

Central Asia-Caucasus Analyst

BI-WEEKLY BRIEFING

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ANALYTICAL ARTICLES:

Analytical Articles

KAZAKHSTAN LEARNS TO LOVE BORAT

Ryan Kennedy

KADYROV AS RUSSIA'S REGIONAL
GENDARME: A BOON FOR CHECHNYA'S
REBEL MOVEMENT?

Kevin Daniel Leahy

THE BOOMERANG EFFECT OF ANS TV'S
CLOSURE

Alman Mir-Ismael

THE CENTRAL ASIAN NUCLEAR-WEAPON-
FREE ZONE AFTER KOREA

Richard Weitz

FIELD REPORTS:

A NEW BRIDGE ON PANJ RIVER CONNEC-
TING TAJIKISTAN AND AFGHANISTAN

Sultanbek Aksakolov

GEORGIA PLANS FOR ALTERNATE GAS SUP-
PLIES TO ESCAPE GAZPROM'S PRICE HIKE

Kakha Jibladze

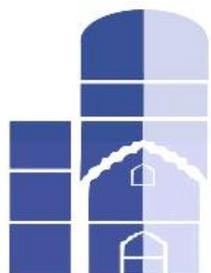
NEW WINDS OF FRIENDSHIP BETWEEN
BISHKEK AND TASHKENT

Joldosh Osmonov

NATOS UNFAMILIAR ROLE,
AFGHANISTAN'S FAMILIAR SITUATION

Simon Roughneen

NEWS DIGEST



Central Asia- Caucasus Institute
Silk Road Studies Program

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Contents

Analytical Articles

KAZAKHSTAN LEARNS TO LOVE BORAT 3
Ryan Kennedy

KADYROV AS RUSSIA'S REGIONAL GENDARME:
A BOON FOR CHECHNYA'S REBEL MOVEMENT? 5
Kevin Daniel Leahy

THE BOOMERANG EFFECT OF ANS TV'S CLOSURE 8
Alman Mir-Ismail

THE CENTRAL ASIAN NUCLEAR-WEAPON-FREE ZONE AFTER KOREA 11
Richard Weitz

Field Reports

A NEW BRIDGE ON PANJ RIVER CONNECTING TAJIKISTAN AND AFGHANISTAN 14
Sultanbek Aksakolov

GEORGIA PLANS FOR ALTERNATE GAS SUPPLIES TO ESCAPE GAZPROM'S PRICE HIKE 15
Kakha Jibladze

NEW WINDS OF FRIENDSHIP BETWEEN BISHKEK AND TASHKENT 16
Joldosh Osmonov

NATOS UNFAMILIAR ROLE, AFGHANISTAN'S FAMILIAR SITUATION 18
Simon Roughneen

News Digest 20

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.

The Analyst aims to provide our industrious and engaged audience with a singular and reliable assessment of events and trends in the region written in an analytical tone rather than a polemical one. *Analyst* articles reflect the fact that we have a diverse international audience. While this should not affect what author's write about or their conclusions, this does affect the tone of articles. Analyst articles focus on a newsworthy topic, engage central issues of the latest breaking news from the region and are backed by solid evidence. Articles should normally be based on local language news sources. Each 1000-1200 word analytical article must offer a concise and authoritative statement of the event or issue in question. An article must provide relevant, precise and authoritative background information. It also must offer a sober and analytical judgment of the issue as well as a clinical evaluation of the importance of the event. Authors must cite facts of controversial nature to the Editor who may contact other experts to confirm claims. Since *Analyst* articles are based on solid evidence, rather than rumors or conjecture, they prove to be reliable sources of information on the region. By offering balanced and objective analysis while keeping clear of inflammatory rhetoric, *The Analyst* does more to inform our international readership on all sides of the issues.

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Submission Guidelines:

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

Research Director; Editor, Central Asia-Caucasus Analyst

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KAZAKHSTAN LEARNS TO LOVE BORAT

Ryan Kennedy

The government of Kazakhstan has dramatically changed its approach to the popular and controversial character Borat. Recent statements from the government, major literary figures, and President Nazarbayev himself have ranged from acceptance to outright praise of the movie. This new strategy reflects the realization by the government that the movie has been more effective in popularizing Kazakhstan than any government efforts, and that previous criticism of Borat only served to increase interest and highlight Kazakhstan's problems with free press. It also suggests that Nazarbayev's daughter, Dariga Nazarbayeva, may have reclaimed her role as the main media adviser for the regime.

BACKGROUND: Borat, the popular and controversial character developed by British comedian Sasha Baron Cohen, has given the Kazakhstan government plenty of reasons not to like him. While claiming to be Kazakhstan's second most popular news personality, Borat has said that Kazakhstan's national drink is fermented horse urine, that the national game involves throwing Uzbeks into a pit, and that, for 3/4 the price of a prostitute in Amsterdam, a person could purchase the same services from Kazakhstan's president.

Not surprisingly, the reaction of Kazakhstan's government to Borat's appearance at the MTV Europe Music Awards in November 2005 was very negative. The Foreign Ministry suggested that Cohen may be acting on the orders of "a foreign power" to defame Kazakhstan, and threatened to bring the case to court. When Cohen used the Borat website to respond, saying he fully supported his government's decision to "sue this Jew," the government kicked him off of the .kz domain name. And when Borat's movie, "Borat: Cultural Learnings for Make Benefit Glorious Nation of Kazakhstan," came out, officials encouraged local theaters to boycott the film, which has yet to be shown in either Kazakhstan or Russia.

Recently, however, the government's approach changed dramatically. It started with the popular Kazakh newspaper *Caravan*, dubbing the movie "the best film of the year." The liberal-leaning, but usually loyal, paper suggested that the government change its tune, quoting Borat's advice to his producer -- "Relax,

Azamat!" Four days later, on November 21st, the Minister of Culture and Information, Ermukhamet Ertysbayev, publicly called the movie "funny" and said that its real target was "American manners and rural people and their intellect." The very next day, President Nazarbayev, in a press conference in London, said, "The film was created by a comedian so let's laugh at it, that's my attitude." With the official acceptance of the film has come other unusual praise, including the nomination of the film for the annual award of the Kazakhstan Club of Art Patrons by a leading national author, novelist Sapabek Asip-uly.



Borat, sporting Kazakh flags.

IMPLICATIONS: The government had several reasons for changing its attitude towards Borat. Primary among these, in the words of Asip-uly, is that Borat "has managed to spark an immense interest in the whole world in Kazakhstan, something our authorities could not do during the years of independence." For example, a Google news search of "the real Kazakhstan" lists 115 articles in the last month, most with headlines like "Real Kazakhstan is Far Better than Borat's Version" in the Arizona Daily Star and "Beautiful Kazakhstan (Sorry, Borat)" in the Florida Sun-Sentinel. A similar search of major newspaper headlines in Lexis-Nexis reveals that from 1996 to 2005, only 690 articles had Kazakhstan in the headline, or about 69 per year. This compares with 117 in just the last six months, of which only 61 do not contain a reference to Borat. The number of visitors to Kazakhstan's state news agency, kazinform.kz, has exploded, doubling to 27,000 unique viewers per week in the leadup to the movie's release, largely because of a link on Borat's homepage. The Kazakhstan Embassy has reported fielding more calls than ever about tourism, and is even promoting tours by the Sayet Tour Agency titled "Kazakhstan vs. Boratistan" and "Jagzhemash!!! See the Real Kazakhstan." As Nazarbayev said in London, "...any publicity is good publicity."

A second reason for the government's change of heart is that criticism of Borat did more to bring attention to the character and highlight Kazakhstan's own problems with free press. Both the criticism of Borat's performance in the MTV Europe Music Awards and the removal of his website from the .kz domain name produced more news coverage than the ceremony itself, and drew formal protest from Reporters Without Borders. More stories appeared in the Western media about the government's spat with Borat than did the three confiscations of opposition newspapers during the December 2005 presidential elections, the banning of the opposition newspaper *The Zuma Times* for violating laws protecting the honor and dignity of the President (Article 100 of the Code on Administrative Violations), or even the murder of Kazakh opposition leader Altynbek Sarsenbayev. The *New York Times*,

for example, wrote two articles mentioning the Sarsenbayev murder, while printing five articles just on Borat's MTV Europe appearance and the ensuing controversy.

Also interesting is the influence of Dariga Nazarbayeva, President Nazarbayev's daughter, and a potential successor to the Presidency, in shaping this response. As Erica Marat reported in the October 18 CACI

Analyst[http://www.cacianalyst.org/view_article.php?articleid=4521], Dariga was among the first to call for accepting the film with a sense of humor. *The Independent* (London) even suggested deploying Dariga as the way to "defeat Borat." The adoption, and relative success, of her strategy for dealing with Borat in the press may help her gain back some of the favor that she lost when she revealed sensitive family information to the press during the Sarsenbayev investigation.

CONCLUSIONS: Both the recent comments on Borat from the President and a high-level minister and their release on consecutive days suggests that these statements mark a complete change in the strategy of dealing with the movie. This change is largely due to hard lessons learned from the criticism of Borat's MTV Europe appearance and the unintentional good press the movie has generated for Kazakhstan. The change may also signal that the President's media-savvy daughter, Dariga, is back on the rise. It is, however, very unlikely that this change signals any softening in Kazakhstan's restrictions on press within its own borders, as these actions have yet to attract large domestic or international attention. President Bush's statements that Kazakhstan is a "free nation" in his meeting with Nazarbayev in the Oval Office only serve to highlight this further.

AUTHOR'S BIO: Ryan Kennedy is a PhD candidate at The Ohio State University, and is currently on a Fulbright Research Fellowship in Moldova. Previous to this he conducted field work in Kazakhstan as part of his dissertation on the relationship between fuel exports and democratic development. His analysis of the 2005 Kazakhstan presidential elections will be included in next month's *Problems in Post-Communism*.

KADYROV AS RUSSIA'S REGIONAL GENDARME: A BOON FOR CHECHNYA'S REBEL MOVEMENT?

Kevin Daniel Leahy

During the course of its centuries-long involvement in the Caucasus, Russia has consistently resorted to the politics of clientelism. Indeed, Chechen strongman Ramzan Kadyrov undoubtedly owes his current political pre-eminence to this time-worn political practice. At present, indications from certain quarters in Moscow suggest that Kadyrov might eventually evolve from a local into a regional gendarme. Certain Russian decision-makers apparently regard Kadyrov as their military wild-card should Georgia attempt to resolve either of the so-called "frozen conflicts" by force. However, the prospect of Kadyrov and his pro-Moscow regime becoming entities of regional significance may harbor unforeseen consequences for Chechnya's domestic political scene.

