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Central Asia- Caucasus Institute
Silk Road Studies Program

Central Asia-Caucasus Analyst

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THE CENTRAL ASIA-CAUCASUS ANALYST

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

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Analytical Articles: Analytical articles require a three to four sentence Key Issue introduction to the article based on a news hook. Rather than a general, overarching analysis, the article must offer considered and careful judgment supported with concrete examples. The ideal length of analytical articles is between 1,000 and 1,300 words. The articles are structured as follows:

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

BACKGROUND: 300-450 words of analysis about what has led up to the event or issue and why this issue is critical to the region. Include background information about the views and experiences of the local population.

IMPLICATIONS: 300-450 words of analysis of the ramifications of this event or issue, including where applicable, implications for the local people's future.

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

Field Reports: Field Reports focus on a particular news event and what local people think about the event, or about the work of an NGdO. Field Reports address the implications the event or activity analyzed has for peoples' lives and their communities. Field Reports do not have the rigid structure of Analytical Articles, and are shorter in length, averaging ca. 700-800 words.

Those interested in joining *The Analyst's* pool of authors to contribute articles, field reports, or contacts of potential writers, please send your CV to: scornell@jhu.edu and suggest some topics on which you would like to write.

Svante E. Cornell

Research Director; Editor, Central Asia-Caucasus Analyst

Central Asia-Caucasus Institute & Silk Road Studies Program

Paul H. Nitze School of Advanced International Studies, The Johns Hopkins University

1619 Massachusetts Ave. N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036, USA.

Tel. +1-202-663-5922; 1-202-663-7723; Fax. +1-202-663-7785

RUSSIA AND CHINA UNITE FORCES IN “PEACE MISSION – 2007”

Erica Marat

This summer the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) will conduct joint military exercises called “Peace Mission–2007”. The Russian-led Collective Security Treaty (CSTO) will closely observe the drills. For the first time, the two organizations will act as partners rather than representing overlapping multilateral structures seeking to fight terrorism, extremism, and separatism in Eurasia. However, the drills also generate discussions whether both organizations are in fact pursuing transnational security or are more concerned with international dominance. The CSTO’s suggestion to practice defense mechanisms against nuclear terrorism suggests the latter.

BACKGROUND: The SCO and CSTO embrace a significant part of Eurasia and their memberships overlap. The SCO members include China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan; while India, Iran, Mongolia, and Pakistan hold observer status. The CSTO members are Russia, Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan; while Azerbaijan and Georgia are observers. The SCO and CSTO were formed in 2001 and 2002, respectively. Since 2002, each organization has been conducting annual collective military exercises, with Russia and China being the main suppliers of military technologies, aircrafts, submarines, elite battalions, and armaments. The SCO and CSTO collective anti-terrorist drills usually involve heavy armament and thousands of soldiers. Today, the SCO’s Regional Anti-Terrorism Structure (RATS) and CSTO’s Collective Rapid Reaction Forces (CRRF) represent largely overlapping and at the same time competing military subunits.

This summer the SCO will practice defense mechanisms against nuclear terrorism in Russia’s Povolzhsk-Uralsk military district. Such large-scale

collective military maneuvers contradict the organization’s initial goals of fighting drug trafficking, organized crime, and ethnic separatism that require smaller scale military and policing operations. The “Peace Mission–2007” exercises will feature exclusively Russian and Chinese military technologies, including China’s “Chengdu J-10” tactical fighter plane and BMP-96 infantry fighting vehicles and tanks. Russia will provide Il-76MF aircraft. New housing facilities will be built to accommodate the participants, and Russian President Vladimir Putin and Chinese President Hu Jintao will attend the drills. Given that no terrorist organization is presently known to possess nuclear weapons, the drills’ objectives obviously aim beyond just anti-terrorism activities. They rather represent an attempt to boast Russian and Chinese military capabilities, as well as the growing ties between the two countries.

In 2006 Russia and China conducted joint military exercises on China’s Shandong peninsula within the SCO framework. These were the first Russian-Chinese joint military maneuvers and signified a closer merger between both states. China provided 7,000 of its military personnel, while Russia provided 1,800. The drills involved trainings on assault ships, submarines, and strategic aviation. Since no other SCO members aside from Russia and China have access to the sea, the

drills were largely labeled as window dressing in front of Taiwan. Importantly, the drills also promoted greater arms trade between Russia and China. Today, Russia's annual arms trade to China amounts to roughly \$2 billion. Diplomatic visits between Russian and Chinese military and security officials also became more frequent since the 2006 drills.

At the CSTO's November 2006 meeting in Moscow, the CSTO expressed its interest to join the SCO's drills, but Beijing declined the proposal. The CSTO officials agreed upon the fact that since both organizations' goals and memberships converge, organizing military drills jointly would reduce costs and facilitate exchange of experience between them. However, the SCO claimed that neither organization provides a legal ground for uniting their militaries in joint maneuvers. Initially Moscow planned to field 450 military personnel to the drills, but Beijing insisted that the number should be 2,000. After negotiations, Moscow and China agreed to provide up to 3,000 military personnel each. These numbers are remarkably higher compared to smaller member-states. Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan will provide 100 personnel each and Kyrgyzstan only 30. The number of personnel sent by each country suggests that the drills will primarily feature Russian and Chinese military teams. Armenia and Belarus, both members of the CSTO, were invited to the SCO-CSTO exercises as observers.

It is unlikely that SCO's RATS and CSTO's CRRF will eventually merge, but potential synchronization of their functioning is indeed an important element in justifying their future coexistence. There is an informal threshold, primarily enforced by Russia, to withhold the expansion of Chinese military presence in the Central Asian states. Although RATS has an office in Tashkent, the SCO does not intend to station a military base anywhere in the region or jointly with the CSTO. The CRRF is stationed in Kant, Kyrgyzstan.

IMPLICATIONS: The "Peace Mission-2007" drills indeed contain more political rather than practical value. Although both SCO and CSTO are concerned with transnational security in Eurasia, neither provides concrete mechanisms for fighting security problems

such as non-state insurgency, drug trafficking and organized crime. The experience of previous collective drills shows that the SCO and CSTO primarily sought to master their military capacities as opposed to developing skills in police activities or intelligence exchange. Arguably, Russia and China share a common concern with secessionist movements on their territories. Both also loathe the Central Asian states' cooperation with the U.S and NATO's Partnership for Peace program. The SCO and CSTO represent a shield from international intervention into Russian, Chinese and Central Asian domestic affairs. With that, both organizations played a mere symbolic role in addressing terrorist incidents in the Central Asian states, often supporting incumbent regimes in times of instability instead of designing concrete anti-terrorism strategies.

The SCO and CSTO's programs emphasize that neither organization represents a military bloc, and that neither intends to align against any state or group of states. Despite that, the discourse around both organizations' functioning often involves discussions of their standoff with NATO and the U.S. military presence in the Central Asian region. Russian mass media regularly condemn Western negative perception of the SCO's cooperation with the CSTO, especially after Russia and China conducted bilateral military exercises in China in 2005. The SCO, on its part, underlines its peaceful intentions and rebukes the possibility of turning into military bloc. Along with that, the organization's documents stress the danger of unipolar tendencies in global security. The SCO regards its member and observer states as supporters of international multipolarism.

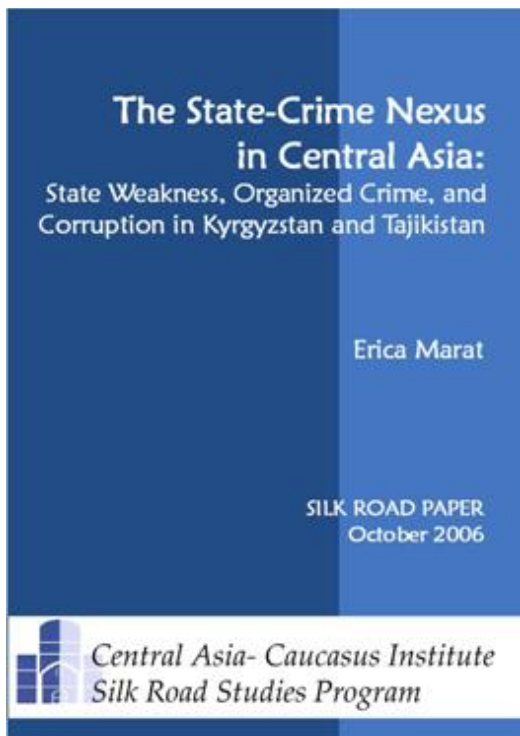
It is likely that China and Russia will try to involve India into the SCO's future military exercises. India's interest in the Central Asian region, as well as military cooperation with Russia and China, has been increasing in the past few years. The SCO also established ties with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations' Secretary, thus placing itself among China's most important multilateral alliances. At the June 2006 summit in Shanghai dedicated to the SCO's fifth anniversary, the organization announced a moratorium on further expansion. Instead, the SCO

will stage partnership dialogues with individual states. Afghanistan has become the first state to participate in the SCO's bilateral partnership dialogues.

CONCLUSIONS: Growing ties between Russia and China indeed amplify both the CSTO's and the SCO's leadership positions in Eurasia. But there is a limit to the merger between the two organizations. Despite Russian interest in military cooperation with China, the Kremlin will not abandon the expansion of the CSTO. The CSTO is a counter-balance not only to Western influence in the former Soviet space, but also to Chinese presence in Central Asia and the South Caucasus. The SCO, for its part, emphasizes

differences between itself and the CSTO. Unlike the CSTO's CRRF stationed at the Russian air base at Kant, the SCO lacks joint military troops. In practice, China will not be able to deploy troops to the Central Asian states, let alone to Russia. The SCO, however, offers a prolific venue for intensification of military cooperation between Moscow and Beijing. This does not necessarily contribute primarily to transnational security, fulfilling instead entirely different agendas.

AUTHOR'S BIO: Dr. Erica Marat is a Research Fellow with the Central Asia-Caucasus Institute & Silk Road Studies Program Joint Center, Johns Hopkins University-SAIS/Uppsala University.



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.

