/RL)

CE'S HUMAN RIGHTS CHIEF BLASTS VERDICT IN CHECHNYA CASE

27 May

The Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights, Alvaro Gil-Robles, said on Friday he was shocked by a recent not guilty verdict on Eduard Ulman and other Russian army officers accused of killing six civilians in Chechnya. Gil-Robles, who was speaking to reporters in Moscow, expressed hope the verdict, issued by a jury at a military court in Rostov-on-Don, Russia, would be reversed. (Interfax)

ABDUCTIONS MAIN PROBLEM IN CHECHNYA- GIL-ROBLES

27 May

European Council Commissioner on Human Rights Alvaro Gil-Robles considers the continuing abductions in Chechnya the republic's main humanitarian problem. On Friday, following his meeting with Russian President Vladimir Putin, Gil-Robles told journalists that he will always insist on putting an end to the disappearances of people in Chechnya and eliminating the atmosphere of impunity that is strengthened when abducted people are not found. (Interfax)

LEADING AFGHAN CLERIC SHOT DEAD

29 May

Gunmen have killed a leading cleric and opponent of the Taleban in southern Afghanistan, police said. Mawlavi Abdullah Fayaz was attacked by gunmen on a motorcycle as he left his office in the city of Kandahar. Last week Mr Fayaz, a key supporter of President Hamid Karzai, had given a strong speech

denouncing Taliban leader Mullah Mohammad Omar. Taliban spokesman Abdul Latif Hakimi told AFP it carried out the killing but this was not independently confirmed. Mr Hakimi said in a telephone call that Mr Fayaz was "preaching against the Taliban under the name of Islam". An aide to Mr Fayeze said the cleric had died on the way to hospital. Mr Fayeze was head of the government-appointed Islamic scholar's council and had condemned the Taliban last week at a meeting in Kandahar of about 500 clerics. He said Taliban fighters were killing innocent civilians and the government should be supported for trying to rebuild the country. Taliban insurgents have become more active since a lull over the winter. Scores of militants and a number of Afghan and US-led coalition troops have been killed in the past two months. (BBC)

COLLECTIVE SECURITY TREATY ORGANIZATION NOT TO DEPLOY BASE IN KYRGYZSTAN'S SOUTH

30 May

The Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO: Russia, Belarus, Armenia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan) does not intend to deploy a military base in southern Kyrgyzstan, CSTO Secretary General Nikolai Bordyuzha said on Monday. "This is not necessary," Bordyuzha told journalists after the talks with acting Kyrgyz Defense Minister Ismail Isakov. The Kyrgyz side did not raise this issue during the talks, Bordyuzha added. Bordyuzha and Isakov discussed the agenda of the forthcoming CSTO summit on June 23. The CSTO Secretary General arrived in Kyrgyz capital Bishkek on Monday. On Tuesday he will meet with acting Kyrgyz President Kurmanbek Bakiyev, Security Council Secretary Miroslav Niyazov and acting First Deputy Prime Minister Felix Kulov. (RIA Novosti)

EVIDENCE OF MASS GRAVE DISCOVERED IN UZBEKISTAN

31 May

RFE/RL visited what appeared to be a mass grave in Andijon containing 37 gravesites on 27 May. Isroiljon Kholdorov, the regional leader of the banned Erk opposition party, told RFE/RL that local gravediggers said bodies were brought in trucks to the site, located in a district of Andijon called Bogishamol, after violence on 13 May. He said, "[The gravediggers] say there are 37 graves with two corpses in each. So, there must be [74] bodies altogether." RFE/RL later learned that the guide who led the correspondent to the site, a man in his late

50s named Juraboy, was stabbed to death by two unknown assailants. No further details were available. Andijon residents said that the mass grave in Bogishamol is only one of several such sites that appeared after 13 May. (RFE/RL)

U.S. SENATORS PRESS INVESTIGATION DEMAND DESPITE COLD SHOULDER DURING UZBEK VISIT

31 May

A group of three U.S. senators told a news conference in Tashkent on 29 May that Uzbekistan must allow an independent investigation of allegations that government troops fired on unarmed demonstrators in Andijon on 13 May, agencies reported. Senator John McCain said, "We are here today because we are concerned about recent events that have taken place, which entailed the killing of innocent people," RFE/RL's Uzbek Service reported. Speaking at a news conference the next day in Bishkek, McCain stressed, "We are not pleased at events in Uzbekistan. We repeat our demand for a full and complete investigation by the OSCE of the massacre [in Andijon] that occurred just a few days ago," RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service reported. Senators McCain and Lindsey Graham noted on 29 May in Tashkent that it would be "very difficult" for the United States to maintain its current level of relations with Uzbekistan in the absence of an impartial investigation, Reuters reported. Senator McCain also noted, "No [Uzbek] government officials agreed to meet with us." (RFE/RL)