BACKGROUND: This past April, the speaker of Chechnya's pro-Moscow parliament, Dukvakha Abdurakhmanov, publicly suggested the formation of a new super-republic in the North Caucasus which would include Chechnya, Ingushetia, and possibly Dagestan. The same individual, known to be a close confidant of Prime Minister Ramzan Kadyrov, repeated this ambitious proposal in August. For his part, Kadyrov gave Abdurakhmanov's initiative a tentative welcome, remarking that unification was possible "if the peoples of Ingushetia, Chechnya, and Dagestan want it, and when Chechnya becomes prosperous".

The mounting tensions between Kadyrov and just about every other key personality within the pro-Moscow regime led many observers to regard the timing of this initiative as specious in the extreme. While Kadyrov's support for a territorial merger remains qualified, he has repeatedly requested that Chechen security forces be allowed to pursue militants into neighboring jurisdictions. Indeed, such pursuits have long been commonplace, with or without sanction from the relevant authorities. This

activity would seem to have been directly responsible for a bloody episode involving Ingush police and Chechen OMON forces this past September. Angered by the impunity with which their Chechen counterparts were operating within their jurisdiction, Ingush policemen apparently decided to teach them a lesson: the resulting confrontation claimed the lives of six Chechens and two Ingush. Although Kadyrov quickly attributed this incident to a "misunderstanding", it was clear that he did not principally disapprove of the actions of his countrymen. Notably, during an interview with *Kommersant* last February, Kadyrov talked up the growing capabilities of Chechnya's MVD, letting slip the fact that he perceived it as less a local than a regional body: "...if you ask me if our Interior Ministry will make it on its own, I'll say: Yes it will! And not only in Chechnya".

Kadyrov has also declared his readiness to counter the outbreak of any "color revolution" that might occur in one of Chechnya's neighboring republics. Furthermore, he has embraced, even fuelled, speculation that Chechen troops might be sent to

either Abkhazia or South Ossetia in order to repel a hypothetical Georgian assault, insisting: "...if our forces are needed, we are ready to execute any order from the supreme commander". As Kadyrov's nominal political superior, President Alu Alkhanov has hastened to associate himself with both Abdurakhmanov's initiative and the hypothetical idea of sending Chechen troops to Georgia's breakaway regions. However, by lending his political support to his rival's apparent expansionist designs, Alkhanov may in fact be damaging his own medium to long-term political viability; for it would seem that he has failed to correctly evaluate the implications these developments may hold for his own career.



Umarov: Waiting for Better Days

IMPLICATIONS: During an interview he gave to the *Moscow News* in October, the pro-Moscow, FSB-affiliated Chechen field commander, Movladi Baisarov, denounced Kadyrov as a "medieval tyrant". Baisarov's issues with Kadyrov stretch back over a number of years, but this candid interview would seem to reflect the views of other influential pro-Moscow personalities. Said-Magomed Kakiev and Sulim Yamadaev are both said to hold Kadyrov in contempt. Thus far, both of these men have supported Alkhanov against his prime minister's machinations – the former through direct action, the latter by maintaining a studied silence. Baisarov has strongly stated that he supports the Chechen president. If rumors of an emerging Alkhanov-

Kakiev-Yamadaev axis are to be believed, then one could safely assume that such a grouping would enjoy Baisarov's support (not to mention that of ex-Grozny mayor, Bislan Gantemirov). Given the scale of opposition toward him, therefore, is it not feasible that Kadyrov is manipulating the mantra of "expansionism" in order to thin the ranks of his opponents? Already, two platoons comprised of troops from *Zapad* and *Vostok* – Kakiev's and Yamadaev's respective battalions – have been deployed to Lebanon as part of a Russian-mandated peacekeeping detachment. Also, Kadyrov's proposal to chase rebels out of neighboring jurisdictions would presumably place a heavy workload on *Zapad* and *Vostok* given the proximity of these units to Ingushetia and Dagestan respectively. These two battalions do not report directly to the Chechen government and are consequently beyond Kadyrov's purview. As such, involving them in a foreign military adventure would at once dislocate them and deprive their respective leaders of political clout in intra-Chechen affairs. Put simply, involving the *Kakievsty* and *Yamadaevsty* in adventures of this sort would reduce the chances of a successful *coup d'état* against Kadyrov occurring. Should this strategy prevail, then Kadyrov would presumably rely on his own forces – recently re-organized into two new, MVD-affiliated battalions – to oversee the situation in Chechnya itself.

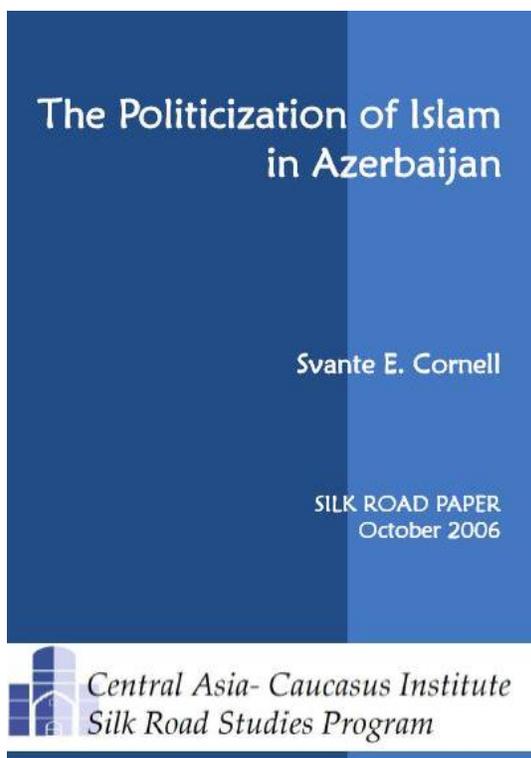
But herein lies a contradiction. Although formed out of the rump of Kadyrov's formally disbanded militia, the loyalty of these new battalions is very much open to question. For example, the leader of *Yug* battalion, Muslim Ilyasov, is reportedly flirting with the burgeoning anti-Kadyrov axis. Indeed, the extent to which Kadyrov is capable of inspiring loyalty has been in dispute for some time, particularly since an embarrassing episode in March during which a member of his so-called Anti-terrorist Center, known only as "Mullah", was exposed as a rebel double-agent; whereupon he fled to the mountains taking upwards of one hundred men with him. Bearing this information in mind, it is possible to conclude that the only winner in such a scenario would be Chechnya-based insurgents

under Dokka Umarov, who might expect to enjoy greater operational scope with the *Kakievsty* and *Yamadaevsty* removed from their theatre of operations.

CONCLUSIONS: An analogous reading of the situation in the North Caucasus might suggest Chechnya as the eye of a political storm. Indeed, rebel activity within Chechnya is presently far less pronounced than in Dagestan or Ingushetia; certain anecdotal evidence suggests the first stirrings of an economic revival, while further accounts (again anecdotal) suggest that the ruling regime enjoys broad popular support. Of course, this is not to suggest for one moment that the Chechnya-based rebel movement has breathed its last. In fact, recent remarks by Russian security officials suggest that the opposite is the case: that the rebels are still very much a force to be reckoned with, both politically

and militarily. Thus, while the Kadyrov regime may have succeeded in establishing a certain stability in the republic, it might yet prove a dangerous folly should he and his benefactors in Moscow decide to extend his security remit beyond Chechnya's borders. Although the actualization of such a scenario would greatly undermine the anti-Kadyrov axis (in particular, Alu Alkhanov), it would also oblige Kadyrov to face a resurgent Chechnya-based insurgency with the aid of military formations whose loyalty to him is at best circumspect. Ironically, therefore, the Chechnya-based rebel movement is the sole party guaranteed to benefit from such a turn of events.

AUTHOR'S BIO: Kevin Daniel Leahy is a freelance writer on North Caucasian affairs and holds a postgraduate degree from University College Cork, Ireland.



New Silk Road Paper!

The Politicization of Islam in Azerbaijan

by Svante E. Cornell

This 75-page Silk Road Paper analyzes the increasing Islamic revival in Azerbaijan, as well as the potential for politicization of Islam. The report discusses the background and reasons for increasing Islamic sentiment in the country, as well as external influences linked to this phenomenon and government policy toward the issue.

The paper is available from the offices of the Joint Center cited on the inside cover of this issue, or freely downloadable in PDF format from either www.cacianalyst.org or www.silkroadstudies.org.

THE BOOMERANG EFFECT OF ANS TV'S CLOSURE

Alman Mir-Ismail

The closure of the independent ANS TV channel in Azerbaijan is a short-term blow to media freedom in the country. Yet various explanations as to its closure do not hold water, suggesting ANS fell victim to inter-elite rivalries to which it had become mixed up. The station's closure is all the more surprising as it goes against President Ilham Aliyev's long-standing and rather successful efforts to build up a reformist image at home and abroad. Moreover, the closure hurts the President's own long-term interests as it removes a check against the growing power of oligarchs as windfall oil revenues come crashing in. Both the President and freedom of speech would hence be well served by the continued service of a balanced and independent broadcaster.

BACKGROUND: On November 24, Azerbaijan's National Council on TV and Radio Broadcasting issued a decision to stop the licensing of ANS TV, the first, most professional and most respected independent TV channel in the country. The move came following year-long pressures on the media outlet both by the Council and the tax authorities. The head of the National Council, Nushiravan Maharramli, informed journalists that ANS TV has been issued nine warnings in the past for violating rules of broadcasting. These involved such issues as passing over the limit of advertisements on news programs, allowing too much time for political ads during elections, opening a radio station in the Sheki region without proper license from the authorities, etc. ANS TV's leadership denies these accusations and has taken the National Council to court. Yet, despite these disagreements, the law enforcement bodies of the country were quick to dismantle the broadcasting antennas of the company and stop the operations of the TV and Radio stations. Both the President and Vice President of ANS Company were summoned to the prosecutor's office yesterday. It is expected now that a new tender for the frequencies, used by ANS will be held soon.

Although the possibility of ANS's closure had been discussed in society for a long time, the news

surprised various layers of society. A group of prominent members of the intelligentsia sent an open letter to President Ilham Aliyev, expressing concerns about the closure of ANS TV. Opposition parties, NGOs and the international community have taken similar steps. Protests letters poured in even from abroad, including such prominent organizations as the OSCE and Reporters without Borders. The staff of ANS TV and Radio has signed a petition to the President as well, asking for his personal involvement in the matter.