CHECHNYA'S NEW PRESIDENT: RATIONAL ACTOR OR IDEOLOGICAL ZEALOT?

Kevin Daniel Leahy

Chechnya's new pro-Moscow president cannot be accused of resting on his laurels. Since his elevation to the republic's top political post last month, Ramzan Kadyrov has scarcely paused to take stock of his meteoric political rise, briefing the media on a whole host of sensitive political topics, spearheading various socio-political initiatives, while reorganizing the presidential structures swiftly and decisively. Many Russian analysts believe that Kadyrov's appointment undermines the very concept of Russian statehood, with some accusing him of harboring latent separatist inclinations. Whether Kadyrov harbors such inclinations is irrelevant, however; whether or not he will act on them is the more pertinent question.

BACKGROUND: In the final analysis, the sagacity or folly of President Putin's decision to promote Kadyrov will be judged solely on the extent to which the new Chechen president is a rational actor. In the broad field of decision making analysis, the rational actor theory is commonly referred to as the "classical" model for explaining the choices human beings make. The rational actor model posits that individual actors, fully cognizant of the various courses of action open to them, will choose the optimal means available to achieve their given objective. It should be stated at the outset that it remains far from clear what Ramzan Kadyrov's ultimate political objective amounts to. Does he foresee Chechnya winning *de jure* independence from the Russian state? Or is he content to expand the republic's autonomy within the amorphous bounds of Russian statehood? In light of recent developments, Kadyrov appears to have chosen the latter course.

While consistently professing his loyalty to the Russian state, he has fought doggedly to extend his government's political and economic writ *vis-à-vis* the federal centre. Kadyrov continues to lay claim to the republic's natural resources, arguing that Chechnya should be allowed to create its own oil company to replace the incumbent production license holder, Rosneft. On the political front, he has successfully campaigned to have Chechen convicts serving time in Russian jails transferred to prisons in Chechnya. Kadyrov has also embarked on

a tentative *détente* with a long-time *bête noire* of the Putin regime, the British-based separatist foreign minister, Akhmed Zakaev.

Behind the scenes, Kadyrov has been busy reshuffling his ministers, promoting a plethora of former separatists to sensitive government posts. This proliferation of separatists-cum-loyalists has left many in Moscow aghast, with nervous politicians and commentators endlessly pondering Ramzan's political trustworthiness. Behind all the blustering professions of loyalty to Russia, could he, in fact, remain a "secret separatist"?

To invoke language more commensurate with the lexicon of rational actor analysis is he, fundamentally, an ideological "zealot"? Kadyrov already compromised his pro-independence principles once, when he switched sides at the outset of the second Chechen war, and joined the federal forces. Allying himself with Moscow was one of a number of options then open to Kadyrov. He could have resisted the invading forces, he could have fled the country, or he could have decided not to fight at all. Ultimately, in order to follow the political path that he deemed the most prudent at that juncture, Kadyrov necessarily renounced his previous, self-proclaimed ideological outlook. On that occasion, Kadyrov was not so "zealous" as to reject the "rational" course of action as it then appeared to him.

IMPLICATIONS: By turning his back on his erstwhile comrades, Kadyrov emphatically illustrated that ideology is not a definitive factor in his decision making process. It is likely that Ramzan and his late father, Ahmed-Hajji Kadyrov, were lured over to the Russian side by certain Kremlin officials who promised them great power and influence. As such, it was greed, not ideology, that prompted this decision. It is important to note that Ramzan's greed mitigates the possibility of him re-embracing separatism. At present, Kadyrov enjoys the lifestyle of a post-modern, landed gentleman. Zooming about the republic in his heavily-armed convoy of SUVs, he exudes the calm, confident demeanor of a country squire surveying his fief. However, were Kadyrov to turn demonstratively against the Kremlin tomorrow, he would likely provoke a violent, knee-jerk response from the Putin administration. The Russian president has invested a great deal in his young charge, and to say he would be displeased with such a turn of events would be an understatement.

A third Russian invasion of Chechnya would necessarily deprive Kadyrov of the flamboyant lifestyle he currently enjoys. According to the Russian journalist Vyacheslav Izmailov, Ahmed-Hajji Kadyrov once told him that the Chechens had been "idiots" to provoke Russia in the early 1990s. "With Russia," he told Izmailov, "it is possible to take whatever we want and at the same time live as we like". As his endless public praise of President Putin indicates, Kadyrov the younger remains mindful of this sage piece of paternal advice. He is also no doubt mindful that a "return to the hills" would be contingent on Dokka Umarov and his rebel rump welcoming back their prodigal son. Given that Kadyrov has been responsible for, among other misdemeanors, the kidnapping and subsequent disappearance of several members of Umarov's family, reconciliation is hardly an option. Kadyrov's recently-demonstrated ability to satisfy on important political issues is another factor that militates against him returning to the separatist path.

Although the willingness to choose a less-than-optimal course of action is not, in the strictest sense, the mark of a rational actor, the art of compromise

is central to all political activity. For instance, as of March 21 Kadyrov has dismissed the prospect of signing a power-sharing treaty with Moscow, insisting that such a treaty would undermine the concept of Russian statehood. The inauguration of such a treaty between Grozny and the federal centre has long been a central political objective for the Kadyrov clan. Nevertheless, Ramzan has discreetly but firmly removed this issue from the centre-periphery political discourse, quite possibly as part of a quid pro quo agreement which hastened his ascent to Chechnya's presidency.

CONCLUSIONS: Kadyrov might not be an ideological zealot but that is not to say that he will never re-embrace the separatist mantra. For now, the Russian state under Putin gives the appearance of strength, if not quite vitality. As the political situation in Russia presently stands, Kadyrov would be quite foolish to upset President Putin. The Russian state still possesses enough power and focus to smash his fledgling regime should it decide to do so. However, should the Russian state weaken socially and economically over the coming years—for example following the 2008 elections – Kadyrov might well deem it rational to adopt an even bolder, more independent stance vis-à-vis the federal centre. First Deputy Prime Minister Dimitri Medvedev, a principal candidate in the race to succeed Putin, stated last September that the next Russian president could be faced with major political challenges arising from "economic upheaval". A president preoccupied with major political challenges in the Russian heartland might well choose to adopt a policy of benign neglect toward Chechnya in much the same way as Boris Yeltsin's administration did during the early 1990s. In view of the prevailing political conditions in Russia, Ramzan the rational actor moves cautiously and stealthily, extending his republic's autonomy gradually as each opportunity presents itself. There may come a day, however, when Ramzan will deem it opportune to break decisively with a Russian state rendered impotent by its own internal political contradictions.

AUTHOR'S BIO: Kevin Daniel Leahy holds a postgraduate degree from University College Cork, Ireland.

THE BURGAS-ALEXANDROUPOLIS PIPELINE AND ITS IMPLICATIONS

Stephen Blank

The Black Sea has emerged as a primary area for the transport of energy to Europe and thence to the world market. Yet Turkey has insisted, partly for ecological and environmental reasons, on restricting the flow of energy through the Bosphorus. This ruling has forced every energy producer in Russia and Central Asia to search for alternatives such as the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline, various schemes to transport oil across the Black Sea, and more recently the new Burgas-Alexandroupolis pipeline which will take oil from Kazakhstan through Russian pipelines and tankers to the Bulgarian port of Burgas and from there through Bulgaria and Greece to the port of Alexandroupolis. But beyond ecological and environmental restrictions on energy transport through the Black Sea Straits, these ventures each have considerable economic and political significance.

BACKGROUND: This new Russo-Bulgarian-Greek project underscores the complex economic and political rivalries that dot the region and Russia's aim of using energy to establish its hegemony in the CIS. Russia controls 51 percent of the project and the other two partners 24.5 percent each. The motives for Bulgaria and Greece are obvious: becoming major players in the energy field and gaining regular oil supplies, large transit fees, and opportunities for jobs and investments. But Moscow's agenda is broader and more strategic.

Russia recently intensified the pressure to bring the 13 year long discussion of this project to fruition because of Turkey's continuing restrictions on tanker trade in the Bosphorus through which one-third of Russia's oil exports flow. While the reasons given for this Turkish policy are environmental security, this trend has had the consequence of forcing more shipments through the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline that does not cross Russian territory and which Moscow therefore does not support. The new project will relieve pressure on the Bosphorus and bypass Turkey as well as the BTC pipeline. And since it uses Kazakh oil, Moscow will keep the pressure on to ensure that this oil only reaches markets through routes it controls in order to keep Kazakhstan dependent

upon it, just as it is trying to do with Turkmen gas to Ukraine.

Third, Washington is sponsoring a huge competing infrastructural plan for the Black Sea that would tie together Central Asian producers like Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan; Turkey, which has made clear its ambition to be a key regional distributor and pivot in the global energy trade; and the Balkans, while bypassing Russia. In other words, the Burgas-Alexandroupolis pipeline is the latest Russian move in an increasingly complex trans-continental rivalry over oil and gas pipelines from Russia, Central Asia, and the Caucasus to Europe and then to global markets. It also represents a Russian effort to outflank the recent moves by Kazakhstan to join the BTC pipeline and ship its oil through a projected Trans-Caspian pipeline under the Caspian Sea that Moscow opposes. Russia opposes this pipeline allegedly because of the ecological damage to the Caspian Sea. But one suspects its real reasons are economic – namely to prevent the loss of revenue that would accrue to it from shipping Kazakh oil through its pipelines to Europe – and political, keeping Kazakhstan under its pipeline thumb, so to speak.

Undoubtedly, Russia figured out that Kazakhstan was increasingly attracted to the American and

European sponsored BTC project and the developing gas pipeline from Baku to Erzurum in Turkey, and has moved to minimize the damage to its interests by getting its pipeline in first. Since Greece and Bulgaria benefit greatly from the new pipeline and the possibilities for economic stimulation that it offers them, it is not surprising that they finally accepted this program. But the reasons for the new urgency behind Moscow's



Proposed Pipeline Route

advocacy undoubtedly are connected to the linkages between Kazakhstan and Central Asia on the one hand and pipelines to Europe that bypass Russia, e.g. the BTC pipeline, on the other.

