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EDITORIAL PRINCIPLES

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

The Analyst aims to provide our industrious and engaged audience with a singular and reliable assessment of events and trends in the region written in an analytical tone rather than a polemical one. *Analyst* articles reflect the fact that we have a diverse international audience. While this should not affect what author's write about or their conclusions, this does affect the tone of articles. Analyst articles focus on a newsworthy topic, engage central issues of the latest breaking news from the region and are backed by solid evidence. Each 700-900 word analytical article must offer a concise and authoritative statement of the event or issue in question. An article must provide relevant, precise and authoritative background information. It also must offer a sober and analytical judgment of the issue as well as a clinical evaluation of the importance of the event. Authors must cite facts of controversial nature to the Editor who may contact other experts to confirm claims. Since *Analyst* articles are based on solid evidence, rather than rumors or conjecture, they prove to be reliable sources of information on the region. By offering balanced and objective analysis while keeping clear of inflammatory rhetoric, The Analyst does more to inform our international readership on all sides of the issues.

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Analytical Articles:

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

Analytical article structure:

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

BACKGROUND: 200-300 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: 200-300 words of analysis of the ramifications of this event or issue, including where applicable, implications for the local people's future.

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

Specifications for Field Reports:

Field Reports focus on a particular news event and what local people think about the event, or about the work of an NGO. Field Reports address the implications the event or activity analyzed has for peoples' lives and their communities. Field Reports do not have the rigid structure of Analytical Articles, and are shorter in length, averaging ca. 500-700 words.

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

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THE EXPANSION OF CACO: A RUSSIAN OFFENSIVE OR A CENTRAL ASIAN SURRENDER?

Farkhad Tolipov

On 18 October 2004 in Tajikistan's capital Dushanbe, an event took place that can be considered a turning point in the evolution of Central Asian community. This was the summit of the "Central Asian Cooperation Organization" (CACO). Two facts of that event attract special attention: the signing by the Russian President Vladimir Putin of a Protocol on Russia's joining CACO, and the official opening of the Russian military base in Tajikistan.

BACKGROUND: Only days after the dismantlement of Soviet Union, the five newly independent Central Asian states – Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan – launched their own re-unification experiment. (After the proclamation of its neutrality, Turkmenistan discontinued participation in the Central Asian summits, though it did not withdraw officially). They slowly attempted to advance their own Commonwealth vis-à-vis the CIS and applied different titles to their formation. Initially, in 1991, it was the Central Asian Commonwealth, later, in 1994, it became Central Asian Economic Community, and in the 2001/2002 summits it acquired the current name of the Central Asian Cooperation Organization.

From the outset of independence, the region has been the object of increased interest of regional and external powers. The geopolitical transformation that is underway in Central Asia changed the status-quo in this part of the world in two principle ways, seemingly mutually contradictory: Russia's geopolitical status in the region diminished and has been put into question. Meanwhile, America's

political and military presence in the region has become an undeniable reality which could become protracted and long-term.

This region became an area of the U.S. Central Command's responsibility. Meanwhile, the launch of the Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan in October 2001 followed by the establishment of the U.S. military bases in Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan became a new turning point in the post-Soviet developments in Central Asia. One of the major signs of the fundamental foreign policy diversification of Central Asian states was the establishment of a strategic partnership between Uzbekistan and the U.S. in March 2002. This unprecedented event in their relations will undoubtedly have systemic geopolitical implications.

Against this background, anxiety has been growing in Russian political and military circles about Moscow's possible loss of influence in the region in the near or mid-term future.

Newly independent Central Asia finds itself very entangled. Whose zone of influence, whose zone of

dominance and whose zone of responsibility is it now? Is this a zone of its own?

IMPLICATIONS: Russia's entry into CACO was suggested by Uzbekistan at the May 2004 summit of this organization. At the time, this was justified by the recognition of the existence of vital Russian interests in the region and commonality between them and those of the states of the region. However, the Dushanbe political event illustrated something else. Central Asians failed to solve their numerous regional problems; tension or mistrust between and among them increase; and they need someone to reconcile or mediate them. This was one of the main messages of the summit in Tajikistan. The other message was that the long-term, strengthened and extended American military presence in Central Asia cannot be tolerated by Russia. Neither message is justifiable, however.

The widespread opinion that Russia will undertake any efforts to compensate/balance increasing American military presence is grounded on a miscalculation of the role of Central Asian countries themselves. Inviting the U.S. was in no way an anti-Russian act on their part simply because any challenge to Russia from the territory of Central Asia will, in turn, challenge the security of the very Central Asian states as a result of the Russian response. Not America but Central Asia would be the target of Russian counteraction with respect to any unfriendly action out of the territory of Central Asia. All sides are well aware of this circumstance. That's why the stereotypical interpretation and justification of Russian efforts regarding its bases and membership in CACO, reflected in the above mentioned messages, misleads public opinion and the international community.

Russia created its base in Tajikistan as if it had not existed or as if no other foreign (U.S.) bases existed in the region to provide security assistance. It is no less unilateral than was, according to erroneous explanations by some Russian officials and experts, the establishment of the American bases. Of course, the U.S. could also apply for membership in CACO.

The fact is that all sides found themselves preoccupied with the old but inadequate balance of power model of international relations.

Parallel to these events, in June 2004, right before the SCO summit in Tashkent, Uzbekistan's and Russia's presidents signed an agreement on strategic partnership. Such a rapid turn in the Uzbekistan's foreign policy was nothing but an element in the chain of events that brought Russia into CACO. From now on Uzbekistan is a strategic partner of the former (or current) rivals: the U.S. and Russia.

Many were inclined to explain this in the following way: Uzbekistan as a "subcontractor" expected rewards in return for its support of the U.S. in Afghanistan and Iraq. The US nevertheless turned to excessive criticism of Uzbekistan over its lack of democratic reforms and human rights, and gave very little in terms of expected response for providing an air base and over-flight rights for the operation in Afghanistan. In this sense, it remains to be determined which partnership – the Uzbek-US or Uzbek-Russian – is really strategic.

Whichever the case, Russia seems to return to its strategic position in Central Asia. The main question is whether this means only the restoration of the Russian strategic dominance there, or the responsible provision of real security assistance to the five regional five countries. America has so far kept a low profile in Central Asia. The dominant analytical view about the possible U.S. posture in the region has stemmed so far from the traditional perception that it is a Russian sphere of influence and even dominance. This echoes a similar approach of three years ago, that any American undertakings in Central Asia should definitely be adjusted with the Russians.

CONCLUSIONS: Russia's entering into CACO as a full-fledged member and the opening of its military base in Tajikistan was in fact not a Russian offensive but rather a Central Asian surrender. Indeed, no one forced them to do so. There is no doubt that Russian active participation in Central Asian affairs was

needed and long expected. So was the Uzbek-Russian rapprochement. But this is not yet a ground to distort the geographical composition and political structure of a solely Central Asian cooperation organization. Unfortunately, the states of the region were able to demonstrate neither their full independence nor their own long awaited unity, but instead demonstrated their need for a the mediator in the conflict-prone regional affairs, undermining and

overlooking thereby the self-value of the integration of solely Central Asian countries.

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A YEAR PAST GEORGIA'S ROSE REVOLUTION: A TURNING POINT IN RUSSIA'S CAUCASIAN STRATEGY?

Khatuna Salukvadze

As a year has passed since Georgia's dramatic Rose Revolution, there is a notably different mindset as well as circumstances in the country. By putting territorial integrity at the top of the agenda, de-frosting the South Ossetian conflict and working its way toward NATO membership, President Saakashvili's government has defined explicitly assertive policies, particularly in relationship with Russia. Simultaneously, while Abkhazia's vote for detachment from Russian domination and the surprising outcome of Ukraine's presidential race intensify Russia's already burdensome agenda in the region, there is a recognition in official Moscow that may lead to understanding of Russia's appropriate role in post-Soviet affairs.

BACKGROUND: Coinciding with the continual developments in Georgia's secessionist regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, bold steps in military cooperation with NATO and the U.S. mark the first anniversary of Georgia's Rose Revolution.

Just a day before the U.S. presidential election, George W. Bush sent a letter to President Mikheil Saakashvili thanking Georgia for its decision to boost its support for coalition forces in Iraq by deploying more troops dramatically, increasing the total number to 850. Following the

assessment of a U.S. military mission currently working in Georgia, the U.S. will launch a new military assistance program for the Georgian armed forces.

Georgian sentiments are running high about possible NATO membership. NATO Secretary General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer's visit on November 4 reiterated the Alliance's support granted by the adoption of Georgia's Individual Partnership Action Plan (IPAP) in growing closer with the Alliance. Georgia is the first country among the partner nations of NATO to

have formed such a document with the Alliance; the successful implementation of this two-year plan could lead to the working process toward NATO membership beginning as early as in 2007. Another small but telling change is the opening of a NATO Representation office in Tbilisi which will represent the Alliance in the entire South Caucasian region.