ANS TV has been closed several times in the past as well and quickly reopened afterwards. This time, however, the issue seems much more serious and complicated. Ironically, during this same week, ANS TV was celebrating its fifteenth anniversary, showing footages and images of its staff working in the first, very difficult, yet historically important days of independence of the country, the Karabakh conflict and the civil conflicts of the early 1990s.

The closure was made more surprising by the fact that ANS was considered to have strong and friendly relations with President Aliyev himself. Last year, when the company came under harsh attacks directed by the President uncle and Member of Parliament, Jalal Aliyev, the President personally met with the leadership of the company the next

day to ensure that such attacks did not turn into a spiral, and in order to publicly display trust and support for the activities of ANS. Thus, many people thought that the year-long pressures on the company were if anything a hint or a message and would not result in the complete closure of the media outlet.

IMPLICATIONS: The first and most commonly used explanation for the recent events is “pressure on the free media”. Indeed, ANS was the most vocal, open-minded and critical channel in the country. Relative to other media outlets, ANS TV and Radio were doing a better job at revealing problems, especially at the local level, discussing issues, raising the voice of the public, broadcasting news about the mismanagement of the local authorities and somewhat balancing the interests of the ruling and opposition parties. The motto used by the company for its own operations was “Exact and impartial news.” ANS was for the most part and by regional standards doing this professionally, without allowing a clear political agenda or ambitions to derail its programming, although accusations to that effect have occasionally been voiced.

Yet it is also true that in the larger picture, ANS was not working against the ruling regime. Despite its independent nature, there have been numerous circumstances, especially during elections, when ANS has supported the ruling party and directed criticism at the opposition. The leadership of ANS was involved in various business operations in the country, which made it even more dependent on the tax authorities. It was widely known that ANS often consulted with the authorities on whom from the opposition to invite to news programs, and how much airtime to give to opposition politicians.

Thus, accusations by opposition parties that the closure of ANS means the closure of independent press in the wake of the upcoming Presidential elections in 2008 seem groundless. After all, ANS always supported the ruling regime in previous elections and had good relations with President Ilham Aliyev. This led most analysts to assume

ANS would play the same game in 2008 regarding elections as in the past.

At the same time, speculations that the government decided to shut down ANS with the goal of stripping the company’s leadership from the millions of dollars it has made on advertising also seem groundless as the scandal over the closure of ANS is costing the country’s leadership too much in terms of public image. In any case, financial deals are usually sorted out behind the scenes, not in public.

Finally, some people tied the closure of ANS TV to the ongoing negotiations between the Presidents of Armenia and Azerbaijan in Minsk and the possibility of them reaching some sort of preliminary agreement on the resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. It is assumed that if the Presidents arrive at a deal on the conflict’s resolution, it would involve painful concessions on both sides. This has led to speculation that the closure of ANS would be aimed at shutting down possible ways to express anger and dissatisfaction with the terms of an agreement. This explanation also seems premature, as no serious breakthrough is expected to be made in Minsk.

None of the circulating theories on the background to the TV channel’s closure hence hold water. Meanwhile, while the government’s version cannot be totally discounted, it is clear that the decision to close the channel was not simply administrative in nature, and that it did meet with political approval. It is hence likely that ANS has been drawn into the infighting among the various “oligarchs” within the ruling regime as its business dealings suggest, and that it has lost out in a rivalry among various power-brokers, many of which disliked the rather independent nature of the channel. Indeed, it should be noted that the closure of ANS occurs in the context of an increasing trend by various powerful oligarchs and ministers to use media outlets as instruments to discredit and undermine each other.

CONCLUSIONS: Clearly, the closure of ANS TV and Radio in the short term hurts democracy and freedom of speech in the country. But more

importantly, it is bringing a boomerang effect on the leadership of the country itself. Azerbaijan is about to enter the era of billions of dollars pouring into the country as a result of oil contracts. A lack of alternative voices and media watchdogs tracking how this money is spent would carry the likelihood of leading to highly inefficient spending as well as misappropriations of these funds. This, in turn, could pose a danger for President Ilham Aliyev himself in at least two ways: First, because of growing public frustration if glaring income disparities are not bridged and high public expectations founder; and second, as it would mean that the “oligarchs” would become even more wealthy and powerful than they already are.

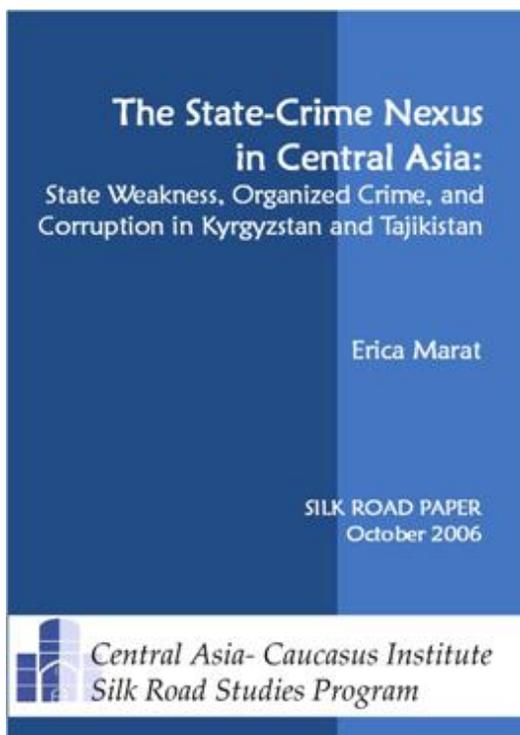
Another boomerang effect, seen from the perspective of Azerbaijan’s national interests, is likely to be felt on the patriotic spirit of the population, as ANS TV was the most respected channel in terms of covering events related to the Karabakh conflict, and was educating the young

generation to be ready for the defense of the motherland.

Finally, the scandal surrounding ANS hurts the reformist image that the President has built up in society and is taking pains to build up internationally. Having realized this, government officials have already accused the media outlets and opposition parties of politicizing the issue of ANS’s closure. Yet, the negative effects are undeniable.

It now remains to be seen whether ANS will be resuscitated and if so in what way. Interestingly, it is in the interest of both the President and freedom of speech that the frequency occupied by ANS be granted to a responsible, balanced and independent broadcaster – something that Azerbaijan now lacks.

AUTHOR’S BIO: Alman Mir-Ismaïl is a Baku-based freelance writer.



New Silk Road Paper!

The State-Crime Nexus in Central Asia: State Weakness, Organized Crime and Corruption in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan

by Erica Marat

This paper analyzes the divergent forms that relationships between organized crime and the state have taken in the two worst hit Central Asian states in the past decade.

This 138-page paper is available from the offices of the Joint Center cited on the inside cover of this issue, or freely downloadable in PDF format from either www.cacianalyst.org or www.silkroadstudies.org.

THE CENTRAL ASIAN NUCLEAR-WEAPON-FREE ZONE AFTER KOREA

Richard Weitz

On November 8, the First Committee of the UN General Assembly responsible for disarmament and international security approved a draft resolution endorsing the recently signed Central Asian Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone (CANWFZ). The zone might provide timely support for international nonproliferation efforts given its innovative features and timely realization, but only if its signatories can satisfy the concerns of Britain, France, and the United States about possible loopholes in its underlying treaty.

BACKGROUND: The attention given North Korea's detonation of a nuclear weapon on October 9 has overshadowed the signing of the long-sought CANWFZ the previous month. On September 8, 2006, the foreign ministers of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan signed the CANWFZ at Semipalatinsk in eastern Kazakhstan. The signatories timed the ceremony to coincide with the fifteenth anniversary of the closure of the nuclear testing ground there. Before September 1991, the USSR had conducted almost 500 nuclear explosions at Semipalatinsk.

The government of Uzbekistan first proposed a CANWFZ in 1993. Formal drafting of the treaty began after the five Central Asian presidents endorsed the proposal at a February 1997 summit in Almaty. In February 2005, their negotiators finalized the language of the text and its attached protocol.

The CANWFZ agreement consists of a preamble and 18 articles. In accordance with Article 3, the signatories pledge not to research, develop, manufacture, stockpile or otherwise try to acquire a nuclear explosive device. They also agree not to allow other parties to conduct such activities on their territories—which cover more than 3.8 million square kilometers—or assist them to do so elsewhere.

The content of the Protocol resembles that found in other NWFZs. It provides a means for the five countries defined under the Nuclear

Nonproliferation Treaty as nuclear-weapon states (the so-called "P-5" of Britain, China, France, Russia, and the United States) to pledge to respect the CANWFZ by not stationing or testing nuclear weapons in the zone. It also contains the standard clause in which the P-5 guarantee the CANWFZ signatories that they will not attack them, or threaten to attack them, with nuclear weapons. Governments consider these so-called negative security assurances a major benefit of joining a NWFZ.

From the perspective of nuclear nonproliferation, the CANWFZ stands as a landmark development for several reasons. First, the Treaty established the world's fifth NWFZ solely in the Northern Hemisphere, which contains the preponderance of nuclear weapons states. Its geographic coverage also resulted in the first multilateral security agreement to embrace all five Central Asian countries—an important accomplishment because of Turkmenistan's traditional aloofness from such initiatives.

Second, Kazakhstan is the first former nuclear weapon state to adhere to a NWFZ. By some accounts, it inherited the world's fourth largest nuclear arsenal—consisting of over 1,400 nuclear warheads deployed on heavy bombers and intercontinental ballistic missiles—when the USSR disintegrated in 1991. During the next few years, Kazakhstan worked with the international community to eliminate this unwelcome Soviet legacy. Since then, Kazakh leaders have taken a

strong position in favor of nuclear nonproliferation efforts.

Third, the United Nations, including the General Assembly and members of the UN Secretariat, directly participated in drafting the CANWFZ Treaty's provisions. The Central Asian governments made a deliberate effort to ensure that the Treaty conforms to the principles and guidelines on establishing NWFZs adopted by the UN Disarmament Commission in 1999. All existing NWFZs were negotiated before the drafting of these provisions.

Fourth, the Semipalatinsk Treaty represents the first NWFZ to contain a provision recognizing the environmental damage associated with nuclear weapons production. Under Article 6, its members pledge to support rehabilitation of areas damaged by past nuclear tests and other Soviet-era nuclear activities on their territories. The Central Asian governments also agree to support the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty, which prohibits all nuclear weapons tests, as contributing to environmental and nonproliferation goals.