A possible second motive for the Burgas-Alexandroupolis pipeline is that Russia is concerned about becoming too dependent upon Turkey as a passageway or middleman for the export of its energy products to Europe. As noted above, one-third of Russian exports already go through the Bosphorus and a large amount of gas goes from Russia to Europe through the Blue Stream pipeline. Just as other suppliers know, their security rests in diversification of export markets and consumers know that their security rests in diversifying the number of their suppliers. Russia understands the need for not becoming too dependent upon any one export route. This issue is driving Russia's energy strategy ever since it was published in 2003. Moscow is determined to deny foreign governments

the ability to interfere with its ability to export to whomever it chooses, and this is a major drive behind the energy crises in Belarus and Ukraine in 2006-07. Therefore it makes sense to suspect that Russia does not wish to become too dependent upon Turkey as a route to markets, especially since its ability to close the Bosphorus could cripple Russian exports in general, not just in terms of energy, or force Russia to accept the BTC. The Burgas-Alexandroupolis pipeline meets this requirement for Russia, giving it a viable alternative to the Bosphorus and Turkey and expanding its options in the Balkans, which it is clearly trying to dominate insofar as energy is concerned.

IMPLICATIONS: As this and other similar deals suggests, pipeline deals are major political ventures as well as economic projects. This particular project has important ramifications for the Balkans, Turkey, Russia, the Caucasus (by virtue of its implications for the BTC pipeline) and Central Asian producers. But beyond that fact, this project has several other implications attached to it. First of all, it shows that the destinies of Europe, the Caucasus, and Central Asia are increasingly intertwined because what is at stake here is not just the future ability of Kazakhstan to conduct an independent energy policy, but also Europe's ability to rely upon diverse suppliers. It also remains to be seen to what degree Bulgaria's and Greece's participation in this project could lead to their falling into a position of dependence upon Russia that would be an impediment to further European integration and democratization.

Secondly, this project implicitly suggests that Turkey's desire to play a major role in the international energy economy as a transfer point and thus pivotal actor in that system. This project suggests that Russia will try to set a limit upon Turkey's ability to play that role even if it does so subtly as is the case here. Nonetheless Turkey will continue trying to be a major transfer point for energy as its participation in the Blue Stream, BTC and Baku-Erzurum pipeline as well as its major role in the export of Russian energy suggests. Inasmuch as Turkey and the EU are engaged in very delicate

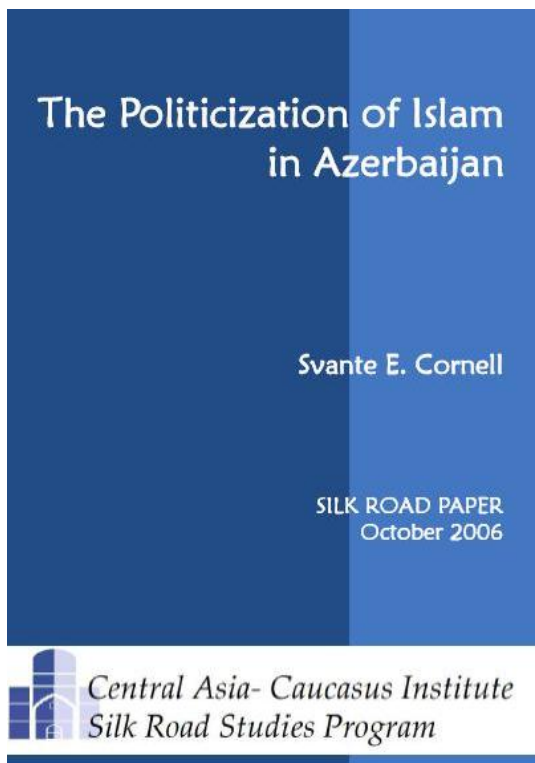
negotiations over Turkey's entry into the EU, Ankara's ability to play a key role in supporting the infrastructure of the global energy trade enhances its importance to the EU and the desirability of reaching a solution that allows for its membership there.

At the same time, Turkey's ability to play this positive role can and will support its aspirations to be a major actor in the Caucasus if not Central Asia, and could clearly lead to tensions with Russia despite the recent Turco-Russian rapprochement. Indeed, this project indicates that the Turkish-Russian romance may have reached its height.

CONCLUSIONS: The Burgas-Alexandroupolis pipeline project is clearly part of a broader Russo-Western struggle over energy policy and foreign influence in the CIS. Washington is supporting a series of infrastructure and energy projects in Eurasia whose explicit objective is to deny the possibilities for Russia to monopolize every kind of energy source in Central Asia and the Caucasus and

Russia seeks to advance its monopolistic agenda with regard to Central Asia by its own projects like this one. Europe, likewise, has woken up to the need of diversifying energy supplies. Only coherent and unified efforts by Washington and the EU can advance projects to counter this Russian trend. This includes strengthening resolve to complete the EU's Nabucco pipeline or to help develop the Baku-Erzurum pipelines. But it remains to be seen where this struggle goes and who will prevail in the struggle over infrastructure and pipelines in Eurasia. While the outcome of this rivalry cannot be foreseen now, it can be predicted that this struggle is likely to intensify and spread into ever wider economic and geographic zones.

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



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.

NUCLEAR SMUGGLING CASE DEEPENS GEORGIAN-RUSSIAN TENSIONS

Richard Weitz

Revelations in January 2007 about the details of a recent smuggling incident in the Republic of Georgia have intensified concerns about the security of nuclear materials in the South Caucasus. Although the initial effect of the case has been to sharpen tensions between Russia and Georgia, over the long-term it could result in enhanced nonproliferation cooperation in the region. Indeed, the only two seizures of Highly Enriched Uranium in recent years have taken place in Georgia, indicating the need for greater involvement by the international community in countering WMD smuggling in the South Caucasus.

BACKGROUND: On January 25, 2007, a Georgian court sentenced a citizen of the Russian region of North Ossetia to eight years in prison for attempting to sell 100 grams of weapons-grade Highly Enriched Uranium (HEU) for \$1 million on the black market. The authorities had detained Oleg Khintsagov for almost a year following his arrest in February 1, 2006, in a complex multinational sting operation that eventually involved the CIA, the FBI, and the U.S. Department of Energy. The Georgian government provided details about the case only after the court reached its verdict.

Although the court also sentenced three Georgian citizens to between four and six years in prison, the immediate effect of the new revelations surrounding the case was to worsen the already problematic relationship between Russia and Georgia. The Russian Ambassador to Georgia, Vyacheslav Kovalenko, had only just returned to Tbilisi after having been absent for four months following revelations about alleged Russian espionage activity in Georgia. The two countries have also experienced acute bilateral disputes over Georgian efforts to join NATO, Russian economic sanctions on Georgia, and Russian support for the two remaining separatist governments—in Abkhazia and South Ossetia—on Georgian territory.

The Georgian authorities have offered different reasons why they delayed providing details about the case until now. Some Georgian officials said they needed time to investigate the incident thoroughly. At least one Georgian legislator said the United States had requested a temporary media blackout. At a press conference announcing the verdict, however, Georgian Interior Minister Vano Merabishvili implied that his government had decided to publicize the case because it had lost patience waiting for greater Russian cooperation in investigating the incident.

Russian officials insisted they have cooperated fully with the investigation. Some attributed the delay to a Georgian attempt, supported by some U.S. officials, to release the information at the most opportune time for embarrassing the Russian government. Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said, “I hope very much that this is not an attempted political provocation.” Lavrov asserted that experts from Russia’s Federal Security Service (FSB) and Federal Atomic Energy Agency (Rosatom) had interrogated Khintsagov, but he “could say nothing coherent.”

A representative of the Office of the Russian Prosecutor General told the ITAR-TASS news agency that the Georgian Prosecutor General’s Office had asked for legal assistance in investigating Khintsagov. He claimed, however, that the

Georgian authorities had failed to respond to the Russian government's request for copies of the materials Russia needed to launch an investigation. Under Russian law, it is illegal for unauthorized personnel to acquire, store, or sell radioactive materials.

Several influential Russians speculated that Georgian and American officials had colluded to exploit the incident to damage Russia's reputation as a responsible steward of sensitive nuclear materials. Konstantin Zatulin, director of the Institute of CIS Countries and a deputy in the Duma, noted the resemblance between the Khintsagov incident and the case of former Russian security agent Alexander Litvinenko, killed with radioactive polonium also widely thought to have originated in Russia: "I see only one reason to again return to the theme of mysterious Russian spies who are transporting uranium and plutonium and other such substances all over the world."

Andrei Cherkasenko, chairman of the board of AtomPromResursy, a Russian manufacturer of nuclear power equipment, explicitly accused Georgian and American officials of deliberately timing the release of the information about the Khintsagov case to coincide with Russian President Vladimir Putin's visit to India, where he signed a memorandum of intent to construct four additional Russian nuclear power plants. Russian, American, and other foreign companies are expected to compete vigorously to sell nuclear equipment to India if the Nuclear Suppliers Group authorizes such sales, a decision expected to occur sometime this year.

Whatever the reason for the timing, the Georgian government did cite the smuggling incident to reaffirm its call for the deployment of international observer missions in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, including along the Georgian-Russian border, to supplement or replace the Russian peacekeeping forces there. After meeting with Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili on February 26, EU foreign policy chief Javier Solana said EU governments might deploy peacekeepers in Georgia provided the mission had a clear and achievable

objective. Publicizing the arrest of uranium smugglers operating in the breakaway regions supports the Georgian argument that neither the local authorities nor Russian peacekeepers have proven able to secure the territories from serious nonproliferation threats and dangerous criminal networks.



Map of North and South Ossetia (BBC)

In the past, Russian officials as well as both regions' unrecognized separatist governments have rejected proposals for deploying permanent observer missions from non-CIS countries on their territories. Murat Dzhoyev, the South Ossetian de facto government's designated foreign minister, dismissed claims that his autonomous region had become a transit zone for nuclear trafficking as "laughable." His office issued a formal statement accusing Georgia of engineering the scandal to discredit the South Ossetian government. The separatist authorities in Abkhazia also denounced the timing of the Georgian announcement, hinting that Tbilisi sought to influence UN Security Council deliberations by spreading alarm about the security situation in Georgia's separatist regions. In mid-February 2006, the "foreign ministers" of Abkhazia and South Ossetia conferred in Moscow with their counterpart from the separatist region of Transnistria on how to strengthen their autonomous positions.