Meanwhile, the humiliating defeat of Russia's hand-picked candidate in the self-declared Abkhaz elections came as a shock to Moscow's political circles, who took for granted that Abkhazia would let them deliver a pro-Russian scenario for this de-facto republic regardless of Abkhaz interests. While President-elect Sergey Bagapsh is getting ready to be sworn into office on December 7 amidst galvanizing unrest, Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov made a rather reluctant recognition by saying that Russia supports Georgia's territorial integrity but that the resolution of conflicts should not be over-accelerated.

In Ukraine, after the first round of presidential race there is inescapable evidence that Russia's support for Viktor Yanukovich against his pro-western opponent did help him win popular support. If opposition leader Viktor Yushchenko eventually prevails in Ukraine as the crisis unfolds, the entire geopolitical reality of the region will be significantly altered.

Finally, a long-awaited meeting between Georgian Prime Minister Zurab Zhvania and South Ossetian leader Edard Kokoiti has also been prompted by the fact that Georgia recently cracked down on smuggling through the South Ossetian enclave. The two sides agreed on demilitarization of the conflict zone by November 20.

IMPLICATIONS: All these are daunting developments for Moscow. Russia's policy-engineers were taken aback by fact that the desire of de-facto republic to be separated from Georgia

does not equal a wish for integration with Russia. Whether the current voting mindset might spill over into confidence-building towards Georgia remains to be seen. One thing is certain, however: President-elect Bagapsh's electoral base turned heavily on opposition to Russian-backed candidate, and will be pressing into a direction that will not necessarily go in tone with Russia's future strategy for the region. In South Ossetia, the removal of systematic and large-scale smuggling mechanisms seemingly counters Russia's meddling in the conflict zone and may heavily influence the economy of this de-facto entity.

President Saakashvili is determined to build a consensus around the economic and military stability of the country; return to the pre-revolution status quo is no longer acceptable. The current leadership clearly seems to have the political will to fight corruption and carry out reforms, and progress is evident specifically in the building of the armed forces where U.S. assistance plays a crucial role. The decisive re-election of President Bush is likely only to embolden U.S. foreign policy and re-invigorate America's strategy for the region, making it highly unlikely that U.S. will distance itself from Georgia, which on a per capita basis is the second largest recipient of U.S. aid. As Georgia's implementation of the NATO IPAP begins, the question of the withdrawal of Russian military bases from Georgia will surface, and Moscow is likely to have to contend with a prospective NATO presence in Georgia over the next decade.

With its own troubled share of the Caucasus, Russia is keen to keep stability in Chechnya as well as its special relationship with Armenia. All this while gratifying self-interest by interfering in Georgia has become a rather ambitious agenda for Russia. The biggest question now may be about what parts of that agenda official Moscow will choose to pursue. The challenge is to choose wisely.

CONCLUSIONS: President Saakashvili emerges determined to use his presidency to reintegrate Georgia's secessionist parts back into a broad federal structure by the means of economic projects. While for Georgia, the effect on the ground will depend on direct negotiation processes with de-facto authorities, a more constructive Russian position in the Caucasus is essential. With Russia's trademark instruments seemingly failed in Abkhaz and Ukrainian elections, Russia may want to rethink its traditional tools for the region. With Abkhazia's apparent refusal to cede to Moscow's my-way-or-

the-highway domination, Russian influence in South Caucasus is diminishing. Moscow can either continue to pursue the same strategy for conceivable future, or look to more constructive options in the region.

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TURKMENISTAN AND UZBEKISTAN – FRIENDS INDEED OR FRIENDS IN NEED?

Maral Madi

Four years have passed since the presidents of Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan last met. Analysis of the countries' relations in the past four years indicate that accumulated problems reached a boiling point and thus needed to be settled, especially in the water sharing and hydrocarbon sectors. Both countries are far from liberal and their power over their respective populations relies largely on force. Thus a shortage of natural resources resulting from unequal division could lead to unnecessary tension in countries seeking to prevent challenges to power. This rapprochement between Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan could be seen as dictated by pressing issues, but could also have broader implications, by bringing Turkmenistan into regional politics.

BACKGROUND: On November 19, 2004, Turkmen President Saparmurat Niyazov paid an official visit to Uzbekistan at the invitation of President Islam Karimov. Niyazov landed not in Tashkent, but in Bukhara which signaled the locality of the issues discussed. Their last meeting took place in September 2000, and subsequently relations became increasingly tense, given the Turkmenistan's neutrality stance, its relations with the Taliban regime, increasing nationalism

and discrimination of ethnic Uzbeks, and frequent border clashes since 2002 spiraling down a vicious circle of mutual accusations. Relations deteriorated even further when Turkmenistan accused Uzbekistan of complicity in an alleged *coup d'etat* against Niyazov in November 2002. Relations between the two neighbors are hence far from rosy.

The officially stated agenda of the meeting included the joint exploitation of water resources,

border demarcation, development of the Kokdumalak oilfield and the situation in Afghanistan. Both countries share water from Amu-Darya river, which is a crucial source for both countries' heavy cotton agriculture. The presidents signed three agreements: on eternal friendship, on simplification of the border regime for residents of border regions, and on movement of personnel working on facilities along the borders. Cross-border communication between groups residing over densely populated borders could ease unnecessary border tensions. Apart from the official agreements, it is believed the two leaders discussed a row of unsettled issues behind closed doors.

Issues of some immediacy included the rational and equal usage of the Amu Darya river and maintenance of the Tyuyamuyun reservoir. Rational usage of Amu-Darya is crucial, considering the straining of Uzbekistan's relationship with water abundant Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. Due to inefficient water usage, Uzbekistan experiences frequent shortages. Under the 1996 water cooperation treaty, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan share the Amu-Darya equally at the Atamurad city juncture. However, recent withdrawals of water by Turkmenistan and its plans to build an artificial lake in the Karakum desert does worry Uzbekistan.

IMPLICATIONS: Water sharing issues can result in significant tension among people dependent on crops for their survival. Until recently Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan and to a lesser extent Tajikistan dominated the usage of the Amu Darya. With the relative stabilization of Afghanistan, which lies in upstream, it will start to use its rightful share of the water. Given the destruction of irrigation installations in Afghanistan during the war, it will in the short term be unable to keep water in reservoirs, and thus will use more water from the Amu Darya – which will be noticed in Uzbekistan and

Turkmenistan. The occasionally grandiose plans of the two countries also neglect the fact that Amu Darya is a major tributary to the dying Aral Sea.

Another issue is the exploitation of the Tuyamuyn reservoir belonging to Uzbekistan, but located in Turkmenistan. Before 2000, Uzbek workers could travel to the reservoir for maintenance and operation. However, after 2000, border controls were expanded and movement was limited. As a result, Uzbek workers were obstructed at the border maintenance of the reservoir was compromised. This causes a danger of flooding in Uzbekistan's Karakalpakstan and Khorezm regions and parts of Turkmenistan's Dashoguz region, with large populations.

The Kokdumalak oilfield is exploited by Uzbekistan though mostly located in Turkmenistan (it earns 70% of all oil revenues in Uzbekistan) and under a previous agreement Uzbekistan had to provide oil to Turkmenistan, but it did not when relations went bumpy. Uzbekistan built a new refinery in Bukhara with over 11 million ton capacity to process oil from Kokdumalak.

Both countries have large gas condensate fields. However, their oil and gas exports are limited by the capacities of the existing pipelines, mostly Russian owned, and the lack of new pipelines that would diversify their delivery markets and would bring hard currency rather than indebted neighbors. In June, Uzbekneftegaz and Lukoil signed a \$1 billion contract on exploitation of oil sites. Uzbekistan could hold 600 million barrels and Turkmenistan 500 million, significant resources but dwarfed by Kazakhstan's 9 billion barrels. Due to the size of their reserves, their protectionist economies, and the shaky investment conditions, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan are at loss competing with Kazakhstan over large foreign investments necessary to build new pipelines. This makes them less picky in their choice of partners. Right

after Niyazov left Uzbekistan, Lukoil head Vagit Alekperov visited Uzbekistan, probably to proceed with plans developed based on concessions and agreements reached between Niyazov and Karimov.

Turkmenistan is tied to Russian pipelines and there is no diversification of gas deliveries through other countries except a smaller Iranian gas pipeline. Russian Gazprom enjoys a monopoly following a 25-year contract signed in April 2003. Discussions on a possible Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan gas pipeline are being revived. Projected to cost \$2-2,5 billion, it would link Turkmenistan's Dovletabad fields with approximately 1.7 trillion cubic meters of gas with Pakistan. Its future depends largely on the availability of the Indian market, but Pakistani attempts to discuss a possible Iran-Pakistan-India gas pipeline suggests waning patience with the much-discussed trans-Afghan pipeline.

Both countries have upcoming parliamentary elections in December. Knowing the presidents' grip on their countries, democratic elections or major changes should not be expected. Some opposition forces suggest Niyazov tried to ensure that Uzbekistan would control the movement of 'suspicious' people, and that they would be extradited back to Turkmenistan if desired. This kind of movement control is also beneficial for Uzbekistan, considering the frequent cases of unrest in parts of the country.