Fifth, the CANWFZ participants must allow for comprehensive supervision of their peaceful nuclear materials and activities by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). Article 8 explicitly requires treaty signatories to adopt the so-called Additional Protocol, which grants the IAEA enhanced inspection rights at members' civilian nuclear facilities. In recent years, the United States, Russia, and other governments have sought to strengthen the IAEA's ability to counter nuclear proliferation and nuclear terrorism by encouraging all countries to adhere to the Additional Protocol. The Treaty signatories also pledge to meet IAEA-approved international standards for the physical protection of their nuclear facilities and radioactive materials.

IMPLICATIONS: The last unique feature of the Semipalatinsk Treaty is that the CANWFZ borders two declared nuclear-weapon states, China and Russia. Accommodating these two countries' security requirements has complicated the initiative.

Not only did Central Asian governments need years to reach their own consensus on these issues, but Western governments objected to the resulting compromises. Whereas China and Russia have pledged to support the CANWFZ, France, Great Britain, and the United States have declined to sign the Protocol until the Treaty signatories address their objections.

Three features of the CANWFZ trouble the American, British, and French governments. First, they complain that, rather than absolutely prohibiting the transit of nuclear weapons through the CANWFZ, Article 4 of the Treaty allows each signatory to decide independently whether to allow such transit. Thus far, only the government of Turkmenistan has unilaterally banned the movement of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction through its territory. The other CANWFZ signatories have refused to exclude the possible transit of foreign vehicles across their borders—including the landing of nuclear-armed warplanes or visits by warships carrying nuclear weapons.

Second, American, British, and French officials cite the absence of a Treaty provision excluding other countries from later joining the CANWFZ. (An earlier draft text explicitly provided for possible expansion.) The fear is that Iran, which borders Turkmenistan, might eventually sign the CANWFZ to bolster claims that its nuclear program is motivated entirely by peaceful purposes. Western officials widely suspect that Tehran aspires to develop the capacity to produce nuclear weapons.

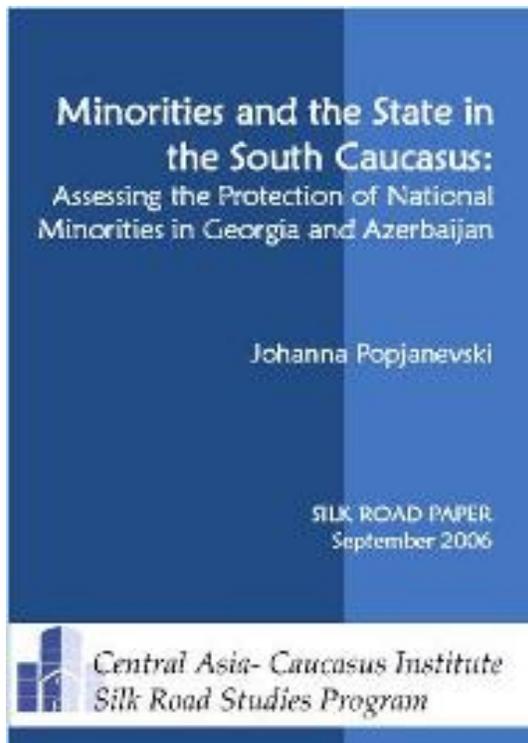
The government of Mongolia, which declared its territory a nuclear-weapon-free zone as early as 1992, has also expressed interest in joining the Treaty. Although none of the existing nuclear weapons states have objected to its membership, the CANWFZ signatories have indicated they do not consider Mongolia, which does not share a border with any CANWFZ party, as falling within the treaty's intended geographic scope.

Finally, the American, British, and French governments express unease with Article 12 of the Semipalatinsk Treaty, which affirms the continued validity of existing international agreements. In particular, these governments about the continuing role of the Collective Security Treaty (CST), signed in Tashkent in 1992. Under Article 4 of the CST, members pledge to render each other “all necessary assistance, including military assistance” in case of external aggression. Four of the five CANWFZ signatories (Turkmenistan being the sole exception) still adhere to the CST, which underpins the Russian-dominated Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO). In the past, Russian military officials have made statements suggesting that their CSTO allies—which include Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan—could fall under the umbrella of Russia’s nuclear deterrent. American, British, and French officials believe that these CST/CSTO provisions call into question the

establishment of an effective NWFZ in Central Asia.

CONCLUSIONS: At the urging of UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan, negotiations over the Protocol continue. These discussions involving the CANWFZ signatories and the P-5 could be protracted. Resolving disputes over the protocols attached to other NWFZs has sometimes taken years. Although no country currently appears prepared to deploy or use nuclear weapons in Central Asia, the recent North Korean detonation underscores the urgency of taking measures now to bolster the fraying nuclear nonproliferation regime.

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New Silk Road Paper!

Minorities and the State: Assessing the Protection of National Minorities in Georgia and Azerbaijan

by Johanna Popjanevski

This 88-page Silk Road Paper analyzes the protection of minorities in Georgia and Azerbaijan, against the background of the ambition by both states to develop an inclusive, civic concept of nationhood.

The paper is available from the offices of the Joint Center cited on the inside cover of this issue, or freely downloadable in PDF format from either www.cacianalyst.org or www.silkroadstudies.org.

FIELD REPORTS

A NEW BRIDGE ON PANJ RIVER CONNECTING TAJIKISTAN AND AFGHANISTAN

Sultanbek Aksakolov

On October 31, a bridge across the Panj River dividing the Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Oblast (GBAO) of Tajikistan and Badakhshan region of Afghanistan was inaugurated by His Highness the Aga Khan, the spiritual leader of the Shi'a Ismaili Muslims and Founder of the Aga Khan Development Network (AKDN), the Tajik President Emomali Rahmonov and Afghanistan Vice President Abdul Karim Khalili.

This was the third of a series of bridges built by the AKDN across the Panj River to connect the rural, mountainous, isolated and impoverished communities living along the borders of Tajikistan and Afghanistan. Following the Great Game in the Pamirs and the 1895 agreement between the Czarist Russian Empire on the one hand and Afghanistan and the British Empire on the other hand, the area was politically divided along this river.

The division of the Pamiris resulted in the loss centuries' of the economic, social and cultural connections between the communities living on both sides of the river. With the establishment of the Soviet government in the present territory of the Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Oblast, the border along the Panj River was sealed. In the Soviet period, a substantial rise of living standards took place in the GBAO, as it was connected to other parts of Soviet Central Asia via the Osh-Khorog, and Dushanbe-Khorog automobile routes and frequent air flights from bordering district of Ishkashim, Rushan, Shugnan, Rushan, Vanj and

Darwaz, as well as the provision of free and universal education, and an improved health care system.

Yet by contrast, the living conditions in the Afghan parts of the same districts worsened, especially with Afghanistan plunging into a quarter of a century of civil war. Traveling via automobile routes from Dushanbe to Khorog along the Panj River in the Soviet period, visitors would notice the sharp contrast in development of society and economy in the Soviet and Afghan parts of Badakhshan.

The collapse of the Soviet Union did not only result in the disappearance of state-subsidized funds for the improvement of living standards, but in the weakening of border control with Afghanistan where internal armed conflicts gave rise to opium production and trafficking. With the outbreak of civil war in post-Soviet Tajikistan, the border along the Panj River become a crossing point for hundreds of thousands of refugees fleeing to Afghanistan. In its turn, the armed conflict between the United Tajik opposition, the Tajik government and Russian peacekeeping border troops, and the flow of opium from Afghanistan to Tajikistan brought life to the brink of despair and chaos, especially in the border areas of the GBAO among other areas of Tajikistan. Fortunately, with the involvement of international and regional agencies including the United Nations, neighboring countries and Russia, peace and stability were gradually restored in Tajikistan.

The Aga Khan Foundation agency of AKDN was among the most active international NGOs to provide assistance and alleviate the humanitarian crisis in the GBAO. Following the humanitarian assistance provided, the AKDN initiated several other projects to foster social and economic development, promote civil society first in the GBAO, then in the Rasht Valley and the Kulyab regions of Tajikistan. The planned series of bridges across the Panj river are also part of the AKDN developmental initiative conducted in collaboration

with the governments of Tajikistan and Afghanistan to facilitate commercial and cultural ties among the remote communities on each side of the Panj. Bridges from Tajikistan to Afghanistan via Panj also provide the opportunity for other neighboring countries like China and Pakistan to boost their trade in the region. It is thus hoped that the Panj River will leave its earlier status as a dividing river and return into its traditional role as a linking point for the mountainous communities.

GEORGIA PLANS FOR ALTERNATE GAS SUPPLIES TO ESCAPE GAZPROM'S PRICE HIKE

Kakha Jibladze

In the face of growing tensions between Russia and Georgia, Gazprom announced a new, starkly higher natural gas price for Georgia. Gazprom claims the price hike – over twice what Georgia is currently paying – is just a reflection of its continuous policy to fully commercialize the business. However the timing of the announcement, just weeks after Russia restricted its diplomatic ties with Georgia, and the fact that other CIS countries are not facing the same pricing has Tbilisi in an uproar.

According to Georgian president Mikheil Saakashvili, Gazprom's demands are the equivalent of economic blackmail against the country as it doggedly follows its pro-Western orientation. During a speech on November 23, the president sought to encourage Georgians to stay united in their fight against Russia's influence despite the threat of more hardships this winter.

“Those who want to make Georgia kneel down will soon understand that they will fail and we will get stronger. This [pressure on Georgia] is even better for us because we will make our economy more flexible and stronger,” he told crowds at Freedom

Square on the third anniversary of the Rose Revolution. “But of course we are on the beginning of this road and we need patience and unity... Today Georgia knows the price of freedom. Good will always prevail over evil. Today Georgia is building a modern European state.”

The fact that the battle over gas prices was expected does not make it less fierce. In a move calculated to bypass the bulk of Georgia's previous demand from Russia – last year Gazprom supplied all of Georgia's natural gas – the government has engaged in a frenzy of negotiations with neighboring countries. According to media reports, the government is nearing an agreement with Azerbaijan and Turkey to receive more than the amount of gas originally agreed upon from the Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum pipeline which is supposed to start pumping gas by the end of this year.

In addition, Georgia has sought Iranian support. Iran helped the country survive the gas crisis last year after two mysterious explosions in Russia caused the country to first lose its gas supplies and then its electricity. The potential deal with Iran is a

touchy one, due to Georgia's strong alliance with Washington. However according to Matthew Bryza, the U.S. Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs, the United States understands that Georgia is in "a difficult position" now that the Russian gas company has doubled its price and Washington does not "want Georgia or Armenia or any other country to be in a situation where it does not have energy for the winter," he said at a press briefing in Tbilisi on November 17.