Representatives of the Russian Federal Customs Service also expressed skepticism that the material in Khintsagov's possession came from Russia. They insist that the Russian government has installed very effective Russian-made "Yantar" radiation monitoring equipment along its southern borders and other trafficking routes that would have detected any smuggled radioactive materials. Georgian officials subsequently revealed that Khintsagov smuggled the uranium across a border checkpoint near Kazbegi, a remote town in eastern Georgia where radiation detection devices might have been less advanced than those deployed at more heavily used transit points.

IMPLICATIONS: The Khintsagov incident underscores the potential nonproliferation threats associated with the anarchic conditions existing in the breakaway regions in the South Caucasus and the other "frozen conflict" regions of the former Soviet Union. The weak law enforcement and porous borders in both Abkhazia and South Ossetia (which permit easy transit with neighboring Russian regions as well as into Georgia) facilitate trafficking in nuclear materials as well as more conventional forms of contraband (e.g., narcotics, counterfeit currency, persons).

Although the Georgian government has made a number of efforts to enhance the safety and security of the nuclear materials under its control, especially after Georgia joined the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) in February 1997, the country remains especially vulnerable to nuclear trafficking through its territory. Besides the lack of effective political authority in the two separatist regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia., foreign governments and nonproliferation experts have expressed concern about the level of corruption in Georgian law enforcement agencies, the growing strength of transnational criminal organizations in the South Caucasus, and the republic's pivotal location at the crossroads between Europe, Russia, Asia, and the Middle East.

In June 2003, Georgian authorities apprehended Garik Dadayan, an Armenian national, in the border town of Sadakhlo for attempting to smuggle 170 grams of weapons-grade HEU across Georgia's borders with Armenia and Azerbaijan. Smuggling had become rampant in the region after relations between Armenia and Azerbaijan deteriorated following their war over the disputed region of Nagorno-Karabakh. Dadayan told investigators that he had acquired the material from intermediaries of Russian and other nationalities in Vladikavkaz, the same North Ossetian city where Khintsagov resided. Georgian authorities concluded that the HEU originated in Novosibirsk. According to the media, however, the FSB sent a confidential letter in May 2006 to the Georgian authorities asserting that Russian experts had concluded that the uranium smuggled by Dadayan and Khintsagov were produced at separate times and "seriously differ in composition."

CONCLUSIONS: The two cases demonstrate the vulnerability of the South Caucasus, especially Georgia, to the smuggling of nuclear materials. According to IAEA, of the 481 occurrences of nuclear smuggling reported between May 2002 and early 2006, only the Dadayan incident involved weapons-grade nuclear material. The Khintsagov case now falls into that category. The international community clearly needs to adopt urgent measures to shore up its nonproliferation defenses in the region. Priorities include improving WMD detection capabilities, extending best practices into private industry, and strengthening the rule of law throughout Georgian territory.

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

FIELD REPORTS

CAN SOMEBODY TURN THE LIGHTS ON IN TAJIKISTAN?

Firuza Ganieva

Tajikistan has been experiencing electricity shortages for several years; however, this winter the most severe energy crisis hit, with disastrous effects on the population. Most regions in the country were supplied with electricity for only several hours per day, whereas rural areas did not have electricity at all. This year's power outages reached even Dushanbe, the capital of the country, where the supply of energy was limited to only eight hours instead of the usual seventeen. Although the government took some steps to resolve the situation, most hopes for light and heat in the next winter season come from the bottom up – from the initiative and creativity of the local population.

While about 95 percent of Tajikistan's electricity generating capacity is hydroelectric, only an estimated 5 percent of Tajikistan's hydroelectric potential, most of it based on the Vakhsh River, is in use. For several years now, the completion of new dams has suffered long delays, and the immense scale of the energy crisis means that the lives of impoverished people have become unbearable. "Spending long winter evenings and nights with a single kerosene lamp, without either electric power or natural gas, cannot be repeated in the coming winter, there should be other ways to deal with problem," said one of the residents of Khujand, the second biggest city in Tajikistan. He also added that his children could not do their homework properly, so as to be successful in school.

Tajikistan experiences deficits of electric power every winter, when the level of water in the big hydroelectric stations is low. However, the deficit of electric energy this year came to a peak. Today, 85 percent of electricity consumed in the Sogd

region, the northern part of the country, is obtained through barter with Uzbekistan. Ironically, although Tajikistan has the potential to become a leader in the production of hydropower, it purchases electricity from the neighboring countries of Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan at international rates, often causing tensions between the countries.

This winter, repeated negotiations with Uzbekistan ended in failure. Power-desperate Tajikistan asked Uzbekistan to sell large amounts of electric power, but the Uzbeks refused to deliver such large quantities, claiming that they did not have the necessary technical infrastructure. The cold winter is another important reason for Uzbekistan's refusal to sell energy.

While Spring showed some promise to alleviate the situation, in reality, the energy crisis deepened further. Nurek, the main hydroelectric station, could not function at full capacity, because the water level in the reservoir went down during Spring to a critical level. In this situation, operating the plant when the water is too low can damage the station and lead to exigent conditions and even a breakdown of the hydroelectric station. In addition, there had been cuts in the transit power line known as LEP-500 that delivers electricity to Tajikistan from Uzbekistan.

Several steps have been taken by the Tajik government, particularly "Barki Tojik", the Tajik state electricity provider, to resolve the situation and avoid a similar situation next winter. There is a LEP (power line) that extends to a length of approximately 370 km and connects the Marry Hydroelectric station in Turkmenistan with

Uzbekistan's Karikul station. Tajikistan was long able to purchase electricity via this LEP, however since 2002 the LEP had become dysfunctional. In addition, on March 1, Uzbekistan denied Tajikistan the provision of transit electricity from Turkmenistan.

In late March, an agreement was reached between Tajikistan and Uzbekistan to restore a regional power grid that goes across Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. According to Alexei Silantiev, vice chairman of "Barki Tojik", Uzbekistan and Tajikistan finally reached an agreement during subsequent negotiations providing that until September 2007, the LEP as well as other energy systems of Uzbekistan will be restored and ready to transport energy. Although Turkmen authorities were not present during this meeting, they had agreed during prior agreements to export 1 billion kilowatt hours of electricity per year to Tajikistan in the coming winter season. Whether promises to restore all necessary equipment will be fulfilled without delays in order to ensure that the new winter season will be warm, remains an open question.

Whereas government initiatives to resolve existing problems are not guaranteed, the local population, both tired and skeptical, is trying independently to find alternative solutions for electricity and to cope with regular shortages of gas. There have been several successful undertakings by private individuals to build small hydroelectric plants to provide electricity that can keep TVs, heating, and electric ovens running even during the regular outages. In the Sogd region, for example Lukmon

Ahmedov built a small hydroelectric power station from used tractor parts, giving power to the whole village, including a school and hospital. The same happened in the settlement of Zargar, which is located not far from the Vahdat city biogas plant, that provides not only natural gas, but is also often used to produce electricity. Also, traditional methods of heating such as "sandali" became widespread not only in the village areas of Tajikistan, but also in cities. "Sandali" means a low metal box or a hole made in the floor, filled with hot coals, over which a table top is placed. A thin quilt is then placed over the table top, at which people sit (on the ground) and covering themselves with a blanket. The construction heats only one room, where members of the family often both sleep and eat.

In Tajikistan, the majority of the population lives in rural areas where there is significant potential for developing renewable resources such as sun, wind, biogas, and hydroelectric power. So far, it seems that the major undertakings of the government to resolve the energy crisis have been associated with delays or failure: the sources of hope for the future come instead from the initiatives of the local population. In western countries, such local undertakings to use environmentally friendly renewable resources are appreciated and supported by the government. In Tajikistan, this development seems to take place independently of any national environmental planning consciousness. It is fueled, rather, by desperation and by the basic need for warmth and light in winter.

GEORGIAN ENERGY CONFERENCE HELD

Kakha Jibladze

On March 22, the sixth annual Georgian International Oil, Gas, Energy and Infrastructure Conference began in Tbilisi. The event, embracing

everything from transportation to energy security, caps a week of energy announcements from the government.

For the past two years, the idea of energy security – and diversifying energy suppliers – has been political holy ground. The usually divided opposition and majority parties have all come out in support of breaking Georgia's ties to Russian energy. While the idea is popular at home, reality has been more complicated.

A few days before the conference opened, Energy Minister Nika Gilauri announced that nearly half of Georgia's gas needs were provided by non-Russian sources, in his words a "historic moment" for the country's energy security. While his statements were a tremendous step back from Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili's 2006 promise to break consumption of Russian gas completely, they do mark a victory for a country which has traditionally looked north for all its gas needs – and most of its electricity.

According to Gilauri, Georgia is consuming a million cubic meters from Azerbaijan's Shah-Deniz field (at \$62.50 per 1000 cubic meters), 1.3 million cubic meters from Azerbaijan's State Oil Company (at \$120 per 1000 cubic meters), 700,000-800,000 cubic meters as a transit fee for transporting Russian gas to Armenia, and finally 2.5 million cubic meters from Gazprom (at \$235 per 1000 cubic meters).

The Shah-Deniz pipeline was re-launched on March 17 after technical problems forced it to stop its flow to Georgia in January, at the height of the gas negotiations with Russia.

On March 21, the energy minister also noted that the government is considering constructing gas storage units in Georgia. The proposal has come and gone from political favor over the past decade; according to reports, at least two feasibility studies have already been conducted on the project. Gilauri did not go into details, instead promising one more feasibility study to look into the idea. He did note two potential locations: Rustavi in the southeast of the country and Ninotsminda in the southwest.

Proponents of gas storage maintain it is the best source of security for a country with limited energy trading partners. A case in point occurred in 2006. When an unexplained "accident" in southern Russia

cut gas supplies to Georgia in the middle of winter, Armenia did not suffer although it relies heavily on Russian gas and specifically that very pipeline, due to its own storage facilities.