Human and minority rights were obviously not on the top of the meeting's agenda. In November, the UN General Assembly adopted a draft resolution on the human rights situation in Turkmenistan, with a stress on religious and ethnic minority groups, including Uzbeks and Russians. Most of its potential and current 'oil'

partners voted against the resolution, including Azerbaijan, China, Iran, Pakistan, Tajikistan and Ukraine, while Kazakhstan abstained and Kyrgyzstan was absent. Russia voted in favor of the draft resolution, while Uzbekistan was absent, perhaps surprisingly since the resolution could help alleviate the condition of the Uzbek minority. Both governments show little concern for people within their borders, and hence protecting minorities abroad is hardly a priority.

CONCLUSIONS: Economic interests clearly dominated the agenda of the Karimov-Niyazov meeting. Both countries, suffering from tensions with their neighbors, need some sort of diversification, such as trade with one other. Access to Turkmenistan's Caspian sea ports is of a great importance for landlocked Uzbekistan's trade with Europe. Considering Russian companies' practical monopoly over energy resources in Central Asia, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan may seek alternative routes to deliver their energy resources to southern markets. Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan recently signed agreements with Russian energy companies to develop hydro-power capabilities, which would allow them in future to be less dependent on Uzbek gas. Thus Uzbekistan's gas leverage could loosen in Tashkent's bargaining with those countries, whereas their leverage against Uzbekistan in water issues could increase. This made it crucial for Uzbekistan to secure water deliveries from Amu Darya for the sake of its cotton economy.

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IRAN PUSHES FOR POSITIVE POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT IN CENTRAL ASIA

James Purcell Smith

Following the dynamic international engagement in Central Asia after 2001 that dramatically shaped the role and place of the region in the forming new world order, Tehran seems to be opting for continued ad-hoc cooperation with the states of Central Asia where it can, and avoiding any possibility of collision of interests with the countries of the region. This follows the established course of Iranian foreign policy of the 1990s in the region. Despite remaining differences, Tehran has managed to find its own niche of political and economic engagement with Central Asian states. Iran's policy is one of economic pragmatism and positive political engagement. But U.S. policy, Iraq and Afghanistan raise the question: How long Tehran will be able to stay the course?

BACKGROUND: In the early 1990s, immediately after the collapse of USSR, Iran adopted an assertive policy in a push to gain influence in Central Asia, both through export of its Islamic ideology, through economic ties, and implying its political agenda in a regional dimension under the aegis of international organizations. These efforts briefly brought the Islamist government in Tajikistan under Tehran's wings in 1991-1992. Its defeat in the ensuing civil war transformed Iran's policy into co-sponsorship of the Tajik peace dialogue on behalf of the United Tajik Opposition. Tehran managed to build close economic and political contacts with Turkmenistan, where Ashkhabad was interested in alternative export ways for its gas resources. Turkmen President Saparmurat Niyazov also needed relations with a neighbor outside the CIS in order to further cement his isolationist foreign policy and strengthen his power inside the country. However, the key factor for the limited ambitions of Tehran in Central Asia was twofold: the unwillingness of the newly independent nations to fall under the wings of yet another "big brother", and Tehran's concern not to cause the outrage of the former "big brother" – Moscow. Hence, from 1993 until the present, Tehran navigates its relations with Central Asian

countries following the principle of consulting with Moscow first, and avoiding any contentious issue that might provoke the Kremlin's anger. In return, Iran received state-of-the-art Russian weaponry worth over \$2 billion, advanced cooperation in building its nuclear power plant in Bushehr, and Russian political support in the international arena. A further reason that limited Iran's geopolitical designs toward this region was America's policy of containment of Iran. Washington has consistently been pushing hard to deny Iran strategic tools of influence over the region, like export oil and gas pipelines. The fourth limiting factor, which is still affecting Iranian standing in the region, is Tehran's scarcity of financial resources and lack of technological know-how. Due to its economic problems, Iran cannot be considered a strategic source of foreign investment and new technologies for the economies of Central Asian states.

IMPLICATIONS: Tehran's recognition of the necessity for active engagement with the countries of Central Asia while avoiding any contentious issues pushes Iran toward a pragmatic approach in bilateral relations with the region. Despite disagreements with Kazakhstan over the division of the Caspian Sea, since 1995 Tehran

and Astana have been cooperating in oil-swap contracts. Depending on signed contracts, from 1 to 2.5 million tons of Kazakh oil are delivered to northern Iranian refineries and the same volume of Iranian oil shipped via an oil terminal in Kharq island. In addition to the Korpedzhe-Kurtkui gas pipeline, operational since December 1997, Turkmenistan also started oil-swap operations. In Summer 1996, a missing 320 kilometer link of strategic Trans-Asian railway was built between Tedzhen in southern Turkmenistan and Mashad in north-eastern Iran, which noticeably increased Iran's importance in the transportation of Central Asian goods. After the 1997 peace deal in Tajikistan, Iran opted for mostly economic and socio-cultural cooperation with Dushanbe. Stabilization of Afghanistan as a result of the U.S.-led operation Enduring Freedom created an opportunity for neighboring states to probe cooperation projects with the new Afghan authorities. In June 2003, Uzbekistan signed agreements on trilateral cooperation on transportation with Iran and Afghanistan, in order to use Afghan territory for transit purposes. Most experts on Afghanistan agree that this kind of step-by-step incorporation of Kabul into the web of regional economy and transportation infrastructure can create a mechanism for Afghanistan's sustainable economic recovery and facilitates long-term stability in that country. Trips by Iranian President Mohammad Khatami to Azerbaijan in August and Dushanbe and Yerevan in September 2004 yet again underlines Tehran's intentions to cement and increase its economic cooperation, and especially investment cooperation, as a precondition for gaining political

leverage in bilateral relations. Tehran's policy of economic pragmatism and positive political engagement in bilateral relations with the countries of Central Asia so far has been a "win-win" situation for the involved parties. The regional countries have a direct interest in creating conditions for long-term sustainable development and indigenous stability mechanisms in Central Asia, and especially in Afghanistan. However, the most topical issue in the U.S.-Iranian and indeed global agenda today is concern over Iran's nuclear program. In the current situation, Tehran finds itself surrounded by US troops in Iraq, the Gulf states, Afghanistan and Central Asia and the key question from Tehran's vantage point seems to be if, where and when the U.S. foreign policy strategy of democratization of regimes in the Middle East will end.

CONCLUSIONS: Despite the volatility in world affairs and global terrorism, a traditionalist and pragmatic approach to international relations in the Greater Central Asia proves to be mutually beneficial. In particular, a peaceful Afghanistan holds great potential for the development of relations between Iran and Central Asia, as it will provide a route of transportation between Iran and the population centers of the region. The prospect of rail and road links via Meshed, Herat and Mazar-i-Sharif to Uzbekistan and Tajikistan could in the longer term be of crucial importance for the region's economic development.

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FIELD REPORTS

DEFENDING THE FAITH? RELIGION AND POLITICS IN GEORGIA

Kakha Jibladze

The largest Orthodox church ever to be built in Georgia officially opened on St. George's Day, November 23. Both the head of the Georgian Orthodox Church, Patriarch Illia the Second, and the head of the Georgian state, Mikheil Saakashvili, attended the ceremony.

President Saakashvili used the occasion to thank the Patriarch for his contributions to Georgian society. The President spoke about the deeds and commitments of Georgia's Catholicos – Patriarch Illia the Second – to Georgia's spiritual life and thanked him for his support to the nation. "I'd like to point out with great appreciation the commitment of Georgia's Spiritual Father, and personally, my spiritual father, Illia the second, who, ever since his enthronement stood by the nation when it fought for independence, freedom and victory. He managed to wake up the national spirit, managed to build new churches since the 1970s, and I want to bow down before him for his bravery and courage, thank him and wish him good health in order to lead the Nation for many years", the president declared.

The role of the Georgian Orthodox Church in the history of Georgia cannot be overstated, but over the past few years radicals operating within as well as without the church have threatened to overshadow the faith's historical role as well as its positive contributions.

The influence the Church and its policies have on the general public was thrown into sharp relief this

fall, when the new minister of education Alexander Lomaia announced education reforms. During informal interviews in the countryside this September, villagers repeatedly voiced concern about the reforms, stating fears that the new minister was planning on ending religion classes in the schools. The 'New Rights' political force collected several thousand signatures throughout the country demanding the minister's resignation. Demonstrations against the minister were held in eight different towns. On November 10, students were escorted away from the ministry by police officers after attempting to convince the minister to continue teaching the history of the Orthodox Church in public schools. The minister was quoted saying these actions prove there is need to reform the schools.

Part of the fuel feeding the fire against the minister are rumors, which have remained unconfirmed, that he is a practicing member of the Jehovah's Witnesses, an active and highly unpopular religious group in Georgia. According to data from the International Center for Conflict Resolution, nearly 78% of Georgians polled this year consider themselves religious and 94% of those follow the Georgian Orthodox Church. In the same survey, 60% reported having negative feelings toward religious minorities like the Jehovah's Witnesses, although less than half had contact with foreign faiths themselves.