However the Georgian newspaper *Kviris Palitra* published an interview with the U.S. Ambassador to Georgia, John Tefft, which cast doubt on American understanding.

According to the interview, the ambassador said that Bryza did not mean Washington is prepared to

turn a blind eye on any long-term relationship between Tbilisi and Tehran.

While the Georgian government is putting on a brave front, there is little chance the country can make it through the winter without any gas supplies from Russia. According to a report published on the news website *EurasiaNet*, the government has not completely closed the door on Gazprom; it is just not heading up the negotiations – private gas distribution companies are.

The new, higher gas prices – just like the embargo on wine and mineral water, and the transportation blockade – will be a bitter pill to swallow at first. However if the government truly finds new partners for providing natural gas, this winter will be one more irreversible step toward Georgia's independence from Moscow's influence.

NEW WINDS OF FRIENDSHIP BETWEEN BISHKEK AND TASHKENT

Joldosh Osmonov

In early October, Kyrgyz President Kurmanbek Bakiyev paid an official visit to Uzbekistan. As a result of bilateral negotiations, the Kyrgyz and Uzbek Presidents signed a number of agreements on cooperation in various realms. This visit is considered of great importance in the relations between the two neighboring countries.

A Kyrgyz delegation led by President of Kyrgyzstan Kurmanbek Bakiyev paid a two-day official visit to neighboring Uzbekistan on October 3-4, 2006. On the first day of the visit, Bakiyev met with his Uzbek counterpart Islam Karimov. Aside from the Uzbek President, Bakiyev also met with the speakers of the two chambers of the Uzbek parliament, Ilgizar Sabirov and Erkin Khalilov, and Uzbek Prime Minister Shavkat Mirziyev. After negotiations held between the two presidents, an Agreement and Program of Economic, Scientific, Technological and Humanitarian Cooperation

between Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan for 2007-2011 was signed. The Presidents issued a Joint Statement as well, where they emphasized the importance of joint actions against international terrorism and religious extremism.

Moreover, heads of departments and ministries of the two countries signed interdepartmental agreements, including agreements between the General Prosecutor's Offices of Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan and between the Foreign Ministers on cooperation.

During the meeting, the two leaders emphasized the commonness of history, culture, and religion as a strong foundation for bilateral cooperation. Islam Karimov said at the press briefing, "We view the first visit of Kurmanbek Bakiyev as a very important and significant event in the history of bilateral relations". Bakiyev, in turn, stated that "it is our fate to live together and support each other in

hard times. We, Kyrgyz nationals, have to correct the mistakes of previous authorities. They led to the isolation of our country even within the region by not fulfilling taken obligations. Everything will be different now.”

It is noteworthy that only a few days earlier, in his address to the nation on September 28, President Bakiyev stated that Kyrgyzstan’s foreign policy had changed. According to him, from now on Kyrgyzstan will pay greater attention to strengthening relations with its neighboring states. “The main point in the foreign policy change is that we put our national interests in the first place. Therefore, we will pay more attention to strengthening relations with our neighbors – Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan and China. Good relations with neighbors are a *sine qua non* for our safety and economic development.”

Security issues were also discussed during the negotiations. Bakiyev noted that the two sides had reached an agreement to conduct joint and coordinated actions of law enforcement bodies and border and security services, in order to ensure a stable situation at the Kyrgyz-Uzbek border. “National security depends on the country itself. It is silly to wait for help from “an uncle” overseas. Another issue is when two countries unite their efforts, and then results double,” said the Uzbek President. It is noteworthy that during the past several months, the Uzbek and Kyrgyz security services conducted several special operations during which the leaders of banned Islamic religious organizations were eliminated, including the leader of Islamic Party of Turkestan Rasul Akhunov.

An important factor is the final signing of an intergovernmental agreement on a non-visa regime between the two countries. According to the document, starting from January 1, 2007, Kyrgyz and Uzbek nationals can travel to each other’s countries without a visa if their visit lasts less than two months. This agreement was sent to the

Parliaments of the two countries for ratification. On October 9, Kyrgyz Parliament members Alisher Sabirov and Muhamedjan Mamasaidov, who were part of the Kyrgyz official delegation to Uzbekistan, proposed to speed up the process of ratification of the non-visa regime with Uzbekistan during a parliamentary session.

The two leaders paid significant attention to economic cooperation. It was noted that the turnover between the two countries increased by 38 percent this year. A key issue in the negotiations was, of course, supply of natural gas. According to the Head of the Foreign Policy Department of the Presidential Administration Ermek Ibrahimov, the two sides had agreed that Uzbekistan would supply around 30-40 million cubic meters of natural gas during this year at the previous price of \$55 for 1,000 cubic meters. Several days later, the Uzbek state-owned company “Uzbekneftegas” said the rates for natural gas would double starting from 2007. However, the General Director of “Kyrgyzgas” Igor Chudinov said on October 13 that the final price for Uzbek gas will be known only after negotiations between “Kyrgyzgas” and “Uzbekneftegas” later this Fall.

Another very important economic agreement achieved by the Kyrgyz and Uzbek Presidents is construction of the “China-Kyrgyzstan-Uzbekistan” railway, said Ibrahimov. At a meeting with EU Special Representative to Central Asia Pierre Morel on October 13, Kyrgyz Prime Minister Felix Kulov said the construction of the railway is under joint study by experts.

Some analysts say that despite existing disagreements between the two neighboring states, Bakiyev’s visit opens a new page in Kyrgyz-Uzbek relations, easing long-standing political tensions between the two countries. However, it remains to be seen whether there are more concurrent interests than insoluble problems.

NATOS UNFAMILIAR ROLE, AFGHANISTAN'S FAMILIAR SITUATION

Simon Roughneen

NATO's 2006 Summit takes place in Riga on November 28-29, when the military alliance will discuss its increasingly globalised commitments. Topping the agenda will be the newly-aggressive role undertaken by NATO in recent months to confront insurgency in Afghanistan, devastated by constant civil and international conflict for almost three decades. Now increased opium production, cross-border Taliban infiltration from Pakistan, and slow reconstruction threatens to reverse gains made in Afghanistan since 2001.

Testifying before the US Senate Foreign Relations Committee in February 2006, NATO Supreme Allied Commander James Jones said that the greatest challenge facing the organisation today is its expansion across Afghanistan. NATO has commanded the UN Security Council-mandated International Security Assistance force (ISAF) since 2003. Operating under a peace-enforcement Chapter VII mandate, ISAF seeks ultimately to enable the Afghan Government assume full responsibility for internal and border security.

NATO's Article 5, or collective defence provision, was invoked on 12/9/01, a day after the al-Qaeda attacks on the US. Although NATO was conceived as a Cold War anti-Soviet alliance focused on Europe, the Prague Summit of 2002 signaled member states' increasing recognition of a changing security environment and the need for NATO to adopt a more flexible operational and geographic 'out of area' profile.

NATO has since provided logistical support to the African Union Mission in Darfur, Sudan, and worked in a humanitarian role after the 2005 Pakistan earthquake. Until July 2006, its role in Afghanistan was mainly focused on Provincial Reconstruction teams (PRTs), a civilian-military development and security collaboration undertaken by US-led coalition forces prior to NATO's arrival

and expansion from Kabul. There are now 25 NATO-led PRTs, operating from the premise that security means more than mere military policy.

Afghanistan has undergone massive civilian displacement and casualties, material destruction, and foreign infiltration and intervention, dating back to the USSR invasion in 1979. The security and development challenges facing ISAF, donors and the Afghan Government are daunting.

In January 2006, the Afghanistan Compact set security, development and reconstruction targets until 2011. However Afghanistan ranks 173 out of 178 countries in the UN development indicators and its Millennium Development Goal indicators are below the majority of sub-Saharan African countries.

The Afghan government has committed itself to creating a professional and ethnically balanced Afghan national Army (ANA) of 70,000 men by 2010. The ANA is about 30,000 strong and is deemed one of Afghanistan's reconstruction success stories. NATO is capacity-building the ANA with Operational Mentor and Liaison Teams (OMLTs). However there remains over 1800 non-state armed groups comprising over 125,000 members active across Afghanistan, although not all of these are a direct threat to NATO forces or the ANA. Warlords, affiliates and clients predominate in the Afghan police.

While GDP growth has been around 15% per annum since 2001, this is from an extremely low base. 80% of Afghans live in poverty and one of four children die before the age of 5. Corruption is rife and is exacerbated by weak administration. In reconstruction, bidding and procurement processes are sidestepped. Government revenue is just 5.45% of GDP, the least of any country with data, according to the IMF – tax collectors seek bribes in lieu of tax, and often have links to warlord/militia groups. Meanwhile, opium cultivation has soared,

with 2006 production levels exceeding 2005 by 49%, now equivalent to 60% of Afghan GNP. Afghanistan now supplies around 90% of the world's crop. Cultivation is heavy in southern and eastern areas where the Taliban insurgency is active. This helps fund the militia and provides impoverished farmers with a more lucrative revenue source than any immediate alternative.

While much has been made of NATO's reconstruction/humanitarian role in Afghanistan and elsewhere, NATO is now engaged in serious ground combat for the first time since its founding in 1949, with over 31,000 troops under the command of General David Richards.

In July 2006, NATO's profile broadened from reconstruction and development to counterinsurgency as ISAF's Stage 3 expansion saw it replace the US-led coalition in southern Afghanistan. NATO assumed a nationwide role in October after Stage 4 took the alliance into Afghanistan's eastern provinces. Stage 3 and Stage 4 take ISAF into highly insecure regions where the Taliban insurgency operating from across the Pakistani border has increased in intensity.

2006 has been the bloodiest year in Afghanistan since 2001, with more than 3,000 people, including about 150 foreign soldiers, killed in fighting across the country. According to NATO figures, there have been at least 90 suicide attacks in Afghanistan this year - a nearly fourfold increase from all of 2005. Insurgents have become more aggressive since the NATO expansion, possibly seeking to turn NATO member states public opinion against the Afghan operation, given that Germany, France, Turkey and Italy, among others, have refused to engage in counterinsurgency. Months of acrimonious public and parliamentary debate preceded Dutch troop deployment to southern

Afghanistan. Now NATO allies are engaged a simmering war-of-words over division of labor in Afghanistan, which risked to erupt into all-out rancor at this week's Riga Summit.