United States diplomats have also been in the region over the past month to discuss energy security, and the U.S. government-funded Millennium Challenge Georgia Fund is already in the "active implementation" stage of its work on the two-year North-South Gas Pipeline rehabilitation project. On March 15, U.S. Deputy of Energy Clay Sell visited Georgia and supported the prospect of additional volumes of gas from the Shah-Deniz pipeline being made available to Georgia.

Georgia's ongoing struggle to increase its energy independence has taken on international significance in light of Russia's increased oil and gas revenues and assertive use of that instrument. The Shah-Deniz pipeline is just the latest in a series of gas and oil pipeline projects that are criss-crossing the region.

The country has few options. While some rehabilitation in the electricity sector has improved service – Georgia is enjoying its second year of nearly 24 hour electricity throughout the country – gas supplies remain a problem. The country is well situated for hydropower, but that is somewhat limited by seasonal weather and is hampered by the need for overdue reforms. Attempts to boost the energy sector via privatization got off to a rocky start when the government had to renegotiate prices after the winning company, Energy-Pro, backed out of its original bid this summer.

The government's continued efforts to diversify energy supplies, particularly gas supplies, are laudable. However, there is a limit to what Tbilisi can do: on the one hand it wants to limit dependence on Russia, but on the other hand it cannot for political reasons become increasingly dependent on Iran. While Azerbaijan is a gas supplier, it does not currently have the supplies to be a major help for Georgia either. Turkey itself is looking for new pipelines to feed its need and bring gas to Central and Western Europe.

As long as the government continues to use the subject as political firewood, it will run the risk of disappointing Georgians with unrealistic

expectations. A realistic look at the geopolitical – and natural – resources could make the transitional period easier.

ETHNIC CHECHENS BLAME KAZAKH AUTHORITIES AND POLICE FOR COMPLACENCY

Marat Yermukanov

This year's Novruz festivities in Kazakhstan was overshadowed by a surge of large-scale violence between Kazakh and Chechen residents of two villages in the Enbekshiqazaq district of Almaty region. While officials go out of their way to dismiss the incident as an ordinary brawl, Chechen families are indignant over the reluctance by the police and local authorities to handle the conflict fairly.

Official accounts of the incident maintain that the fight between Kazakhs and Chechens was triggered by a quarrel between a local ethnic Chechen resident Mamakhanov and ethnic Kazakh Salimbayev on March 18. In the heat of the argument which erupted in a game saloon of the village of Malovodnoye, Mamakhanov reportedly shot a plastic bullet which wounded his opponent in the leg. The next day, around seventy Kazakhs of Malovodnoye armed with stones and iron rods marched to the neighboring village of Kazatkom where the Mamakhanovs lived. The outraged crowd started beating every Chechen in sight. But on the approach to Mamakhanov's house the vengeful mob was stopped by gunfire that killed two Kazakhs. The incensed crowd began throwing stones and Molotov cocktails at Chechen-owned cars and houses and reduced the Mamakhanov residence to ashes. The vandalizing crowd stabbed one Chechen to death; two other Chechens and four Kazakhs were hospitalized in critical condition and died later from severe injuries.

The violence lasted for two days, but the police and authorities, although managing to disperse the vandalizing crowd and taking the Mamakhanov

family to a safe place, according to local Chechens, did little to settle the conflict. They suspect the police for having an ethnically biased stance. Chechen residents, eye witnesses to the fight, said that when one of the Mamakhanov brothers saw policemen among the crowd of angry Kazakhs, he went out of his house to talk to them, hoping Kazakhs would not dare to beat him in the presence of the police force. Moreover, he served in the district court and saw familiar faces among the policemen. But as soon as he went out the violent mob turned on him. Police did not interfere as punches and kicks rained on the poor man. Another member of the Mamakhanov family, Amir, two hours before the tragic incident flew in from London where he studied, as it turned out, only to meet his death from the hands of the vandalized rowdies. His disfigured dead body was found near a gasoline station.

The Mamakhanovs, like many Caucasian and Central Asian ethnic groups, had an extended family. But only few of them survived the attack. One of the brothers, Sado Mamakhanov, told journalists the Mamakhanovs were aware of the impending threat long before the violence, and applied to the district police department for protection – but their requests remained unheeded. Some of the Chechens in Kazatkom suspect the violence against Mamakhanovs was a premeditated act tacitly supported by local authorities. But more discouraging is the attempt by locals to identify ethnic Chechens with criminal gangs. In the densely populated and impoverished multi-ethnic Enbekshiqazaq district, the Mamakhanovs are

among the few fortunate and well-off families who run a successful business. But many in Kazaatkom believe that the Mamakhanov's prosperity is based on ill-gotten money and theft. "They have grabbed our best land plots and dammed up the pond, denying us access to irrigation water", complained some villagers at a meeting which was designed to reconcile the conflicting sides. "Look how they get rich through cattle theft. When Chechens were deported from their land and came to Kazakhstan clothed in rags and tormented by hunger, we offered them food and shelter. Now they are paying back with ingratitude," said one of the Kazakh elders at the meeting.

Such extreme views are depressingly common among local Kazakhs and other ethnic groups. Immediately after the conflict erupted, Kazakhs demanded the removal of Chechens from the Enbekshiqazaq district within 24 hours. When elders tried to dissuade nationalists, they blocked

the highway running from Almaty to Zharkent. Special police forces managed to clear the highway for traffic within a few hours, but it will take immeasurably more time to restore peace and calm in the district. The Interior Ministry posted checkpoints around the village of Kazatkom, the police searches every vehicle for firearms, and non-locals are not allowed to enter the village.

But even the tightest security measures will not bring life in the district back to normal if adequate solutions for the settlement of interethnic clashes are not found. Unfortunately, Chechens and Kazakhs in Enbekshiqazaq district equally mistrust the police and authorities. Some Kazakh residents believe many high-ranking police officers and officials take bribes from Chechen criminals and drug dealers. Whether true or not, this lack of confidence in authorities is not conducive to a positive solution of ethnic conflicts, the threat of which is persistently underestimated by officials.

OPPOSITION LEADER APPOINTED PRIME MINISTER IN KYRGYZSTAN

Nurshat Ababakirov

On March 30, Almazbek Atambaev, one of the leaders of the opposition, assumed the premiership, which indicated President Kurmanbek Bakiev's willingness to make concessions: to build a coalitional government and review the much-criticized December 2006 constitution. However, the United Front and the coalition For Reforms refused to take up positions in the government, viewing it as a maneuver by the President and stressing its limited power to usher in constitutional reforms.

As President Bakiev's March 23 address on the second anniversary of the "Tulip Revolution" proved to be increasingly disappointing, it reinforced the belief by the radical opposition that

further talks were hopeless. However, Almazbek Atambaev, one of the opposition's leaders, discerned the president's openness for dialogue.

Becoming the third Prime Minister in two years, Almazbek Atambaev, the leader of the Social Democratic Party, referred to himself as a "bridge" between the government and the radical opposition. By promising to renew the government by 40 percent, Atambaev has already sacked three ministers: First Deputy Prime Minister Daniyar Usenov, Minister of Emergency Janysh Rustanbekov, and Minister of Health Shayloobek Niyazov. Although the dismissal of ministers with tarnished reputations, galvanized by public scandals, has contributed to some extent to alleviating public

discontent, the new Prime Minister has little choice but to form a government largely on the basis of the previous one.

With like-minded cohorts, the new Prime Minister created a moderate opposition bloc, the coalition For United Kyrgyzstan, which underscoring negotiation means for the sake of “securing peace and integrity” of the state. It includes Edil Baysalov, the leader of the Coalition for Democracy and Civil Society, Parliamentarian Azimbek Beknazarov, former minister for Foreign Affairs Roza Otunbaeva, and Parliamentarian Dooronbek Sadyrbaev. They react to the “categorical and peremptory” statements of the United Front led by Felix Kulov, and the reluctance of the members of the coalition For Reforms to build a “cohesive position for negotiations.”

Nonetheless, the steps taken by Almazbek Atambaev, a high-profile opposition leader, towards the president rendered criticism as well. Atambaev, being on the frontline of the opposition during the November protests that resulted in the amended constitution empowering the parliament, was remembered for labeling the president as a “political corpse,” pointing to his failed reaction to the demands of the public. He was also widely exemplified for voluntarily resigning from his position as Minister of Industry, Trade, and Tourism on April 21, 2006, in protest against the family rule and upsurge of criminals on the political scene. However, observers point to Atambaev’s edgy viewpoint towards Felix Kulov, who was able to magnetize many opposition politicians around himself, despite his unbending support for the president while in power, that made him seek independent talks with the president.

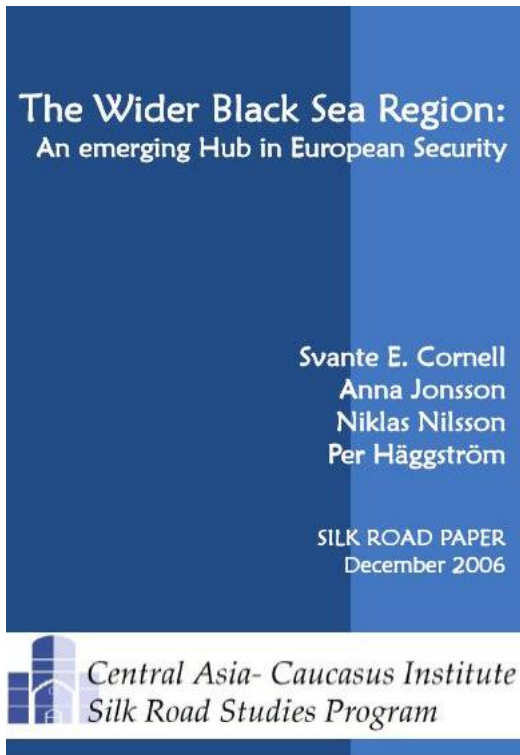
It seems that Prime Minister Atambaev is unlikely to satisfy the demands of the opposition and defuse the political confrontation. Firstly, as the more radical opposition argues, the Prime Minister has no power to decide upon political issues, pointing to the President Bakiev’s power over the security forces, whereas the Prime Minister is solely responsible for economic matters. Secondly, the current government cannot be coalitional, since the

opposition members from both the United Front and the movement For Reforms refused to take part in it, the reason for which was the belief that President Bakiev is giving up government seats in order to weaken the opposition and to prolong his time on power. Also, the argument goes that Atambaev’s support is weak, since he opted out from the movement For Reforms to negotiate with the president. “There, Atambaev represents only himself,” argues Felix Kulov.