Followers of the Jehovah's Witnesses have been persecuted throughout Georgia over the past several years, at times violently. On February 24 Human Rights Watch outlined priorities for human rights protections following the revolution, including defending religious freedom. In its brief, HRW states that over the past four years attacks on non-traditional groups such as the Jehovah's Witnesses and Baptists have become a serious problem. They outlined several steps the new government should take to foster a safe atmosphere for religious minorities, including the fostering of religious tolerance and the arrest of Basili Mkalavishvili, a former priest and known vigilante against religious minorities.

Mkalavishvili was detained on March 12 at the Tbilisi airport and was tried this fall. His arrest prompted the president to speak out against extremism, stating that violence is against Christian principles. But some do not see the actions of Mkalavishvili as violence; they see it as protection. For the nearly 2,000 years Georgia has followed the Orthodox faith, it has battled to keep that faith. Some clergy see the new missionaries from the West as just one more enemy to be defeated.

In the mountainous resort of Bakhmaro, located between the regions of Guria and Adjara, Orthodox believers leave giant crosses on a different mountain peak each summer that serve to honor their faith as well as to remind Muslims in the area of their past and the country's present. One priest involved in the activity said the cross reminds everyone of their sins and it is important that Muslims remember that their ancestors were Orthodox. He said the Orthodox Church is weak now and foreign faiths are taking advantage of its

weakness. While he added there is much to respect from Western culture, he also remarked that the one true religion is Orthodoxy and western cultures have allowed people to create their own god.

Saakashvili addressed these concerns as well during his speech on March 12, saying violence is not protection and Christianity does not advocate beating someone as protecting the faith. He has continued to speak out for religious tolerance, reminding Georgians during his speech to the National Movement party that the country should use King Davit Aghmashenebeli as their example while rebuilding the nation. "A third important issue is the involvement of representatives from all ethnic groups in Georgia's political life. There are just two criteria for someone to be promoted in Georgia - professionalism and loyalty to Georgia...That is why we see modern Georgian history as a continuation of what Davit Aghmashenebeli began," he said, adding that Davit used to visit mosques, synagogues and churches.

According to organizations like Human Rights Watch, it was the lack of government intervention during Shevardnadze that led to the current situation. In a February letter to the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom, Rachel Denber, the acting director of the Europe and Central Asia division of HRW, stated, "This culture of impunity has had a degrading impact on Georgian society. It has made religious nationalism an acceptable if not necessary element of political platforms. And it has made intolerance acceptable in Georgian society." It will be up to the new administration to make sure King Davit's legacy of religious tolerance in Georgia is as honored as his nation building.

WAR IN WAZIRISTAN

Daan van der Schriek

In September 2003, Pakistan started military operations against suspected members of Al-Qaida and the Taliban in South Waziristan, a Federally Administered Tribal Area in its North-West Frontier Province (NWFP) bordering Afghanistan. Apart from hunting down terrorists, Pakistan's aim seemed to be to bring the autonomous tribal areas finally under central control. But the continuing operation has not gone as smoothly as hoped, causing many casualties and much resentment. A former Taliban fighter and detainee of the Guantanamo Bay prison, Abdullah Mehsud, has gained prominence and notoriety in the struggle against the Pakistani military in Waziristan.

After the fall of the Taliban regime in Afghanistan, in November 2001, several Taliban and Al-Qaida members managed to escape to the Pakistani tribal areas, where they found refuge amidst the local tribes – and a base to continue operations in Afghanistan. In September of last year, Pakistan started operations against these fighters. And although the deaths of dozens of militants is announced every week as a result of these operations and officials claim that only some 100 of an original 600 fighters are left in the area, there is little sign yet that the government has won the battle. Already, some 200 government forces have been killed, says the Peshawar-based Pakistani journalist Rahimullah Yousafzai, who predicts that the army “will continue to suffer.”

And this is because the army is no longer facing only terrorists and Taliban, but also the tribes of Waziristan, who have become alienated by the military operations and punitive economic blockades targeting their region. From the outset, says Yousafzai, the government wanted not only to flush out terrorists, but also to bring the notoriously lawless Tribal Areas under central control. Perhaps

the latter aim was even more important than the former, as the area is not as important for Al-Qaida and the Taliban as the province of Baluchistan – or indeed the country's big cities. “They haven't captured anybody of importance from Al-Qaida in Waziristan,” says Yousafzai. “But they did in the cities.”

Other observers have pointed out that, if Pakistan were really serious about eliminating Taliban operations from its territory, it would first of all have paid attention to Quetta, the capital of Baluchistan where according to the US military the Taliban has held several gatherings.

The military actions in Waziristan, meanwhile, have resulted in an increasingly alienated local population. Thousands of tribesmen have been forced to evacuate their homes because of the operations. Local people have also been killed in airstrikes; indeed, an investigative commission of the Peshawar High Court Bar concluded in September that the majority of casualties in Waziristan have been locals. Also, in a bid to win the war, Pakistan started in May to arrest relatives of persons who committed a crime. At least seven women and 54 children under the age of 18 from NWFP have in this way been detained. However, as a result of this, “tribal people are becoming alienated from the government,” the November 22 issue of Newsweek quoted former chairman of the human rights commission of Pakistan Afrasiab Khattak as saying.

And these days, alienated tribesmen have someone to go to: Abdullah Mehsud. A native from Waziristan, Mehsud fought with the Taliban in Afghanistan, where he lost a leg. After being captured in November 2001 in Kunduz, he was imprisoned in Guantanamo Bay – but subsequently released as a person of little importance. But after

his return to Pakistan he became involved in the anti-government struggle in Waziristan and he gained notoriety with the kidnapping, this October, of two Chinese engineers working in Waziristan. One of the Chinese (plus the five kidnapers) was killed in an army rescue attempt and since, Mehsud is one of the most wanted – and well-known – men in Pakistan. On November 8, a military operation aimed at capturing Mehsud started – so far without success.

On November 26, however, the Pakistani military said it would end its operation in South Waziristan, because Osama bin Laden is not hiding in the area.

But perhaps it's too late now for the authorities to stop the fighting.

Mehsud has reportedly recruited hundreds of tribal youths in his force, and on November 18 he contacted several Pakistani media outlets to inform them he was preparing to launch guerrilla actions. So it seems that the troubles in Waziristan aren't over yet, although the army wants to end its actions in the area. Pakistan employed some 70.000 (para) military forces in the NWFP – to counter a force that would have been a few hundred strong only. But now, according to some, the army must fight the local tribes.

TEACHERS UNITED TO LOBBY THEIR POLITICAL AND SOCIAL INTERESTS

Aziz Soltobaev

Kyrgyz school teachers believe their rights have been violated and intended to defend them as a lobbying union. In mid-November 2004, they appealed to the Ministry of Education to exclude schools from involvement in election campaigns and regulate a payroll system that turned to business in some cases with its in-kind payments. In the meantime, an initiative group started gathering signatures around Kyrgyzstan for an appeal to the Government to stop turning schools into political institutions.

Teachers are considered to be one of the poorest and simultaneously most exploited categories of state employees in Kyrgyzstan. After the collapse of Soviet Union, when the position of teacher was respected and on demand, the school system as well as other educational systems entered a deep crisis. The sovereign Kyrgyz Republic experienced a dramatic outflow of teachers from the educational system to the labor market, especially to the trade sector. Many unclaimed

teachers acquired practical “MBAs” in the bazaars, trading with goods imported from China, Turkey and India, and further distributed them within the CIS by a shuttle trading system. Other teachers migrated to Russia, hoping for a better social security system.

Presently, most teachers at schools are close to retirement age, but still needed due to the lack of supply of new specialists. Every spring, school supervisors visit the Central Pedagogical University named after Arabaev (KSPU) in Bishkek with the purpose of attracting young specialists to work in the countryside. However their efforts are in vain. The monthly starting salary of 10USD does not create enthusiasm to work there. According to the National Statistics Committee, the salary fairly covers a third of the minimum consumer basket, which stands at nearly 35USD. According to the Ministry of Education, by May 1, 2004, there was a lack of nearly 3,400 teachers in village areas.

“The situation is critical. English, Math and Russian language teachers are on the highest demand. Schools need 643 English, 426 Math and 311 Russian language teachers; in all other subjects, more than 100 teachers are required to provide full secondary education in villages”, the press service of Ministry of Education informed the Analyst.

“The problem is not that we do not provide jobs, but that graduates are unlikely to work there, because there are no economic motivating mechanisms. Accordingly, those teachers who find themselves in rural areas are poorly prepared, and therefore prepare poor students. As a result, the quality of education suffers”, head of the registrar’s office of KSPU Tolegen Abdrahmanov told the Analyst.

Teachers have now expressed their negative attitude to their forced involvement in lobbying for candidates. During previous elections and referenda conducted in Kyrgyzstan in the last five years, many teachers were involved in counting ballots, registering voters, and reporting results. International and human rights organizations reported many violations were registered during the election process. Thus, teachers were exploited for lobbying someone’s interests. Now, teachers want to stop this process.