In September, NATO's Operation Medusa reportedly killed over 1,000 Taliban amid Afghan government claims that scores of civilians were also killed. London's Daily Telegraph stated that NATO's report on Operation Medusa cited clear evidence that Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) is involved in supplying insurgents, leading to a meeting between Richards and Musharraf to discuss the issue. Pakistan recently signed a deal with tribal leaders in the region bordering NATO's new eastern Afghan domain. Prior to the NATO assumption of command, US forces reported a 3-fold increase in insurgent infiltration into Afghanistan since the Pakistani government deal with tribal leaders. NATO military commanders are seething at President Bush's failure to effectively press Musharraf on this issue - with the US loathe to compromise the Pakistani President in advance of next year's elections.

With ISAF committed to assisting Afghanistan in creating a stable and secure environment, the entrenched nature of the insurgency and apparent cross-border strategic depth in Pakistan means that NATO will have to defeat an entrenched enemy if it is to realize its mission, a challenge exacerbated by member states' complex diplomatic engagement with Pakistan. Added to a dynamic development and security challenge in southern and eastern Afghanistan, recent predictions that NATO may need five years to fulfill its mission appear accurate at best and optimistic at worst.

NEWS DIGEST

EX-MEMBERS OF DISBANDED DETACHMENT SURRENDER WEAPONS IN CHECHNYA

15 November

Ex-members of the disbanded Goretz tactical group, formerly led by the wanted commander Movladi Baisarov, have surrendered a large arsenal to Chechen police. The Goretz detachment was disbanded at the order of a federal executive agency and its former members were attached to other units. "Thirty-eight pieces of fire arms and over 6,000 pieces of ammunition were surrendered in the village of Pobedinskoye in Groznensky district on Tuesday, where the group was based," the Chechen Interior Ministry informed Interfax on Wednesday. Chechen Interior Minister Ruslan Alkhanov told Interfax on October 25 that Baisarov, a native of Chechnya's Groznensky District, was reportedly hiding in Moscow. "He was entered on a wanted list on suspicion of organizing abductions and murders," Alkhanov said. (Interfax)

CHECHEN OMBUDSMAN PROPOSES JOINT TASK FORCE TO ASSESS DAMAGE

16 November

A task force made up of representatives of the federal and Chechen governments should be set up to assess the damage caused to the republic since the mid-1990s, Chechnya's commissioner for human rights Nurdi Nukhazhiyev told Interfax on Thursday. "The government of the Russian Federation should establish an expert commission involving representatives of the government of the Chechen republic to calculate the actual damage caused to the Chechnya by the hostilities since November 11, 1994 and to determine the total amount of financing to rebuild Chechnya's socioeconomic sector and clean up the environment," he said. (Interfax)

KYRGYZ WIN RIGHT TO BEAR ARMS

16 November

Businessmen in Kyrgyzstan have welcomed a new law making it legal for them to use weapons to defend their property. However, there are a number of grey areas in the law which NBCentralAsia commentators say need to be defined more clearly – including what actually constitutes property, and what the police and courts should do when a violent incident takes place. On November 14, the Kyrgyz parliament passed a bill amending current criminal and civil legislation to allow individuals to defend their property to the extent that is reasonable, and to use firearms as long as they have a gun license. Businessmen welcomed the changes as a rational move. Omurbek Abdrakhmanov, president of the Azat corporation and a former head of Kyrgyzstan's Union of Entrepreneurs, told NBCentralAsia, "Property owners have a right to defend themselves and their assets. As an owner myself, I see no negative aspects to this, only positive ones. "When you can't defend yourself even in the courts, this kind of radical measure is the only solution." Abdrakhmanov does not predict that members of the public will start arming themselves en masse, and Kubatbek Baibolov, a member of parliament who is also a businessman, agrees with him. "This law will not result in a mass acquisition of weapons. Any businessman or owner who had a chance bought weapons in the wake of the March 24 looting," said Baibolov, referring to the night of rioting and attacks on shops that followed the March revolution of 2005. "People realised they had no other realistic option if they were to protect their property." He added, "Illegal takeovers and outright seizures of property have become more and more frequent, and this threatens the very foundations of the state." Toktogul Kakchekeev, chief spokesman for Kyrgyzstan's prosecution

service, warns that the courts and the law-enforcement agencies still need to set specific limits to the definition of self-defence. He believes that law could be subject to diverse interpretations where it talks about how courts and investigating agencies should deal with such matters, how property is defined, and accountability for using weapons. (IWPR)

DETENTION OF CHECHEN COMPENSATION COMMITTEE HEAD POLITICAL - KADYROV

17 November

The detention of the compensation payment committee's secretary Sultan Isakov is politically motivated and aimed at undermining the reputation of the Chechen authorities, the republic's Prime Minister Ramzan Kadyrov told a meeting with senior officers of law enforcement services on Friday. "My impression is that this detention came as a kind of political action aimed at discrediting the republic's authorities. The situation with Isakov's detention is a political order. Its goal is to undermine the authority of the republic's government," he said. (Interfax)

ANOTHER OFFICIAL ARRESTED IN GEORGIA ON CORRUPTION CHARGES

18 November

Georgia law enforcement bodies arrested another official on corruption charges. As a REGNUM correspondent reports, chair of sakrebulo (local parliament) in Pirveli village of Zestafon District (Georgia) Alexander Chulukhadze was detained; financial police accused him of financial fraud. According to the investigation, he abused power and within two years had been producing and applying falsified invoices; as a result of his activity the damage to the country was estimated as 10,000 lari. In case, he is pronounced guilty, Chukhuladze faces sentence of 6-8 years. (Regnum)

KYRGYZ GOVERNMENT APPROVES DRAFT STRATEGY OF THE COUNTRY'S DEVELOPMENT IN 2006-2010

20 November

Kyrgyz government approved a draft strategy of the country's development in 2006-2010; an appropriate order was signed on November 21 by

Prime Minister Felix Kulov, a REGNUM correspondent was informed at the governmental press office. According to Kyrgyz ministers, achievement of aims put in the draft strategy is possible only if a high rate of growth is guaranteed. It is necessary to achieve annual GDP growth rate at the level of 5-5.5% in 2006-2007 and 6.5-7.9% in 2008-2010. By the end of the strategy realization, the Kyrgyz republic plans to achieve GDP per capita at level of \$770. The draft strategy of the country's development in 2006-2010 will be submitted to the parliament for consideration in the near future. (Regnum)

IS RUSSIA PRESSURING AZERBAIJAN OVER GAS PROJECT?

21 November

Russia has threatened the Azerbaijani leadership that it will raise to \$230 per 1,000 cubic meters the price it charges Azerbaijan for gas if Baku goes ahead with exports to Turkey at the lower price of \$120 per 1,000 cubic meters of natural gas from the Shah-Deniz field, the websites echo-az.com and thenewanatolian.com reported on November 21. In response to that threat, Baku has proposed to Botas, the state-owned Turkish pipeline company, postponing for one year the start of gas exports to Turkey via the Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum pipeline. That postponement would negatively affect Georgia, which for months has sought to reduce its dependency on Russian gas supplies by reaching an agreement with Azerbaijan on increasing the amount of Shah Deniz gas it either receives in lieu of transit tariffs or may purchase at a preferential price. (RFE/RL)

GEORGIA MAY BLOCK RUSSIA'S WTO ENTRY

21 November

Georgia Threatens to Block Russia's WTO Entry if Trade Agreement Not Reached Georgia has threatened to block Russia's accession to the World Trade Organization if the two countries fail to agree on customs regulations and resume talks on the ban of key exports to Russia. In a joint statement released late Monday the Foreign Ministry and the Ministry for Economic Development said the Georgian government was "interested in Russia's entry to WTO," but added that if the agreement is not reached, "the process

of Russia's accession to WTO will be suspended." Georgia demands that Russia stop trading with its two breakaway regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia and that all goods pass through checkpoints run by the central government. "We will be very principled and we won't compromise in anything for the sake of defending our interests," said the newly appointed Economic Development Minister Georgy Arveladze. The statement comes days after Russia secured a much-sought bilateral agreement with the United States, removing the last major obstacle in Moscow's 13-year journey to join the world's biggest trading club. To become a WTO member, Russia must secure similar agreements with all its major trading partners in the body. Georgia, which has already concluded such a deal with Russia, has suggested that it would re-negotiate terms or recall the agreement because of what it calls illegal trade and because of a Russian ban on Georgian wine and mineral water. Moscow banned the goods in spring, citing quality concerns. Tbilisi claims the ban is punishment for its pro-Western course. Relations between Russia and its tiny southern neighbor are at an all-time low after Moscow slapped a sweeping transport and postal blockade on the country in retaliation for the brief arrest of four Russian officers in Tbilisi accused of spying. Russia appeared defiant. The Interfax news agency quoted an unidentified Foreign Ministry official as saying Russia wants to continue trading with the rebel provinces without oversight from Tbilisi. "We are capable of guaranteeing due control over cargo and passenger traffic ... without outside assistance," the official was quoted as saying. (AP)

TAJIK GOVERNMENT STEPS DOWN

22 November

In line with the Tajik constitution, Tajikistan's government has officially stepped down following the reelection of President Emomali Rakhmonov. The country's ministers will continue to hold their positions until a new government is formed. (Interfax)

289 U.S. MILITARY DEATHS IN AFGHAN AREA

24 November

As of Friday, Nov. 24, 2006, at least 289 members of the U.S. military have died in Afghanistan, Pakistan and Uzbekistan as a result of the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan in late 2001, according to the Defense Department. The Defense Department last updated its figures on Saturday, Nov. 18, 2006. Of those, the military reports 187 were killed by hostile action. Outside the Afghan region, the Defense Department reports 56 more members of the U.S. military died in support of Operation Enduring Freedom. Of those, two were the result of hostile action. The military lists these other locations as: Guantanamo Bay Naval Base, Cuba; Djibouti; Eritrea; Jordan; Kenya; Kyrgyzstan; Philippines; Seychelles; Sudan; Tajikistan; Turkey; and Yemen. There was also one military civilian death and four CIA officer deaths. (AP)

KYRGYZ OPPOSITION PARTY SAYS ONE OF ITS MEMBERS DETAINED

24 November

Kyrgyzstan's Ata Meken (Fatherland) opposition party says one of its members has been detained by Kyrgyz security services for unspecified reasons, RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service reported. One of Bakyt Kalpetov's lawyers, Kasymbek Raiymkul-uulu, told RFE/RL he has been prevented from seeing his client, whom he says has started a hunger strike to protest his detention. Ata Meken party leaders allege Kalpetov's detention is part of political pressure being exerted against the party because of its activities. Tursunbek Akun, the head of the Human Rights Commission under the Kyrgyz president, told RFE/RL today that the commission has asked the security services to clarify the matter. "The Ata Meken party appealed to us with a request [regarding Kalpetov's detention]," he said. "On their request, I am appealing to the National Security Service [to clarify his situation]." On November 22, Kalpetov was briefly detained by Bishkek police in connection with his alleged involvement in an assault against the deputy director of state broadcaster MTRK. He denies the charges. Party members are threatening to start protest actions if the Kyrgyz authorities do not free Kalpetov. (RFE/RL)