On the other hand, Parliamentarian Omurbek Tekebaev, member of the United Front, who shared the chairmanship of the Movement For Reform with Atambaev, argues that the power of the new Prime Minister is tied to the opposition. He believes that the more pressing United Front the appears, the greater are the chances that Atambaev will have to force President Bakiev towards reforms. “If the mass protests in April are cancelled, the White House will not reckon with the new Prime Minister,” he contends.

The United Front insists that the coalition government should come along with early presidential elections, which should test the legitimacy of President Bakiev, and constitutional reforms. Its leader, Felix Kulov, has visited Moscow three times since he stepped down from the premiership. In his interview to a Russian news agency, he modestly hinted that these visits fortified his plans. As the cells representing the United Front prop up in different cities and rayons, supporters are attracted not only from among ordinary people, but also from local authorities.

The coalition For Reforms has already sent an “infallible” version of the November constitution to the president. If the president fails to consider it by April 5, the members of the coalition For Reforms say that they will have to join the United Front’s demand for early presidential elections at the mass protests, which should start on April 11. President Bakiev is also working on his version. Nevertheless, the latter’s attempt to hold a tight grip on centralized power is likely to be loosened this hot spring.



New Silk Road Paper!

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by Svante Cornell, Anna Jonsson, Niklas Nilsson, and Per Häggström

This 120-page paper analyzes emerging role of the Wider Black Sea Region in European Security, and European interests there. It provides concise analysis of major challenges in the region, and policy recommendations for Europe's future policies there.

This 120-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.

NEWS DIGEST

NATO FOCUSES ON UNRESOLVED GEORGIAN CONFLICTS

21 March

A Georgian delegation headed by Deputy Foreign Minister Giorgi Mandjgaladze met in Brussels on March 21 with senior NATO officials to discuss the implications for Georgia's membership aspirations of the unresolved conflicts with Abkhazia and South Ossetia. The NATO officials affirmed support for Georgia's territorial integrity and positively assessed Georgian initiatives aimed at resolving the conflicts peacefully and securing greater international participation in that peace process. (Caucasus Press)

TAJIK LEADER WANTS TO DROP RUSSIAN NAME

21 March

Tajikistan President Emomali Rakhmonov says he wants to change his name to drop the Russian-style ending that was attached to last names of people from ethnic groups across the Soviet Union. "In Soviet times, our names were documented according to the rules of the Russian language," Rakhmonov said Tuesday at a meeting with Tajik intellectuals on the eve of a traditional celebration of the vernal equinox. "I want to return to traditions and change my name to Emomalii Rakhmon," he said. (AP)

REGIONAL GOVERNOR INTIMIDATES VETERAN ARMENIAN OPPOSITIONIST

22 March

The Republican Party of Armenia (HHK) headed by Prime Minister Andranik Markarian refused on March 21 to launch an investigation into attempts last week by one of its members to prevent an opposition party leader from meeting with voters, RFE/RL's Armenian Service reported. Surik Khachatryan, governor of Syunik province in south-eastern Armenia, reportedly prevented former

Prime Minister and National Democratic Union Chairman Vazgen Manukian from meeting with voters and from spending the night in a hotel in the provincial capital, Kapan. Manukian on March 20 branded Khachatryan an "uneducated criminal" and said the population of Syunik "lives under a feudal system." Explaining the HHK's decision not to act on Manukian's allegations, Galust Sahakian, who heads the HHK parliament faction, advised Manukian to ask the police to do so. (RFE/RL)

U.S., AZERBAIJAN SIGN AGREEMENT ON SECURITY AND COOPERATION IN ENERGY SECTOR

22 March

The United States and Azerbaijan signed an agreement Thursday aimed at improving security and cooperation in the Caspian Sea region's energy sector. The State Department said the memorandum of understanding would establish "a high-level dialogue on energy security" co-chaired by the State Department and Azerbaijan's foreign ministry. State Department spokesman Sean McCormack said several similar agreements are in the works. The agreement was signed by Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and Azerbaijani Foreign Minister Elmar Mammadyarov. During a meeting with Mammadyarov, McCormack said Rice also would touch on other aspects of U.S.-Azerbaijani relations, "including on human rights. That will be at the top of the secretary's agenda." The agreement said the "dialogue will aim to deepen and broaden already strong cooperation among governments and companies to expand oil and gas production in Azerbaijan for export to global markets." It said particular emphasis would be on pipelines, specifically the Turkey-Greece-Italy gas line and potentially the Nabucco pipeline. That line, to cost more than \$6 billion if it is built, would pump gas from Iran and Azerbaijan through Turkey, Romania, Bulgaria and Hungary to Austria and

other European Union states. The EU is backing the project. The memorandum spoke of a growing U.S. partnership with Azerbaijan, a former Soviet republic, in energy, security and improving the former Soviet republic's democratic and market systems. (AP)

CHECHEN LEADER MEETS WITH COMPATRIOTS IN MOSCOW

22 March

Pro-Moscow Chechen Republic head Ramzan Kadyrov convened a meeting in Moscow on March 21 with prominent Moscow-based Chechen businessmen and political figures, *kommersant.ru* and *kavkaz.uzel.ru* reported. RussNeft President Mikhail Gutseriev, an Ingush, was invited but did not attend, "Nezavisimaya gazeta" noted on March 22. In the course of a 30-minute address, delivered in Chechen and without notes, Kadyrov described what has been accomplished under his supervision to rebuild Chechnya's war-shattered infrastructure, assuring his audience that while he does not need their help to continue that process, he "advises" them to demonstrate solidarity with their co-ethnics. Kadyrov further deplored negative Russian press coverage of developments in Chechnya, and again said the republic does not need a power-sharing agreement with the federal center. Speaking after Kadyrov, Dukvakha Abdurakhmanov, speaker of the lower chamber of the Chechen parliament, announced that the Chechen legislature has formally asked the Russian Constitutional Court to allocate 8 billion rubles (\$307.9 million) in compensation for those Chechens repressed under Stalin. (RFE/RL)

EX-PRESIDENT'S DAUGHTER REGISTERED AS CANDIDATE IN KYRGYZ BY-ELECTION

23 March

Bermet Akaeva, the daughter of former Kyrgyz President Akaev, has been officially registered as a candidate in an upcoming parliamentary by-election. Akaeva will face three other candidates in an April 29 vote in Kemin district. Akaeva's father is a native of Kemin. (akipress.org)

FORMER KYRGYZ PRIME MINISTER SAYS OPPOSITION MOVEMENT ENJOYS POLICE SUPPORT

23 March

Former Prime Minister Feliks Kulov, who now heads the opposition movement United Front For A

Worthy Future, told the Russian newspaper "Vremya novosti" in an interview published on March 22 that "the majority of Interior Ministry employees" support the front. "We are also supported by 800 retired police officers, and that's just in Bishkek and Chuy provinces," Kulov added. The group plans to hold a demonstration in Bishkek on April 11 calling for reforms. Kulov said that he is sure that the authorities "will not decide to use force." He warned, however, paraphrasing a line by the poet Rasul Gamzatov, "If there's a shot from a pistol, they'll get in return a shot from a cannon. Because to shoot at the people will be tantamount to signing their own death sentence." (RFE/RL)

KYRGYZ PRESIDENT SAYS TROOPS WILL NOT FIRE ON DEMONSTRATORS BUT PROMISES TO KEEP ORDER

23 March

In an interview published in "Vremya novosti" on March 22, President Kurmanbek Bakiyev ruled out the use of force against protesters, but warned that the authorities will maintain order. "We learned a lot from the lessons of Aksy [where six demonstrators died in 2002], and we will never use force against peaceful people," Bakiyev said. "At the same time, we will never allow disturbances and riots. If someone decides to do that, they will receive a sharp pushback." Bakiyev also stressed that it is not too late for negotiations. "I'm ready to discuss any topic, including constitutional reform," he said. (RFE/RL)

GEORGIAN PRESIDENT SNUBS AZERBAIJANI MINORITY

23 March

Mikheil Saakashvili cancelled at the last minute on March 22 a planned visit to those districts of Georgia south of Tbilisi where the population is overwhelmingly Azerbaijani, and instead traveled to Armenia for a private visit to spend the day skiing with his Armenian counterpart Robert Kocharian at the resort of Tsakhkadzor. Saakashvili was to have met with representatives of Georgia's 500,000-strong Azeri minority to congratulate them in connection with the Nourouz spring holiday. (RFE/RL)

KYRGYZ LEGISLATORS REJECT OFFICIAL STATUS FOR UZBEK LANGUAGE

26 March

Kyrgyzstan's parliament voted on March 23 not to grant the Uzbek language official status in those parts of Kyrgyzstan where large numbers of Uzbek

speakers are concentrated. A bill to give the Uzbek language official status in such areas had been proposed by Qodirjon Botirov, an ethnic Uzbek lawmaker from Jalal-Abad. The bill drew only 29 votes, with 38 needed to pass. (RFE/RL)

FSB, PRO-MOSCOW CHECHEN LEADER IMPLICATED IN POLITKOVSKAYA KILLING

26 March

Five former members of the now disbanded Goret's armed unit headed by Movladi Baysarov have accused pro-Moscow Chechen administration head Ramzan Kadyrov of sending three of their former colleagues to Moscow to kill Russian journalist Anna Politkovskaya, and of having them murdered upon their return to Chechnya. In a 1,200-word missive sent to Daymohk and Chechenews and reposted on March 23 by chechenpress.org, the five outlined Baysarov's collaboration with the GRU and the Russian 58th Army beginning in 1996, and his estrangement from Kadyrov after Kadyrov's father's death in a terrorist attack in