It is vital for the government to take action as soon as possible in order to conduct the parliamentary elections planned for February 2005 without logistical problems. However, authorities

questioned whether this condition would be satisfied. On November 24, the Head of the Central Election Commission Sulaiman Imanbaev commented the proposed initiative as follows: “Teachers don’t take part in the election campaign, but remain organizers of the elections themselves. In many settlements there are no other appropriate buildings but schools”.

Another vital issue addressed to the Ministry is the payroll issue. Salaries are frequently paid in kind in rural areas, with lottery tickets and forceful subscriptions to unpopular newspapers. The “Dargemm” teacher’s movement stated that in some rural areas, compulsory payroll delay is accepted as a systematic practice.

Teachers also complained of overloaded classes. While according to educational standards, the number of students in classes should not exceed 20, in many of schools this figure passes 30. On the other hand, the usual standard for teacher is 72 hours of teaching per month, for which they are paid around \$20. However, Kyrgyz teachers often work 216 hours and the salary is not enough for surviving. Some rural teachers leave schools to work on farms, where they are paid nearly \$60 for cultivating agricultural products. The status of teacher has turned out to be one of the least respected in Kyrgyzstan. “Dargemm” plans to discuss its problems and adopt a final resolution at the Congress of teachers to be held in mid-December.

PLANNING THE ANNIVERSARY OF THE ROSE REVOLUTION IN SOUTH OSSETIA

Theresa Freese

Venturing into South Ossetia’s woods, once a normal activity now proves dangerous. Conflict zone residents face mines, detention, kidnapping,

beatings, and possible death. Livestock are also disappearing, or fall victim to mines. Residents say the situation is “worsening daily,” but believe

their fates will be clearer once 23 November – the anniversary of the Rose Revolution, and the escalation to the initial conflict – passes and as demilitarization progresses.

“Mate Kobaladze, aged 56, died on Wednesday,” told Guram Vakhtangashvili, parliamentary representative of the Georgian population in the Liakhvi Gorges. “He went to the beginning of the diversion road, above Eredvi, to gather wood and hit a trip wire. He lost too much blood and died.” Three individuals were lightly injured before him when running into *rastishkas* (trip wires tied to grenades).

“If you can get hit in your own yard, you can get hit anywhere,” Kekhvi residents complained. They pointed out that a local resident and two children were similarly injured in orchards over the past week. “The biggest problems are now in Didi Liakhvi,” Guram stressed, enumerating local problems associated with the conflict. “Eldar Kakhniashvili is probably dead. He was 20 years old.”

“Eleven days were spent searching for him in the hills,” elaborated Gela Zoziashvili, deputy governor of the region. “His family realized he was missing when the cows came home and he did not. In protest, his relatives and the local population blocked the road [linking Tskhinvali to Russia]. They told us to take measures to return their son—no matter what condition he was in. In response, Ossetians blocked the road [to Tskhinvali]. Nine Ossetians and 18 Georgians were detained by both sides. On the first day of the search, a cameraman and journalist were lightly injured when they triggered a trip wire while cleaning their shoes.”

Didi Liakhvi is a strategic center to the conflict: South Ossetia will never be complete as long as Georgian villagers (approximately 8,000) reside there under Georgian jurisdiction, while it provides Georgia with a lever against Ossetians. It is a landlocked territory surrounded by hills from which, Georgians claim, Ossetians fire regularly on Georgian villages in an attempt to scare the population into leaving. Residents

cannot pass freely to Georgia proper unless they can use Tskhinvali road. A diversion route, bypassing Tskhinvali, the capital of South Ossetia, crosses mountainous terrain and may be inaccessible once winter progresses. Meanwhile, Tskhinvali residents must cross Didi Liakhvi to reach South Ossetia’s northern territories and Russia. Ossetians, too, have a bypass route—Dzari road, which is reportedly well-defended by armed positions and embanked by minefields. But it is unpaved and will be difficult to use during winter months.

“We know what they want—to tear this part out of Georgia,” Gela declared.

Disappearances, landmines, and detention are not the only problems residents face. “Every day there is some kind of tension,” Guram noted. He alleged that along the road to Vanati, at Dmenisi, the largest Ossetian village in Patara Liakhvi, Ossetians take 20 to 30 lari from vehicles carrying wood back from the hills. Russian peacekeepers at the Vanati checkpoint ask for five. “They won’t allow vehicles to pass unless drivers pay.” Wood cutters explain that on top of this they pay 20 lari to Georgian officials to have the right to gather wood.

Reportedly, not only Ossetians are collecting fines. One man whose car could not get through explained to Marat Kulakhmetov, commander of the joint peacekeeping forces, “One of the Russian soldiers told me to stop my engine. He pointed his automatic weapon at me and said, ‘Georgians are also taking 500 rubles from Ossetians, so turn off your engine.’”

A conflict of interest between following local legislation and surviving the winter complicates the situation. Ossetians claim that Georgians are destroying the woods as they clear entire patches of trees for winter fuel. Georgians explain they do so only because they are too afraid to venture deeper into the woods. Ossetians do not want to allow Georgian wood traders to pass Vanati checkpoint.

“I’m not letting traders through,” explained Valeri Kokoev, an Ossetian member of

parliament representing Patara Liakhvi. "Because this is a conflict zone, locals receive a discount on cutting wood," he explained. "They can sell the wood for higher prices elsewhere," Kulakhmetov added. Nodar countered that it is impossible to distinguish between a trader and a villager gathering wood for the winter. Moreover, both sides contest where Georgian territory ends and Ossetian territory begins. Cases of beating or detention largely occur when crossing Ossetian territory.

Daily shooting merely increases the tension. "We don't pay attention to automatic weapons," Ramaz explained. "We hear this every night. It is the shelling that scares us. Three nights ago there was shelling from 12 to 5 am. Guja Gagnidze's house was hit by fragments. There were no injuries or deaths this time." "Sometimes we just want to throw our hands up and leave," one woman whose house was hit over the summer declared. "But what can we do?"

Demilitarization of South Ossetia—meant to de-escalate the crisis—is now underway, in accordance with a 5 November Sochi agreement. Peacekeepers are replacing Ossetian positions above Tamarasheni, while Georgian trenches around Tamarasheni Secondary School are being destroyed. However, both sides interpret demilitarization differently. The first phase envisions replacing illegal positions with joint peacekeeping forces and closing trenches. What should be done with arms, minefields, heavy military equipment, troop deployment, the de facto Ossetian defense ministry, and "police" (both sides claim armed civilians pose as policemen) remains unclear. Joint Control Commission meetings in Vladikavkaz over the next few days should define this concept further.

Guram was skeptical, calling demilitarization "a bluff." He believes that Ossetians will never remove arms from Tskhinvali or Ossetian villages. "The defense ministry, special forces, the local population—they all are armed," he explained. Georgians believe that demilitarization is "unrealistic" as long as

weapons remain in Ossetian territories, noting that once the local Georgian population is disarmed and troops removed the Ossetians can immediately enter their villages.

Addressing the humanitarian concerns, Guram explained, "We plan to give two tons of coal to each family. It should be enough for the winter. Flour and oil is being delivered to the entire Liakhvi Gorge population through CARITAS." Meanwhile, this week the government began to repair the most damaged houses or to reimburse residents with cash.

Didi Liakhvi residents now report that Ossetians are afraid that 23 November will find Georgians storming Tskhinvali. "The Ossetians are scared and panicking," Ramaz noted. "Six buses with children already left for Orjonikidze [Vladikavkaz]."

"[President Saakashvili] has said that by the anniversary of the Rose Revolution we will be in Tskhinvali," Guram explained. "On the same date in 1989, under Gamsakhurdia's government, approximately 40,000 Georgians tried to enter Tskhinvali to hold a meeting. The Russians stopped them at Ergneti." The armed conflict soon followed.

Meanwhile, Russia is financing a new road, reportedly at a cost of \$3 million, from Tskhinvali, through Didi Liakhvi, and on to the Russian border at Roki tunnel. Some observers fear the Ossetians, or Russians, can claim the territory is theirs once the road is finished. Locals do not seem to mind. "Villagers are happy," Ramaz explained. "A good road is important." However, many actually believe the UN is fixing the road.

"I can't understand when our legislation will be active in Tskhinvali," Ramaz concluded. "The longer this situation continues, the worse it is. It's time to say this is ours and this is yours. There is no Ossetian territory, there is only Georgian territory. "It was better under Shevardnadze," one local authority concluded. "At least then we had peace."