IMF APPROVES NEW LOANS FOR ARMENIA

31 May

The IMF has approved a new three-year Poverty Reduction and Growth Facility program under which Armenia will receive some \$34.2 million in low-interest loans, RFE/RL's Armenian Service reported on 27 May quoting the IMF office in Yerevan. The first tranche, worth some \$4.9 million, was disbursed on 25 May. IMF Deputy Managing Director Agustín Carstens noted Armenia's strong economic performance in 2004 and early 2005, as reflected in GDP growth and a fall in inflation. He added that "poverty and inequality indicators have improved notably in recent years," adding that "the authorities' new PRGF-supported program aims at consolidating macro-economic stability, generating additional domestic resources to finance poverty-reduction and growth-enhancing expenditures, and boosting private sector activities." (RFE/RL)

ARMENIA MARKS INDEPENDENCE ANNIVERSARY WITH 'ROUND DANCE'

31 May

Tens of thousands of Armenians, including President Robert Kocharian, linked hands on 28 May to form a 170-kilometer long human chain that performed a 15-minute dance around the base of Mount Aragats, the highest mountain on the territory of the Republic of Armenia, Armenian agencies and RFE/RL's Armenian Service reported. Estimates of the number of participants ranged from 160,000 to 240,000. Kocharian characterized the dance, which was organized at the initiative of the Nig-Aparan NGO, headed by Prosecutor-General Aghvan Hovsepian, as an attempt to express the unity of the Armenian nation. (RFE/RL)

GEORGIA NOT TO STATION MILITARY UNITS IN AREAS RUSSIAN ARMY BASES ARE TO VACATE - DEFENSE MINISTER

31 May

The Georgian Defense Ministry does not intend to station its armed units on the sites Russian military bases are to vacate. "We are not planning to station our military units in the former army bases. Akhalkalaki will be the only exception. But then, it will not be a base. We are drafting an employment program for Georgian nationals presently on the personnel of that Russian army base," Georgian Defense Minister Irakly Okruashvili said. According to the latest information RIA Novosti received from the ministry, the first train started from the Batumi base today to remove a part of its military hardware in compliance with agreements made in Moscow. The removal had been duly coordinated with the host country, said a spokesman for the Georgian Defense Ministry. According to Georgian Foreign Minister Salome Zurbishvili, a new stage is taking start in Georgian-Russian relations. "This is an end of Russia's 200-year long military presence in Georgia. It ushers in a new partnership stage," she said at a news conference today. According to the foreign minister, Georgia is offering to Russia a new pattern of cooperation, in particular, of the anti-terror alliance. It

all has found reflection in the document signed in Moscow quite recently. "An anti-terror center will be set up to use a minor part of the Batumi military base. As for the Akhalkalaki base, it will be closed down," said Zurbishvili. As the foreign minister explained, the signatures of the two countries' presidents were not obligatory to judicially formalize the instrument on base pullout. "The foreign ministers of Georgia and Russia signed the document to gain time." Russia and Georgia are intending to sign a framework treaty on friendship and good-neighborly cooperation. "The work on that treaty was problem-laden in the absence of a treaty on the bases," she said. As the OSCE (Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe) was holding summitry in Istanbul in 1999, Russia pledged to pull out all its military projects from Georgia. Two army bases, the 137th base in Vaziani, close to Tbilisi, and the 50th base in Gudauta, (Abkhazia), were pulled out in 2000. The two remaining, the 62nd base, in Akhalkalaki (the Samtskhe-Javakheti area) and the 12th base, in Batumi (Adzharia) became object of long bilateral foreign-ministerial consultations. (RIA Novosti)

SUPREME COURT IN BISHKEK IS BEING STORMED

1 June

About 300 people are storming the building of the Supreme Court of Kyrgyzstan. They say that they represent the people and demand that the court should resume operation. About a hundred supporters of several candidates who lost the parliamentary election in March 2005 have been holding the building for 45 days. They have bottles with Molotov cocktail in front of them and threaten to set fire to the court in case of storming. The crowd that is storming the building was brought to the site in about a score of minivans, which have been parked around the corner. The attackers have turquoise bands on their sleeves, while the defenders of the building wear red bands. (RIA Novosti)