May 2004. They alleged that Kadyrov personally selected three of their colleagues and dispatched them to Moscow, where they murdered Politkovskaya on orders from an FSB Colonel identified as Igor Dranets. On their return to Chechnya, the three men reported personally to Kadyrov on their mission, after which they were purportedly executed by members of Kadyrov's security guard. Baysarov protested the killing of his men and then left for Moscow, where he was gunned down in the street on November 18 by police sent by Kadyrov from Grozny. (RFE/RL)

INGUSHETIAN PRESIDENT'S RELATIVE ABDUCTED

26 March

Four Russian-speaking armed men snatched Uruskhan Zyazikov, a 79-year-old relative of Ingushetian President Murat Zyazikov, as he was heading with two relatives to the mosque in Nazran for Friday prayers on March 23, regnum.ru and kommersant.ru reported on March 23 and 24, respectively. The reasons for the abduction are unclear. President Zyazikov's elderly father-in-law, Magomed Chakhkiyev, was similarly abducted one year ago but released after two months, apparently after payment of a sizeable ransom. (RFE/RL)

ARMENIAN PRIME MINISTER DIES

26 March

Andranik Markarian, who served as Armenian prime minister since May 2000, died of a heart attack in Yerevan on March 25 at the age of 55, Armenian media reported. Markarian began his political career in the late 1960s as a member of the clandestine National Unity Party (AMK) and was sentenced in 1974 to two years' imprisonment on charges of anti-Soviet agitation and propaganda. In 1992, Markarian joined the Republican Party of Armenia (HHK), the successor party to the AMK, and became its chairman in 1997. Markarian was elected a parliament deputy in 1995, and again in 1999; President Robert Kocharian named him prime minister in May 2000. In that capacity, he presided over a period of double-digit economic growth, but consistently adopted a tough line on such key issues as the Karabakh conflict and Armenian-Turkish relations. He also, as parliament speaker Tigran Torosian told RFE/RL's Armenian Service on March 25, worked to bring closer adherents of diverging strategies within the leadership. Accepting the resignation of the cabinet on March 26, President Kocharian paid tribute to Markarian as "a colleague and friend" and as "a moderate, tolerant, and decent person." (RFE/RL)

ARMENIAN GOVERNMENT STEPS DOWN

26 March

Armenia's government has resigned after Prime Minister Andronik Margarian's death, in line with the constitution. Final formalities related to the Cabinet's resignation were settled at an emergency Cabinet meeting chaired by President Robert Kocharian on Monday, sources in the Republican Party told Interfax.

The Republican Party controls the post of prime minister and six ministerial portfolios. (Interfax)

TWO GEORGIAN POLICE OFFICERS KILLED IN SOUTH OSSETIA

26 March

Two Georgian police officers died on March 25 when their patrol car came under fire near the village of Didmukha, some 20 kilometers from the South Ossetian capital, Tskhinvali. The Georgian Ministry for Conflict Resolution identified the attackers as members of an illegal militant group and claimed the wounded Georgians were killed execution-style by a shot to the head, according to Interfax. But South Ossetian Interior Minister Mikhail Mindzayev was quoted by kavkaz-uzel.ru as saying South Ossetian

police only opened fire when the Georgian patrol car ignored their efforts to flag it down. On March 26, Russian Ambassador to Georgia Vyacheslav Kovalenko expressed profound regret at the killings. Kovalenko reportedly added that it is time "to try to restore confidence between the two states -- I say the two states, not the two peoples," without specifying whether he indeed meant Georgia and the republic of South Ossetia, which is not recognized as an independent state. (RFE/RL)

TAJIKISTAN LEADER: THE PARTY'S OVER

27 March

President Emomalii Rakhmon has banned high school graduation parties in this largely Muslim Central Asian nation, the latest in a string of edicts on Tajik cultural and social life. Rakhmon said he was concerned about the "pompous" and "excessive luxury" of school festivities, according to his press service. Earlier, he ordered a ban on the use of cell phones and private cars at high schools. In recent years, end-of-the-year graduation celebrations have become elaborate and lavish, with wealthy families buying teenagers new dresses and suits, and renting limousines, restaurants and ballrooms for parties — a trend made all the more jarring given Tajikistan's widespread poverty. (AP)

IRAN MAKES FIRST PAYMENT OF YEAR ON BUSHEHR

27 March

Sergei Novikov, who is a spokesman for the Federal Atomic Energy Agency (Rosatom), said on March 26 that Iran recently made its first payment since late 2006 toward financing the Russian-built Bushehr nuclear power plant, Russian news agencies reported. He added that the payment is just over half of one of the monthly installments Iran is supposed to be paying. Russian officials recently said that Iran is well behind in its payments. They added that consequently it will not be possible to meet the original deadlines for the first fuel deliveries to take place in March and for the plant to begin operations in September. Iran denies that it is behind in payments and suggests that Russia has an unspecified political motive for holding up construction. About 2,000 Russian engineers and workers are involved in the Bushehr project. (RFE/RL)

TAJIK LEADER BACKTRACKS ON BABIES' NAME CHANGE

28 March

Tajik President Imomali Rakhmonov has backtracked on his order that parents should give new-born babies only Persian names. In power in his Central Asian state since 1992, the president told a government meeting this week that people should drop Slavic endings of surnames, such as -ov, when registering their babies. His spokesman said on Wednesday it was just a recommendation even though Rakhmonov himself now wanted to be known as Rakhmon. "The president's initiatives are just recommendations, and citizens have the right to choose themselves whether they want to keep an old surname or change it, and how to name their children," his spokesman Abdufattokh Sharipov said. "The president has announced plans to change his name to a traditional one, which is basically his personal business, and he did not mean to impose his will on the whole country." Sharipov added: "I personally, for example, have not decided whether I will change my surname." Slavic endings like -ov were added by many people across the five ex-Soviet republics of Central Asia during Russian imperial rule and later under the Soviet Union. Tajiks speak a dialect of Farsi. The Tajik leader will technically remain "Rakhmonov" until he registers his name officially, but the presidential Web site and the state news agency Khovar have already switched to his new name. (Reuters)

BAKIYEV REFUSES TO ACCEPT RESIGNATION OF FIVE MINISTERS

28 March

Kyrgyz President Kurmanbek Bakiyev has refused to accept the resignation of the country's five Cabinet members, the head of state's press service told Interfax. "President of Kyrgyzstan Kurmanbek Bakiyev did not accept the resignation of these five Cabinet members at a meeting with members of the government on Wednesday," it said. Kyrgyz Prime Minister Azim Isabekov told journalists earlier today he had accepted the resignation of First Deputy Prime Minister Daniyar Usenov, Emergency Situations Minister Dzhanys Rustenbekov, Economic Development and Trade Minister Sabyrbek Moldokulov, Healthcare Minister Shailobek Niyazov and government executive office chief Tynychbek Tabyldiyev. (Interfax)

RUSSIA WILL BE THE FIRST TO RECOGNIZE ABKHAZIA - BAGAPSH

28 March

Russia will be the first country to recognize Abkhazia's independence, Sergei Bagapsh, the president of this breakaway republic, said. "You know perfectly well who will recognize [Abkhazia] - Russia and the countries close to us," Bagapsh said at a news conference at Interfax in Moscow on Wednesday. "We don't expect recognition to come soon, taking the opinion of the world community into account. But the process is underway, which is the main thing. Recognition by Russia, Belarus and several other countries that know Abkhazia would suffice at this stage," he said. "We'll establish relations based on agreements and then we'll develop them and promote our economy faster," Bagapsh said. (Interfax)

GAMSAKHURDIA'S REMAINS BROUGHT TO TBILISI

28 March

The remains of Zviad Gamsakhurdia, Georgia's first post-Soviet president, were brought to Tbilisi from the Verkhny Lars border checkpoint early on Wednesday. A motorcade, carrying Gamsakhurdia's relatives and members of a reburial commission, brought Gamsakhurdia's remains to the family's home in Tbilisi. Gamsakhurdia is to be buried on Saturday near the grave of his father, the prominent Georgian writer Konstantin Gamsakhurdia, in the courtyard of his home in Tbilisi by decision of the family, which is against a new identification procedure, Rustavi-2 television reported on Wednesday morning. The state commission for reburying Gamsakhurdia's remains made the decision on Tuesday evening to bury the remains of the first Georgian president in a pantheon for distinguished public figures in Tbilisi and place the coffin at the St. Trinity Cathedral for a memorial public service. (Interfax)

AZERBAIJAN TO INCREASE GAS, OIL PRODUCTION

29 March

Azerbaijan will increase annual oil production to 476 million barrels and natural gas production to 30 billion cubic meters by 2010, its energy minister said. Natiq Aliyev said oil production will double from the nearly 237 million barrels produced last year, The Moscow Times reports. He said the bulk will come from increased production at the Azeri-Chirag-Guneshli oilfield in the Caspian Sea. The Shah Deniz project will make up most of the increase in natural gas, Aliyev said. Azerbaijan

added to the global oil market when the \$4 billion Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline opened last year, sending Caspian crude to markets in the West. The project was supported since it sends non-Middle East oil to market, bypassing Russia. Aliyev said the country will soon take control of the Azerbaijan Gas Supply Co. from Norway's Statoil, the current operator. Part of that will include Shah Deniz gas sent to market from a new pipeline from Baku to Erzerum, Turkey, through Georgia. Gas supplies from Shah Deniz are soon expected to start flowing through a newly constructed parallel gas pipeline from Baku via Georgia to Erzerum in eastern Turkey. Aliyev said Azerbaijan would eventually control marketing and sales of gas from the Shah Deniz. "Azerbaijan itself will conduct all talks on gas supplies to the European markets," Aliyev said. (UPI)