NEWS DIGEST

EX-SOVIET STRONGMEN BURY HATCHET 19 November

The Turkmen and Uzbek presidents have signed a declaration of friendship, ending years of mistrust between the two Central Asian neighbours. Uzbek leader Islam Karimov and Turkmen President Saparmyrat Niyazov said all bilateral issues had been resolved. They drank champagne to celebrate their pact in the Uzbek Silk Road city of Bukhara, near their common border. Relations worsened two years ago when Turkmenistan accused the Uzbeks of aiding an attempt to kill Mr Niyazov. The meeting came after four years without presidential-level contact between the two former Soviet states. President Niyazov, known as Turkmenbashi or Father of all Turkmen, rarely leaves Turkmenistan. But on this occasion he travelled across the desert to Bukhara for the surprise summit. The leaders agreed to share water resources and ease travel restrictions between the two countries in the hope of boosting bilateral trade, which has increased recently but has been historically low. There have been warnings of a water crisis in southern Uzbekistan if a crumbling Soviet-built water pumping station on the Amu Darya river in Turkmen territory collapses. President Niyazov said after the summit that Uzbek engineers would be allowed to visit the facility to help with repairs. In addition, Turkmenistan is planning to dig a vast reservoir to be called Lake Turkmen on its side of the river. Outsiders fear it may put ecological pressure on an already damaged area, but President Niyazov says the project has been carefully thought through. A dispute over the Kokdumalak oil field, most of which lies in Turkmenistan but has been exploited by Uzbekistan since Soviet times, was also reported to be on the agenda. Neither leader gave details of any discussions, but Mr Niyazov said: "Our Uzbek friends and Turkmen citizens residing at the border may sleep quietly and shouldn't worry about tomorrow." (BBC)

THE FIVE-YEAR CASPIAN SEA PROTECTION STRATEGIC PLAN IS IN PLACE

19 November 2004

The strategic partnership between the five Caspian littoral states in the field of protection of the marine environment could serve as a model for analogous co-operation and minimisation of pollution in the Black Sea and in the Mediterranean', the vice-president of the World Bank for Europe and Middle East Shigeo Katsu mentioned at the Caspian Environmental Investment

Forum in Baku today. According to Shigeo Katsu, the World Bank is supportive of protection of the environmental protection in the region and is prepared to continue providing practical assistance for this business. The head of the Caspian Environmental Programme Hamid Ghafarzade from Iran spoke about composition of the Caspian Protection Strategic Plan for five years. The strategy is estimated at \$170 mn. 'Nearly as much as \$10-11 mn of the needed funds have been taken from international finance institutions for implementation of the incorporated projects', again Ghafarzade mentioned. Again Ghafarzade went further to say that the strategy was aimed at steady use of natural resources, protection of biological diversity, maintenance of steady management of the littoral zones, prevention of marine pollution and improvement of the quality of water. According to again Ghafarzade, approximately \$14 mn has been released for the CEP projects including \$5 mn from the EU funds and \$8.5 mn from UNEP and UNDP. 'The second phase of the programme is beginning next year and we think that \$6 mn will be raised for it from Tacis, UNDP and other finance institutions. The World Bank, too, has provided a portfolio of priority investments', again Ghafarzade mentioned. (Azer-Press)

KAZAKHSTAN BUILDING TANKER FLEET FOR TRANS-CASPIAN OIL EXPORTS

22 November

Kazakhstan is building a fleet of tankers to carry crude oil exports to various destinations on the Caspian Sea, state oil company KazMunaigaz said Friday. So far KazMunaiGaz has ordered three 12,000-dwt vessels from Vyborg shipyard in northwest Russia. The first, named Astana, is expected to be delivered before the year-end. Two more will be completed in 2005. Further orders are likely to follow. Caspian export outlets for Kazakhstan include Russia's Makhachkala port on the northwest coast which ties into a pipeline running to Novorossiysk on the Black Sea. During the warmer months of the year, oil can also be moved into European Russia via the River Volga which joins the Caspian near Astrakhan. Iran's Neka port on the south coast is another option. Shipments of Kazakh oil to Azerbaijan are likely to climb swiftly following completion next year of the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline to the Turkish Mediterranean. (Platts Commodity News)

CHECHEN REBEL DENIES AL QAEDA LINK**23 November**

A leading Chechen militant has denied assertions that Osama bin Laden's al Qaeda movement is linked to Chechen rebels fighting Moscow. In a statement published on a rebel Web site on Tuesday, Movladi Udugov said the international Islamist militant group had never set up training camps in Chechnya. He also denied meeting bin Laden. Russia has long said the Chechen rebels are linked to international terrorists, saying its 10-year war in the rebel province is a key front in the U.S.-led war on terror. "This is a total lie and crude provocation," said Udugov, a propagandist for the rebels, on Web site www.kavkazcenter.com in response to a declassified U.S. intelligence report published by U.S. pressure group Judicial Watch. "It is not even worth proving this is false." The report, which Judicial Watch said had been released under U.S. freedom of information laws, detailed al Qaeda's efforts in Chechnya and said the region would be a good area to train militants since Western countries could not attack it. The alleged links between the two movements have muted Western criticism of Russian conduct in Chechnya, where troops are accused of human rights abuses. British and U.S. officials have said Chechens are helping insurgents in Iraq. Extremist rebels led by warlord Shamil Basayev have also adopted tactics similar to those used by al Qaeda, which carried out the Sept. 11, 2001 attacks on U.S. cities, sending suicide bombers and hostage-takers to attack civilians. President Vladimir Putin specifically blamed al Qaeda-linked groups for downing two Russian airliners in August, and other officials said the group was behind the Beslan school hostage crisis in September, when more than 350 people died. Udugov said such allegations were unfounded. "There have never been any al Qaeda training camps in Chechnya or anywhere else (in the Caucasus). If it is so, let them give the addresses," he said. "It is sufficient to remember the false claims about Chechen fighters in Afghanistan, Pakistan and Iraq. As is well-known, neither the Russians, nor the Americans, nor the British have produced a single fact to back up their claims. Apart from constant lies there is nothing." (Reuters)

AZERBAIJAN SEEKS UN HELP IN DISPUTE WITH ARMENIA**23 November**

Azerbaijan urged the U.N. General Assembly on Tuesday to intervene in a long and bitter territorial dispute with neighboring Armenia over its breakaway Nagorno-Karabakh region. But France, Russia and the United States, which have been trying to resolve the dispute on behalf of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, asked the assembly to stay on the sidelines and not interfere with their efforts. Talks "can

only progress in an atmosphere of confidence between the parties. Anything in the direction of building confidence and of avoiding a division of the General Assembly is helpful," said U.S. envoy Susan Moore, speaking on behalf of the OSCE initiative led by Paris, Moscow and Washington. Rival claims have hung for years over tiny, mountainous Nagorno-Karabakh, a mainly ethnic Armenian enclave inside Azerbaijan. Azerbaijan suffered a humiliating defeat in a 1988-94 war with Armenia over the region after its inhabitants tried to break from Azeri rule. An estimated 35,000 people were killed and one million refugees fled to Azerbaijan, where they remain. At the same time, thousands of ethnic Armenian refugees fled to Armenia. A cease-fire ended the conflict but the dispute persists despite international efforts to broker a deal. Azerbaijan's foreign minister, Elmar Mammadyarov, said his government had decided to take the issue to the General Assembly because Armenia was pursuing an "illegal settlement policy" by flooding the disputed area with Armenians, with an eye to annexing the enclave. He called on the assembly to adopt a resolution affirming its "continued strong support" for Azerbaijan's territorial integrity and the right of Azeri refugees to return to their former homes in the enclave. But Armenian Ambassador Armen Martirosyan said Azerbaijan's proposal was aimed at torpedoing the OSCE-sponsored negotiations. The assembly put off a vote on the draft resolution until an unspecified later date. (Reuters)

PUTIN REACTS TO POLITICAL CRISIS IN UKRAINE**24 November**

Russian President Vladimir Putin said in Lisbon on 23 November that Russia can neither recognize nor protest the the presidential runoff in Kyiv because "no official results have been announced," Russian and Western news agencies reported. He added that "I can advise others to follow our example," in an apparent jab at the U.S. and the EU for condemning the conduct of the election. Putin admitted that he was too quick to congratulate Prime Minister Viktor Yanukovich on his victory on 22 November before all the votes were counted. He added that it was an informal gesture. "I really only privately congratulated one of the presidential candidates on his victory according to the information provided by the exit polls." That contrasts with the fact that Yanukovich's opponent, Viktor Yushchenko, was decidedly ahead in all exit polls. Putin added that only the Ukrainian Central Election Commission can announce the official results, and he called on both sides to follow legal procedures in resolving the conflict. At the same press conference, Putin slammed as "inadmissible" doubts expressed by the European Union and the

Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) about the outcome of the disputed presidential elections in Ukraine, RTR and Reuters reported. "The Ukraine is a large European country with a developed legal system, we don't have to give the country lessons, it is the Ukraine that can give lessons to others," Putin added. "I am aware of the statement made by the EU foreign ministers with reference to the OSCE observers, in which the results of the elections were put into question," he said. "If someone continues to use OSCE observers for such purposes this organization will lose its international prestige and the very goal of its existence," he added, reported RTR. (RFE/RL)

ARDZINBA SAYS HE WILL REMAIN PRESIDENT PROVISIONALLY

24 November

Vladislav Ardzinba, the incumbent president of Abkhazia, will remain in office until the next president is elected in a repeat poll, and will ignore next month's inauguration of the announced winner of the disputed October 3 election, the presidential office said on Wednesday. The planned inauguration ceremony on December 6 is unconstitutional and will have no legal foundation, Ardzinba's spokesman Roin Agrba said in a statement. Abkhazia has been the scene of major public unrest since the October 3 presidential election, whose results sparked bitter disputes among supporters of the two main candidates. (Interfax)