KAZAKH SAYS BORAT CREATOR DESERVES PRIZE

24 November

A leading Kazakh writer has nominated actor Sacha Baron Cohen for a national award for popularizing Kazakhstan. Novelist Sapabek Asipuly called on the Kazakh Club of Art Patrons to give Baron Cohen its annual award, according to a letter published by the Vremya newspaper Thursday. Baron Cohen's fictional character Borat "has managed to spark an immense interest of the whole world in Kazakhstan, something our authorities could not do during the years of independence," said Asipuly. Government officials in the former Soviet republic have been enraged by Borat's unflattering portrayal of Kazakh life in the spoof documentary, "Borat: Cultural Learnings of America for Make Benefit Glorious Nation of Kazakhstan." "If state officials completely lack a sense of humor, their country becomes a laughing stock," Asipuly said. Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbayev said earlier this week that Borat has helped to make Kazakhstan better known in the West and he invited Baron Cohen to visit the Central Asian state. The film, which follows Borat on a trip across the U.S. to report back to his homeland on American culture and lifestyle, has become a runaway hit while generating controversy for scenes depicting misogyny and racism. "I truly hope my initiative will be supported for the benefit of the glorious nation of Kazakhstan," Asipuly said. Asipuly is known for several novels describing the Russian colonization of Kazakh lands and the Stalinist purges against Kazakhstan's political and cultural elite in the 1930s. (AP)

UZBEKISTAN REJECTS U.S. CHARGE OF RELIGIOUS INTOLERANCE

24 November

Uzbekistan has condemned a U.S. State Department decision to include it on a list of so-called Countries of Particular Concern (CPCs) for Severe Violations of Religious Freedom, the Uzbek foreign ministry said Friday. "Religious tolerance has always been, and continues to be, one of the most important aspects of Uzbekistan's government policy," a ministry statement said. "This step demonstrates yet again the one-sided

approach and double standard applied by the American State Department to such crucial questions as religious freedom," it said. Countries of Particular Concern are designated annually by the U.S. State Department under the International Religious Freedom Act. U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice added Uzbekistan to the list this year for what John Hanford III, ambassador-at-large for international religious freedom, called "widespread and severe" violations of religious freedom in Uzbekistan. "Muslims have long borne the brunt of the government of Uzbekistan's harsh repression," Hanford told a press conference on the announcement of the CPC list for 2006. "The government continues to target observant Muslims for arrest, often considering conservative Islamic practice to be evidence of extremism and terrorism." He said that thousands of observant Muslims with no ties to extremist organizations have been harassed or detained simply on the basis of their religious beliefs or practices. (RIA Novosti)

BUS HITS HOUSE IN KAZAKHSTAN, KILLING 7

25 November

A passenger coach slammed into a residential building in Kazakhstan in the early hours Saturday, leaving 7 people dead and 13 others injured, the Central Asian republic's emergencies ministry said. "A Mercedes bus, with 20 passengers on board, crashed into a private house at 1:20 a.m. local time [9:20 p.m. GMT] in the Karaganda province [in central Kazakhstan], 884 kilometers [549 miles] into the Almaty-Yekaterinburg highway," the ministry said in a news release. The driver and two passengers, who had sustained severe injuries, were taken to a hospital in the provincial capital of Karaganda, while the other ten passengers were hospitalized in a nearby village with minor injuries. Police are investigating what caused the vehicle to veer off the road. (RIA Novosti)

KAZAKHSTAN-AZERBAIJAN BUSINESS FORUM DUE IN ASTANA

26 November

The Kazakhstan-Azerbaijan business forum will be held in the Kazakh capital, Astana, in early

December, Azerbaijan's Embassy to Kazakhstan said. Over twenty Azerbaijani companies will attend the forum. Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan have signed over 80 agreements to date, including ones on economy, tourism and agriculture. (Azertag)

BUSH PRESSES KARZAI ON AFGHAN DRUG TRADE

26 November

U.S. President George W. Bush has asked Afghan President Hamid Karzai to demand more action against Afghanistan's drug trade. Karzai's office said today that Bush telephoned Karzai on November 25, ahead of the NATO summit in Latvia next week. At the summit, Bush is expected to press European NATO allies for more support for Afghanistan's battle against the resurgent Taliban. Afghanistan's poppy crop yields about 90 percent of the world's opium, which is used to make heroin. Production jumped by nearly 50 percent. (RFE/RL)

U.S. AND GEORGIA INVESTIGATE S. OSSETIA COUNTERFEITERS

26 November

The U.S. Secret Service is working with police in the former Soviet republic of Georgia to investigate an international counterfeiting operation that produces fake \$100 bills that have been seized in the United States and Israel, the Washington Post reported on Sunday. The counterfeiting operation, based on the separatist enclave of South Ossetia, has produced more than \$20 million in fake bills that have been transported to the United States and Israel, according to investigators cited by the Post. The counterfeit notes have been passed at numerous businesses in Baltimore, Maryland; New York City; Buffalo, New York; and Newark, New Jersey, the newspaper said. It said the notes have also surfaced in Georgia and neighboring Russia. The Post said the number of notes produced in the region and passed in the United States has increased dramatically in recent years. It cited unidentified senior officials, U.S. diplomats, U.S. court documents and a recent report to Congress. The presence of a major international counterfeiting ring in an area of the former Soviet Union where territorial status remains unresolved

15 years after the collapse of communism offers a stark example of how organized crime has flourished in the region, sometimes through neglect and sometimes with the suspected involvement of government officials, it said. "Counterfeiting is not the only headache for us if you're talking about criminality in South Ossetia," Ekaterine Zguladze, Georgia's deputy interior minister, told the Post. "You also have drug trafficking, weapons trafficking, robbery, kidnapping. And our opportunity to fight criminals in there is very limited." White House spokesman Alex Conant referred queries on the matter to the Secret Service, where the duty officer was not immediately available to comment. (Reuters)

ROUNDTABLE ON CHECHNYA MAY BE HELD IN GROZNY - PACE DELEGATION

26 November

Head of a the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) delegation Andreas Gross has hailed the decision of the Chechen authorities to hold the second PACE roundtable meeting on Chechnya in Grozny. Gross said at a meeting with Chechen Prime Minister Ramzan Kadyrov in Gudermes that the idea of the roundtable meeting in Grozny is sound. At the same time, the head of the delegation highlighted the fact that two conditions should be guaranteed to hold the meeting in Grozny. Firstly, those who acknowledge Chechnya as a part of Russia and who renounce force, should have the right to take part in the meeting, he said, adding that Chechens who left Russia's internal republic and who are criticizing the Chechen authorities from Moscow, Berlin and other cities should participate in the meeting as well. In 2005, a visit to Chechnya, the analysis of the situation and meeting with the authorities showed that these conditions were not fulfilled, Gross said. Should the PACE delegation come to a conclusion that these conditions are no more an obstacle to the meeting, it may be prepared, the PACE delegation head said. (Interfax)

KYRGYZSTAN CITES PROGRESS ON UZBEK BORDER TALKS

27 November

Kyrgyzstan has reported progress with neighboring Uzbekistan in demarcating their common border, RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service reported. Salamat Alamanov, the Kyrgyz government official in charge of regional affairs, told RFE/RL that topographical engineers from both countries have agreed on additional kilometers of the disputed border. "As a result of consultations conducted at the level of experts, about 2.5 kilometers of the Kyrgyz-Uzbek border have been defined," he said. "Those results have now to be discussed at the level of [government] delegations. They will then be sent to the governments [of both countries] for approval." Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan share a 1,375-kilometer border. The 300 kilometers or so that remain in dispute have led to a number of border incidents. Kyrgyzstan also shares common borders with China, Kazakhstan, and Tajikistan. China is the only country with which it has no border disputes. (RFE/RL)

SEVERE GAS, ELECTRICITY SHORTAGES HIT TAJIKISTAN

28 November

Most regions of Tajikistan's have been hit by severe natural gas and power shortages during the past five days. RFE/RL's Tajik Service reports that electricity supplies to the capital, Dushanbe, and Khojand, the country's second-largest city, were drastically restricted on the night of November 27. Only central areas hosting administrative buildings and main hospitals received normal power supplies in those two cities. Industry officials warned on October 9 that electricity would be available to Tajik households for just eight hours a day until April. But they also assured the public that the restrictions would not affect Dushanbe. Authorities have yet to explain the sudden shortages. It is unclear whether they are linked to efforts to build a dam on the Vakhsh River, a tributary of the Amudariya River, whose source is in neighboring Kyrgyzstan. (RFE/RL)

SPEAKER OF AZERBAIJAN PARLIAMENT MEETS WTO REPRESENTATIVE

27 November

Speaker of Azerbaijan Parliament Ogtay Asadov met with Mr. Arif Hussain, Director of the World Trade Organization's (WTO) Accession Division, 27 November. Chairman of Milli Majlis said Azerbaijan, as an independent state, attaches great importance to development of ties with the authoritative World Trade Organization. On Presidential Decree, relevant legislature is being prepared for Azerbaijan's admission to this structure, he noted. Experts will shortly present the legislative act for consideration. Ogtay Asadov said currently Azerbaijan is the initiator and participant of large economic projects of global significance. The country's GDP grows year by year. Increase of foreign investments to the country is evidence to political stability in the Republic, the Speaker stressed. Mr. Arif Hussain said the quick development of economy, production of competitive goods in the country and strengthening of democracy will promote to Azerbaijan's accession to WTO. He shared his pleasant views and impressions with the visit to the country. In meeting, also focused were other questions of mutual interest. (Azertag)

ONE BODYGUARD OF CHECHEN PRESIDENT KILLED, FOUR INJURED IN ROAD ACCIDENT

27 November

A bodyguard of the Chechen president has died in a road accident in Ingushetia and four others were rushed to hospital in critical condition, press secretary of the president Saidmagomed Isarayev told Interfax Monday morning. "After midnight President Alu Alkhanov was returning to Grozny to meet a delegation of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) having interrupted a working visit to Moscow. A Volga car with a drunken driver behind the wheel collided with the presidential motorcade near the village of Yandary," he said. Alkhanov survived unhurt. Earlier a source in Ingush law enforcement told Interfax that a resident of Yandary had caused the accident. He was hospitalized with injuries. The source said one police officer was killed and three hospitalized with injuries. (Interfax)