KYRGYZ PREMIER UNEXPECTEDLY RESIGNS

29 March

One day after President Kurmanbek Bakiyev blocked his attempt to sack five ministers, Azim Isabekov resigned on March 29, RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service reported. Bakiyev publicly rejected Isabekov's decision to fire the ministers. Bakiyev quickly accepted Isabekov's resignation and nominated Almaz Atambaev, the leader of the Social Democratic Party and a member of the new For A United Kyrgyzstan opposition movement, to replace Isabekov. Former Foreign Minister Roza Otunbaeva, also a member of that movement, welcomed Atambaev's appointment, saying: "Atambaev is a compromise figure and a representative of the opposition. I believe that he will try to resolve all the major issues on our agenda. Right now, we say that the main thing is to establish a coalition government while, at the same time, carrying out constitutional reforms." But two other opposition movements, For Reforms and the United Front For A Worthy Future For Kyrgyzstan, said they will not participate in a coalition government. Parliament must vote whether to confirm Atambaev's appointment. (RFE/RL)

NGO SAYS RUSSIA ABUSED GUANTANAMO DETAINEES

29 March

The New York-based nongovernmental organization Human Rights Watch (HRW) said in

a report entitled the "Stamp of Guantanamo," which was released on March 29, that seven citizens of the Russian Federation were beaten and abused by Russian authorities in 2004, after the U.S. authorities returned them to their home country, according to HRW's website (<http://www.hrw.org>). U.S. forces detained the men in Afghanistan in 2002 and held them at the Guantanamo detention center for two years. HRW representatives interviewed three of the former inmates and talked to the families and lawyers of all seven men in preparing the 43-page report. The study criticized the U.S. government's policy of repatriating suspects to countries with poor human rights records, such as Russia, on the basis of "diplomatic assurances" that the returnees would not be abused. HRW Associate Director Carroll Bogert said in a statement that "what happened to the former detainees is pretty standard for a lot of suspects in police custody in Russia. But that's just the point. The U.S. government knew these men would likely be tortured and sent them back to Russia anyway." (RFE/RL)

THOUSANDS PAY LAST RESPECTS TO DECEASED ARMENIAN PREMIER

29 March

Thousands of people filed past the coffin of deceased Prime Minister Andranik Markarian in Yerevan's Opera House on March 28, RFE/RL's Armenian Service reported. Markarian was buried later the same day at the Pantheon following a prayer service conducted by Catholicos Garegin II. Pro-government and opposition politicians paid tribute to Markarian, stressing his "kindness" and unique ability to act as a bridge between rival political factions. Markarian died of heart failure on March 25 at the age of 55. Dignitaries from a dozen countries attended his funeral, including U.S. Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Matthew Bryza, Georgian Prime Minister Zurab Noghaideli, Russian Transportation Minister Igor Levitin, and Turkish Ambassador to Georgia Ertan Tezgor. (RFE/RL)

RUSSIA BLOCKS TOUGH UN RESOLUTION ON IRAN'S DETENTION OF BRITONS

30 March

Russia blocked British attempts in the UN Security Council on March 29 to gain approval for a tough resolution calling on Iran to release immediately the 15 British sailors and marines it detained recently,

international media reported on March 30 (see Iran below). Russia also opposed British proposals for the resolution to state that the 15 were seized in Iraqi waters and to "deplore" the seizure. Russian Ambassador to the UN Vitaly Churkin said that Moscow could not accept such language. In the end, the council approved a text expressing only "grave concern" for the detention. On March 29, Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov warned the United States against "increasing tensions" in the Persian Gulf through its planned military exercises there. Lavrov stressed that such maneuvers would only make an unstable situation worse. Rajab Safarov, who heads Russia's Center for Contemporary Iranian Studies, wrote in the daily "Vremya novostei" of March 29 that Washington seeks to humiliate Tehran diplomatically. He added, however, that neither the United States nor Iran has any interest in war breaking out. The daily "Nezavisimaya gazeta" wrote on March 29 that "Russia could profit handsomely from a war in the Persian Gulf" and noted that recent rumors of an U.S.-Iranian armed clash there triggered a rapid rise in oil prices. The daily pointed out that "calculating Russia's dividends from a [U.S.] war with Iran is actually easy. Russian oil and petroleum-product exports amount to nearly 7 million barrels a day. A price rise of just \$10 per barrel will earn Russia \$25 billion a year. The lion's share of the revenues will go to the federal budget and thus enable the government to compensate for failing to meet tax-collection targets...in the first two months of this year." In related news, President Vladimir Putin on March 29 sent a message to the Arab League summit in Saudi Arabia, in which he criticized unspecified attempts to resolve Middle East problems "unilaterally" and by "using force," Russian news agencies reported. Putin also said he is "deeply concerned" over the situation in Iraq and called for a deadline on the presence of foreign troops there in order to avert a civil war. (RFE/RL)

ARMENIAN OPPOSITION PARTY ANNOUNCES ELECTION BOYCOTT

30 March

The leader of the small opposition Liberal Progressive Party (AAK), Hovannes Hovannisian, announced on March 29 that the party will boycott the May 12 parliamentary elections, RFE/RL's Armenian Service reported. A former parliamentarian, Hovannisian explained that because the coming election will "not be free and

fair," AAK plans to focus on organizing antigovernment demonstrations in the wake of the ballot. But he also admitted that his party will be unable to meet the 5 percent minimum threshold required for attaining seats in the new parliament. He attributed that shortcoming more to "vote rigging" in the system of proportional representation than to any lack of popularity of himself or his party. The announcement of an election boycott follows a similar move by the larger, more influential opposition National Democratic Union (AZhM), early this month after the breakdown of talks over the formation of an opposition electoral alliance. (RFE/RL)

ARMENIAN FOREIGN MINISTRY ISSUES CAUTIOUS WELCOME FOR TURKISH OVERTURE

30 March

In a statement from Yerevan, Armenian Foreign Ministry spokesman Vladimir Karapetian cautiously welcomed on March 29 the inauguration of a newly renovated ancient Armenian church by the Turkish authorities, but noted that Turkey needs to do more to improve Turkish-Armenian relations, RFE/RL's Armenian Service reported. Karapetian specifically pointed to the decision by the Turkish authorities to designate the 10th-century Armenian church as a historical museum rather than as a place of worship. He further stated that the event was timed to distract attention away from the current debate in the U.S. Congress over official recognition of the Armenian genocide. The Turkish government held an inauguration ceremony on March 29 to mark the opening of the recently restored Akhtamar Church, located on the island of Akhtamar in eastern Turkey's Lake Van, and was attended by senior Turkish officials, leaders of Turkey's Armenian community, and an Armenian state delegation led by Deputy Culture Minister Gagik Gyurjian. (RFE/RL)

KADYROV PERFORMS UMRAH, RETURNS HOME FROM SAUDI ARABIA

1 April

Chechen President Ramzan Kadyrov arrived to Mineralniye Vody on Saturday morning after performing the Umrah, or the lesser Hajj, to Mecca, Medina and other sacred Muslim sites. At the airport of Medina Kadyrov was seen off by the governor of the province and the chief of the Royal Protocol. "The pilgrimage has reasserted my

conviction that progress, stability and economic and social development are only possible if the moral principles, laid down in all religions, are profoundly observed," Kadyrov told Interfax. "Christianity and Islam require that believers be fair and humane. It would be impossible to talk about justice if these principles were disregarded," he said. He also said that while visiting the holy sites, he "prayed to Allah that he send prosperity, wellbeing and greatness to Russia, as Chechnya is an integral part of the Russian state." Kadyrov announced that after his upcoming inauguration the government would step down. "Government replacements will depend on each minister's previous performance and talent to deal with the complex tasks of accelerated economic and social development," he said. (Interfax)

GUAM SUBMITS DRAFT RESOLUTION ON FROZEN CONFLICTS TO UN

2 April

The UN General Assembly is expected to debate in April a draft resolution of the regional organization GUAM [Georgia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan and Moldova] on ways to settle "frozen" conflicts, GUAM General Secretary and Georgia's First Deputy Foreign Minister Valery Chechelashvili said. "International support for the principle of the territorial integrity of states with frozen conflicts, within their internationally recognized borders, is the key point of the draft. This principle must be the cornerstone in settling any conflict," Chechelashvili said in an interview with the Nezavisimaya Gazeta published on Monday. He said GUAM member-states continue weighing a plan to form a joint peacekeeping force. "Preparations are under way, although this project is only one aspect of cooperation within GUAM," Chechelashvili said. The GUAM general secretary said that the plan to form a joint peacekeeping force was not "a counterbalance to Russia." "This idea was prompted by the organization's plans to create conditions and guarantees, jointly with our partners, for the peaceful settlement of conflicts. Besides, we will not be able to work in this area without the mandate of authoritative international organizations - the UN, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, and the European Union," he said. "GUAM has no anti-Russian bias," he added. (Interfax)

SERZH SARKISIAN APPOINTED ARMENIAN PM

4 April

Armenian President Robert Kocharian has appointed Serzh Sarkisian prime minister, discharging him from his duties as defense minister and secretary of the country's Security Council, the presidential press service said on Wednesday. Sarkisian heads the Republican Party, which controls the seat of prime minister under a coalition agreement in parliament. In his capacity as premier, Sarkisian succeeds Andranik Margarian, who died recently. The next parliamentary elections are scheduled for May 12. (Interfax)

KAZAKHSTAN INTERESTED IN BURGAS-ALEXANDROPOULOS PROJECT

4 April

Kazakhstan has interest in the Burgas-Alexandroupolis oil pipeline project, Kazakh Minister of Energy and Mineral Resources

Baktykozha Izmukhambetov said. He told reporters in Baku on Wednesday that Kazakhstan's stake would depend on what conditions were proposed to it. "It can happen that we buy half of 49 percent of the joint Greek and Bulgarian stake, and maybe we shall hold negotiations on going shares in Russia's stake," Izmukhambetov said. Under an intergovernmental agreement, the International Project Company will own the Burgas-Alexandroupolis oil pipeline. The company will be set up by the parties in the project with Russia having a 51 percent stake, Bulgaria 24.5 percent and Greece 24.5 percent. The document reserves a possibility of subsequent complete or partial disposal of a stake in favor of oil companies interested in participating in the International Project Company. (Itar-Tass)