JAILED AZERBAIJANI OPPOSITIONISTS APPEAL FOR CLEMENCY

24 November

The seven Azerbaijani opposition leaders who were sentenced to up to five years' imprisonment on charges of inciting violent protests in Baku after the October 2003 presidential election have asked Azerbaijan's top Muslim clergyman, Sheikh-ul-Islam Allakhshukur Pashazade, to present President Ilham Aliyev with their collective appeal for a pardon. Pashazade is a member of the presidential commission on pardons. Even before the seven men were sentenced, President Aliyev hinted that there was no doubt as to their guilt; he subsequently said they would not be pardoned in the near future. (zerkalo.az)

KAZAKH, KYRGYZ, UZBEK LEADERS CONGRATULATE YANUKOVYCH

25 November

Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbaev, Kyrgyz President Askar Akaev, and Uzbek President Islam Karimov have all congratulated Ukrainian Prime Minister Viktor Yanukovich on his victory in the

bitterly disputed 21 November presidential runoff, agencies reported. President Nazarbaev expressed his "heartfelt congratulations," adding, "Your victory testifies to the Ukrainian people's choice in favor of a united nation, a democratic path of development, and economic progress." The runoff results have sparked mass protests in Ukraine and widespread international skepticism; the only other world leaders to have congratulated Yanukovich are Russian President Vladimir Putin and Belarusian President Alyaksandr Lukashenka. (RIA-Novosti)

UZBEK MILITANT 'BEHIND PAKISTAN ATTACKS'

25 November

A Pakistani general has accused an Islamic militant leader from Uzbekistan of instigating attacks in Pakistan's tribal region of Waziristan. The military commander in South Waziristan, Safdar Hussain, said three suspected militants from Central Asia had confessed under interrogation to having received orders from the leader of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, Tahir Yuldash. The general accused Mr Yuldash of financing and masterminding what he called terrorist attacks in Pakistan. Pakistani forces have been conducting major operations in Waziristan against suspected Taleban and al-Qaeda fighters. General Safdar also accused al-Qaeda of using children to carry out militant activities in the tribal areas bordering Afghanistan. He said most of those arrested in the area were teenagers. (BBC)

STUDY SAYS TAJIKISTAN LEADS CENTRAL ASIA IN CHILD MORTALITY

26 November

A recent UNICEF study shows that Tajikistan has the highest child mortality rates in Central Asia. According to the study, 78 children per 1,000 do not survive their first year; 106 per 1,000 do not live to the age of five. The most frequent causes of death were accidents during childbirth (22 percent), pneumonia (20 percent), and diarrhea (12 percent). The study also noted that Tajikistan has the highest rates of severe and chronic malnourishment in children under five -- 36.2 percent and 4.7 percent, respectively. In an apparent critical reference to the study, Tajik Health Minister Nusratullo Fayzulloev said that statistics on Tajikistan are not always reliable. He said, "For example, the statistical data that UNICEF and other international organizations are presenting does not always agree with data provided by the Tajik State Statistics Committee." (Asia Plus-Blitz)

RUSSIAN LIBERAL PARTIES PICKET UKRAINIAN EMBASSY

28 November

More than 200 protesters from the Yabloko party and the Union of Rightist Forces picketed the Ukrainian embassy in Moscow in support of Ukrainian opposition leader Viktor Yushchenko on 28 November. Wearing orange scarves and waving orange flags, the symbols of Yushchenko's presidential campaign, the demonstrators chanted "We Won't Be Overcome." A smaller group of counter demonstrators, led by the leader of the Working Russia party, Viktor Anpilov, gathered nearby to support Ukrainian Prime Minister Yanukovich. About 20 police officers kept the two groups apart. (ITAR-TASS)

BLASTS SHAKE KAZAKH PRO-PRESIDENTIAL PARTY HEADQUARTERS

29 November

Two explosions took place on the evening of 28 November at the headquarters of the pro-presidential Otan party in Almaty. A 20-year-old passerby was hospitalized with light injuries. A source in the Emergency Situations Ministry told the news agency that the explosives, the equivalent of 300-400 grams of TNT, were planted on a telephone switchboard on the building and on a first-floor windowsill. Bolatkhan Taizhan, a high-ranking Otan adviser, told RFE/RL's Kazakh Service that extremists could be behind the attack. He said, "Despite differences in their views, all [political] parties [in Kazakhstan] say that the main thing is to maintain stability in Kazakhstan.... This is what the leadership and members of opposition parties say as well. That's why I think the blasts could be accidental. But one shouldn't be surprised if they turn out to be the work of extremists." President Nazarbaev heads Otan. (RFE/RL)

MISSING RIGHTS ACTIVIST GALVANIZES KYRGYZ OPPOSITION

29 November

Opposition legislators Azimbek Beknazarov and Alevtina Pronenko announced at a 25 November press conference in Bishkek that they will join the People's Patriotic Movement's petition drive to remove Kyrgyz President Askar Akaev from office if rights activist Tursunbek Akun is not found, RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service reported. Demonstrations continued in support of Akun, who has not been seen since 16 November, including a protest in the Aksy Raion that drew 2,000 people. Meanwhile, the Bishkek office of Freedom House announced in a 26 November press release that it is beginning an independent investigation into Akun's disappearance, RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service reported. Stuart Kahn, program director for Freedom House's human rights defender support project in Kyrgyzstan, said, "We will concentrate on those aspects of the case which have not been fully clarified, and we have officially appealed to the National Security Service and the Interior

Ministry with an offer of cooperation and a request for access to information." (RFE/RL)

ARMENIA FAILS TO SEND REPRESENTATIVES TO NATO SEMINAR IN AZERBAIJAN

29 November

Two Armenian parliamentarians, Defense and Security Committee Chairman Mher Shahgeldian (Orinats Yerkir) and Aleksan Karapetian of the opposition National Unity Party, cancelled on 25 November their participation in a three-day NATO seminar on security issues in the South Caucasus that opened in Baku that day, RFE/RL's Armenian Service reported. Shahgeldian told journalists that Orinats Yerkir Chairman and parliament speaker Baghdasarian had written to his Azerbaijani counterpart Murtuz Alesqerov to request guarantees of protection for the two Armenian delegates, but did not receive a response to that request. The unofficial Azerbaijani Karabakh Liberation Organization (QAT) staged repeated protests in Baku last week against the Armenians' anticipated arrival; police forcibly dispersed a QAT protest on 25 November outside the hotel where the seminar was taking place and detained 10 of the protest participants. (RFE/RL)

ARMENIAN PARLIAMENT SPEAKER URGES OPPOSITION TO ABANDON BOYCOTT

29 November

In his annual report on the activities of the National Assembly, parliament speaker Artur Baghdasarian on 24 November appealed to opposition deputies to abandon their boycott of legislative proceedings. Opposition deputies walked out of the parliament chamber nine months ago to protest the majority's refusal to debate a draft constitutional amendment that would have allowed a national referendum on the question of confidence in President Robert Kocharian. Baghdasarian argued that "real participation" by the opposition is critical to the ongoing discussions about planned reforms to the electoral code and the constitutional and judicial systems. (RFE/RL)

FORMER ARMENIAN PRESIDENT SAYS KARABAKH SETTLEMENT NOW INCREASINGLY COMPLICATED'

29 November

On his return from a personal visit to the U.S., Levon Ter-Petrossian told journalists at Yerevan's Zvartnots Airport on 24 November that he believes a solution to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict with terms as favorable as those offered in 1997 is no longer possible, and that Armenia is paying a heavy price for failing to accept those terms, RFE/RL's Armenian Service reported. In an article published in most Armenian newspapers on 1 November 1997 titled, "Time for Serious Thought," Ter-

Petrosian argued that Armenia should agree to concessions rather than risk continued isolation and economic stagnation. That opinion met with resistance from senior Armenian ministers, and the ensuing controversy culminated in Ter-Petrosian's forced resignation in February 1998. Ter-Petrosian said on 24 November that no progress has been made toward a solution of the conflict, but declined to say what the present government should do to expedite such a settlement. He hinted that he might return to active politics "if there is a task, a mission, and I feel that my involvement...is necessary," but would not say if he will run in the next presidential election, due in 2008. (RFE/RL)

AZERBAIJAN BLOCKS RAIL CARGO TRANSIT TO GEORGIA

29 November

Some 900 freight cars bound for Georgia have been halted in Azerbaijan, and Georgian Railways Commercial Director Ramaz Giorgadze was scheduled to travel to Baku on 29 November to discuss the issue with Azerbaijani officials. Although no official explanation has been given for the delay, Caucasus Press said that some Azerbaijani functionaries have admitted that security personnel are checking the cargoes on suspicion that they are destined for Armenia. But Georgian Railways Director General David Onoprishvili said the cargo is destined not for Armenia but the Georgian Black Sea ports of Poti and Batumi. (Caucasus Press)