SUICIDE CAR BOMB IN WESTERN AFGHANISTAN KILLS POLICEMAN

28 November

A suicide attacker rammed a car bomb into a police vehicle in western Afghanistan, killing a policeman and wounding three civilians, officials said. The attacker drove the car into a police jeep on the outskirts of Herat city as counterterrorism police followed him suspecting he might be planning an attack, interior ministry spokesman Zemarai Bashary told AFP on Tuesday. "One police officer was martyred and one was wounded in the suicide blast," said Bashary. The attacker's body was blown to pieces, he said. Three civilians were also wounded, western Afghanistan deputy police director Ali Khan said. He said the attacker wanted to enter the city for "destructive attempts" and struck the vehicle as police were trying to stop him at a checkpoint. Human flesh littered the road, which links the city with its airport, an AFP reporter said. The force of the blast blew a deep hole into the tarmac, he said. Police quickly sealed the area. Bashary blamed the attack on "enemies of peace and stability", a term often used by Afghan officials to refer to the hardline Taliban movement that has been waging an insurgency since being driven from power in late 2001. The suicide attack was the fourth in insurgency-hit Afghanistan in as many days and came as NATO leaders were to meet to consider the alliance's operations against the Taliban. On Saturday an attack aimed at soldiers with the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force in the province of Logar near Kabul wounded two civilians. The following day a man blew himself up in a restaurant in eastern Paktika province, killing 15 people in one of the biggest suicide attacks in weeks. And on Monday an attack in the southern city of Kandahar killed two Canadian soldiers and 15 camels. The Taliban insurgency, which makes regular use of suicide and roadside bombings, has been the bloodiest this year, claiming 3,700 lives -- four times more than last year, according to an official report. Most of the dead are rebels. (AFP)

AFGHANISTAN'S "OPIUM ECONOMY" UNPRECEDENTED: UN, WORLD BANK

28 November

The scale of Afghanistan's "opium economy" is virtually unprecedented, a UN and World Bank report said Tuesday, warning it threatens to ruin the country's attempts to rebuild after years of war. Efforts to cut back Afghan opium production -- which makes up more than 90 percent of the world total -- were being hampered by corruption, with wealthy opium producers paying bribes to stop eradication, it said. The "tightening environment" against the trade was seeing it consolidate around "fewer, more powerful, and politically connected actors", with a popular Islamic money transfer system used to launder drug funds. Afghanistan's opium production jumped by 50 percent this year to a record 6,100 tonnes, the UN Office on Drugs and Crime said in September, even after internationally-backed counter-narcotics efforts costing billions of dollars. The opium makes most of the heroin used in some neighbouring countries and in Europe, where 7,000-8,000 deaths from the drug are registered every year. "The magnitude and importance of Afghanistan's opium economy are virtually unprecedented and unique in global experience," the report said. Opium takes up less than four percent of the total cultivated area in Afghanistan, with only 13 percent of the population involved in cultivation, it said. But the opium economy still accounts for around one-third of total economic activity, with opium gross domestic product estimated at between 2.6-2.7 billion dollars in the past two years. It is the country's largest source of export earnings and a major source of income and employment in rural areas, also supporting the balance of payments and indirectly -- through customs duties on drug-financed imports -- government revenues. "The sheer size and illicit nature of the opium economy mean that not surprisingly, it infiltrates and seriously affects Afghanistan's economy, state, society, and politics." It was also a "massive source of corruption" that undermined public institutions, especially in the security and justice sectors. "There are worrying signs of infiltration by the drug industry into higher levels of government and into the emergent politics of the country. "Thus it is widely considered to be one of the greatest threats to state-building, reconstruction, and development in Afghanistan," the report said. (AFP)

IAEA TO RENDER TECHNICAL AND FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE TO KYRGYZSTAN

28 November

International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) will render technical assistance to Kyrgyz government; an agreement on it was signed at the IAEA headquarters on November 27; a REGNUM correspondent was informed at Kyrgyz foreign ministry press office. Kyrgyzstan Ambassador to the OSCE and other international organizations in Vienna Rina Prizhivoyt signed the agreement from the Kyrgyz side; the IAEA Deputy Director General, Director of Technical Cooperation Department Anna Maria Chetto – from the side of the IAEA. According to the agreement, Kyrgyzstan received possibility to start together with the IAEA realization of national projects about \$2mln worth in the sphere of preservation of the environment and medicine, as well as completely to use potential of the IAEA to settle acute problems such as radioactive waste, protection of nuclear materials, treatment of oncological diseases at the sum of \$2mln environmental protection. (Regnum)

KAZAKHSTAN LOOKING FOR NEW GAS EXPORT ROUTES

28 November

Kazakhstan, keen to become a global gas exporter, is looking for export routes to Western markets which avoid the network of Russia's Gazprom, the head of the Kazakh gas pipeline company was quoted on Tuesday as saying. Kazakhstan, a large oil producer and exporter, has big reserves of natural gas. It wants to raise its weight as a gas exporter on the global market but its main concern is export routes. "Kazakh gas exports to Europe are constrained by ... the necessity to obtain access to the gas transport system of Russia's Gazprom due to our geographic location," KazTransGas head Serik Sultangaliyev told Express-Kazakhstan newspaper. "We understand really well that in this situation development of Kazakhstan's natural gas industry is impossible without cooperation with Russia. But at the same time we are looking for new ways to export energy to the global markets." Sultangaliyev said one option would be to lay a

gas pipeline on Caspian Sea bed to link the Kazakh oil port of Aktau with the Azeri capital Baku. The European Union and some littoral states favour the route but Russia is against it. "This idea is still being discussed," he said. Europe, which gets a quarter of its gas from Russia, is also looking for alternative sources after Moscow cut supplies briefly at the beginning of the year due to a row with Ukraine. Kazakhstan is a close political ally of Russia but it wants to diversify export routes. Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan are Central Asia's biggest gas exporters. Kazakhstan has so far exported very little gas, partly due to a lack of export infrastructure. Encouraged by high global prices, it now wants to cash in on its gas reserves. The energy ministry expects Kazakhstan to be pumping up to 45 billion cubic metres of natural gas a year by 2015. It has built an oil pipeline serving China and wants to export oil through the U.S.-backed Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline that avoids Russia and runs from Azerbaijan to Turkey. (Reuters)

ARMENIAN PARLIAMENT PASSES BILL ON APPROPRIATION OF PRIVATE PROPERTY

28 November

The Armenian parliament adopted on November 27 in the third and final reading by a vote of 70 in favor a controversial bill that legalizes the confiscation of private property when dictated by "state and public need," RFE/RL's Armenian Service reported. The bill was drafted in response to an April ruling by Armenia's Constitutional Court designating unconstitutional the expropriation and demolition of private homes in Yerevan to make way for private development schemes. Victims of those forced evictions who complain they were not granted adequate financial compensation for the loss of their homes demonstrated outside the parliament building on November 27 but were unable to prevent passage of the bill. (RFE/RL)

GEORGIAN OPPOSITION LAMBASTES U.S. AMBASSADOR OVER IRAN COMMENTS

28 November

The opposition Democratic Front Georgian parliament faction took issue on November 27 with comments by U.S. Ambassador John Tefft in an interview published in the weekly "Kviris palitra," Caucasus Press reported on November 27. Tefft was quoted as saying that Washington considers unacceptable any long-term strategic cooperation between Georgia and Iran, including the import by Georgia of Iranian natural gas. On November 23, Georgian Prime Minister Zurab Noghaideli said Tbilisi is negotiating with four separate potential gas suppliers -- Azerbaijan, Russia, Iran, and Turkey -- and will choose "the best option," Caucasus Press reported. He said the picture with regard to gas imports from Iran should become clear in December. Speaking on November 27 in Riga, where she will attend the NATO summit, Georgian parliament speaker Nino Burdjanadze said Georgia will not buy gas from Russia for \$230 per 1,000 cubic meters, the price Gazprom said last month it plans to charge beginning as of 2007. Azerbaijan has not yet responded to Georgian requests for additional gas from the Shah Deniz field, the export of which is scheduled to begin before the end of this year. (RFE/RL)

SOUTH OSSETIA ACCUSES GEORGIA OF PLOTTING PROVOCATIONS AGAINST RUSSIAN PEACEKEEPERS

28 November

The security services of the breakaway province of South Ossetia have warned that Georgia's special services are plotting provocative acts against Russian peacekeepers deployed in the Georgian-South Ossetian conflict zone. "The information available to us indicates that officers of the Georgian Interior Ministry have received orders to organize the detention of Russian servicemen from the peacekeeping forces, preferably officers, to take pictures during the [alleged] confiscation of fake U.S. dollars during a search and to record all this with a video camera," a source in South Ossetian law enforcement services told Interfax on Tuesday. The Georgian Interior Ministry circulated a statement on Monday accusing Russian peacekeepers of transporting counterfeit

banknotes, the breakaway province's First Deputy Prime Minister Boris Chochiyev said. (Interfax)

USA TO HELP MODERNIZE MILITARY AIRDROME IN AZERBAIJAN

28 November

The USA will participate in modernization of one of military airdromes in Azerbaijan; at present, military organizations of both countries are discussing the issue; communication officer of the US embassy to Azerbaijan Jonathan Henick is quoted by APA Agency as stating. He stressed that the USA continued to use Heydar Aliyev airport, as well as Azerbaijani air space, and the cooperation was very important for the USA. According to him, Azerbaijan assumed obligation at IPAP to modernize its second airdrome. "At present, we conduct discussions with Azerbaijan in connection with search for forms of modernization, rendering assistance; I want especially to stress that the initiative does not belong to the USA which may render assistance if necessary," he pointed out. As for increasing number of US radars installed some time ago in Azerbaijan, Henick informed that they were handed over to Azerbaijani soldiers. According to him, Azerbaijan decides itself how to use these radars and in which form. Henick mentioned that these radars are aimed at monitoring the Caspian Sea basin while it is not directed against neighboring countries. He informed that he does not have any information on new radars adding that if some problems appear, these issues will be discussed in future. Also, he mentioned role of the USA in guaranteeing security of Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) oil pipeline. According to the US embassy's official representative, countries through whose territory the oil pipeline passes account for the oil pipeline's security themselves. The BTC and Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum gas pipeline will create regional energy security. One of directions of cooperation in security sphere is providing forces responsible for the work with equipment, conducting maneuvers; we may actively cooperate in the sphere, Henick concluded. (Regnum)