CHECHEN SEPARATIST WEBSITE RESUMES WORK IN LITHUANIA

29 November

The Kavkaz-Center Chechen separatist website began operating again on Monday and the website's administrators claim they are working on Lithuanian territory. "The work continued after the Lithuanian telecom unblocked the site's address after getting the Vilnius Second District Court's official decision to remove all restrictions on the international Chechen Agency on Lithuania's territory," says a statement from the site's administration. (Interfax)

FORMER RUSSIAN PARLIAMENT SPEAKER IDENTIFIES CAUSES OF FIRST, SECOND CHECHEN WARS

29 November

In an interview published in the 22 November issue of "Yezhenedelnyi zhurnal," Ruslan Khasbulatov said that the decision to send Russian troops into Chechnya in late 1994 was taken partly to distract public attention from growing economic problems, and partly because then Russian President Boris Yeltsin feared that Khasbulatov

himself -- one of the leaders of the October 1993 confrontation between Yeltsin and the Duma -- might come to power in Chechnya in the event that his campaign to oust Chechen President Dzhokhar Dudaev peacefully was successful. Khasbulatov claimed that hundreds of thousands of Chechens supported that ill-fated campaign. As for the second Chechen war, Khasbulatov argued that it could have ended in 2000-2001 if the Russian military had apprehended the leaders of the Chechen resistance, but that Chief of Army General Staff Anatolii Kvashnin did all in his power to prolong the conflict while constantly affirming that it was "manageable" and "localized." (RFE/RL)

AFGHAN CONCERN AT OPIUM SPRAYING

30 November

The Afghan government has expressed concern to US and British officials after a mystery spraying of herbicide on opium crops in the country's east. The government said a probe had shown poppies in two districts of Nangarhar province had been sprayed by air without authorisation. The US and British denied any involvement in such activities. The Afghan government said villagers in Nangarhar had complained of feeling unwell after the mystery spraying two weeks ago. A local doctor, Mohammed Rafi Safi, told the AFP news agency he had treated 30 farmers who claimed their fields had been sprayed with herbicide. Presidential spokesman, Jawed Ludin, told a news conference: "It is not just serious for us because of some health problems, it is not just serious for us because it harms the other crops, it is being taken very seriously because it affects the national integrity of our country." Mr Ludin said he had held talks with foreign officials to express the Afghan government's opposition to spraying. He said US and British officials had given the president assurances that they had "never in the past and will never in the future support any aerial spraying either directly or indirectly". An investigation is continuing in Nangarhar with soil samples taken from the Shinwar and Khogyani districts. Nangarhar provincial governor Din Mohammed said he was in no doubt there had been an aerial spraying. "I don't know who might be behind this but... the airspace of Afghanistan is under the control of the United States," he said. Villager Zarawar Khan said he saw "a huge plane flying very low" and spraying a snow-like substance on crops. It said the country now supplied 87% of world opium. In 2003, the trade was worth \$2.8bn, representing more than 60% of gross domestic product. It urged the US and Nato forces to fight drugs as well as Taleban insurgents. (BBC)

KAZAKHSTAN TO ENLARGE ANNUAL RETURNEE QUOTA TO 15,000 FAMILIES

30 November

The state quota for the return of ethnic Kazakhs to Kazakhstan will enlarge to annual 15,000 families in 2005-2007, Chairman of the Migration Committee at the Kazakh Labor and Social Security Ministry Zhazbek Abdiyev said at a press conference in Alma Ata on Tuesday. He said the enlargement of the quota by 5,000 families a year resulted from the governmental plans to increase the population of Kazakhstan to 20 million by 2015. "The quota aims to help the organized return of those who cannot return to their home land because of poor financial status or old age," Abdiyev said. It is planned to provide oralman families with free accommodation instead of giving them money to buy housing, he said. More than 59,000 families or 300,000 people have returned to Kazakhstan within the past 12 years under the national oralman program. Most of oralman families came from Mongolia, Turkey, China, Russia, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan. Kazakhstan has a population of 15 million, and more than 4 million ethnic Kazakhs live in about 40 countries. President Nursultan Nazarbayev spoke about the return of ethnic Kazakhs to their native land for the first time in 1992, and the first oralman families came to Kazakhstan from Mongolia later in the same year. The quotas were introduced later to give material aid to returning Kazakhs, and returnees were called oralman. (Itar-Tass)

RUSSIA DELIVERS 56 TONNES OF HUMANITARIAN AID TO TAJIKISTAN

30 November

Two Il-76 planes of the Russian Ministry for Civil Defense and Emergencies delivered over 56 tonnes of humanitarian aid to Tajikistan on Tuesday. Russia sent 20 tonnes of multi-bed tents, several power plants, 11 tonnes of medicines, 15 tonnes of baby food and other kinds of foods, representative of the ministry's Center of Medicine, Rehabilitation and Tourism Alexander Toritsin, who accompanied the cargo, told Itar-Tass. The cargo was transferred to the Tajik Ministry for Civil Defense and Emergencies in the presence of representatives of the Russian embassy in Tajikistan. The humanitarian aid from Russia came on time, Tajik Deputy Emergencies Minister Abdurakhim Radzhabov said. Landslides and floods affected over 1,000 residents of Tajikistan. Several dozens of families were resettled, and the economic damage exceeded \$40 million. (Itar-Tass)

TAJKISTAN PARLIAMENT'S LOWER HOUSE ADOPTS BILL TO INTRODUCE LIFE IMPRISONMENT

30 November

The Tajik Parliament's lower house adopted a bill Tuesday introducing life imprisonment as an alternative

to the death penalty. Tajikistan has had a moratorium on the death penalty since April and courts have since been using the 25-year jail term instead. The 25-year sentence wasn't an adequate enough punishment for some grave crimes, the parliament's press service said Tuesday. Life imprisonment will be applied as punishment for grave crimes such as murder and rape in aggravating circumstances, terrorism and genocide that are punishable by the death penalty under the current Criminal Code. To become law, the bill initiated by President Emomali Rakhmonov has to be approved by the upper chamber of Parliament and signed by the president. (AP)

RUSSIA IN FAVOR OF RE-ELECTIONS IN ABKHAZIA

1 December

The Russian authorities support the actions of incumbent Abkhaz president Vladislav Ardzinba aimed at stabilizing the political situation in Abkhazia, Gennady Bukayev, assistant to the Russian prime minister, told journalists on Wednesday. "There is a legitimate president, Vladislav Ardzinba, in Abkhazia, the Russian authorities support his persistent efforts to stabilize the social and political situation in Abkhazia and his decision to organize re-elections in the republic," Bukayev said. He also said that, "due to the escalation of tension in Abkhazia, the security at this sector of the Russian state border, including the sea sector, will be increased and railway communications between Moscow and Sukhumi will halt on December 2." (Interfax)

UK ASKS KAZAKHSTAN TO CHANGE PROCEDURE FOR HIRING FOREIGNERS

1 December

The UK thinks Kazakhstan's procedures for hiring foreign workers and issuing documents for them need to be reviewed, British Ambassador James Sharp said at a meeting with the chairman of the Kazakh Senate's committee on social and cultural development, Kuanysht Sultanov, in Astana on Tuesday. Sharp said that many companies in Kazakhstan are working in different industrial branches, so they have to acquire up to four different work permits for every one of their employees. The UK has suggested that Kazakhstan amend the corresponding laws to deal with this problem. The ambassador also said that Kazakhstan's policy on attracting foreign workers is slowing the development of the country's oil and gas complex. A quota for foreign workers is set in Kazakhstan each year based on the country's demands. In 2004, this quota was 0.21% of the country's economically active population. In Kazakhstan, with a total population of 15 million, the economically active population is approximately 7.5-8 million people.

The foreign workforce is used primarily in the oil and gas industry. (Interfax)

SIX US DEAD IN AFGHAN PLANE CRASH

1 December

Rescuers searching for a US military plane which went missing in Afghanistan have recovered the bodies of six passengers from the crash site. The US military says the wreckage of the aircraft was found in the central Bamiyan province. The plane was carrying three civilian crew members and three military passengers. The Casa 212 plane, which left Kabul on Saturday, was one used by the US Air Force to move troops and equipment. "The aircraft was located late Tuesday - it was up in the mountains in (central) Bamiyan," military spokesman Major Mark McCann told AFP news agency. "We also discovered all six people on board died," he said. Ghulam

Mohammed, a senior police official in Bamiyan, said: "They found pieces of the engine and the wheels scattered on top of Baba Mountain, which rises to 5,060m (16,600 ft) and was covered in fresh snow." Maj McCann said the cause of the crash was being investigated. But the US military said there was no indication that the plane had been brought down by hostile fire after taking off from Bagram air base outside the capital, Kabul, on Saturday bound for Shinband in Herat province. "The indications we have is that it got into a valley and tried to gain altitude quickly," Major General Eric Olson of US military said. "The pilot apparently recognised that he was not going to be able to gain altitude quickly enough and tried to make a very dramatic turn, didn't make it and crashed into a very narrow valley." The US-led coalition has over 17,000 troops hunting Taleban and al-Qaeda militants in Afghanistan. (BBC)

