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EDITORIAL PRINCIPLES

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

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Analytical 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: Ideal length between 1000 and 1200 words.

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

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

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

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

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. 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.

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KYRGYZ GOVERNMENT'S CONTROL SLIPS, CREATING DANGERS AND OPPORTUNITIES

Aya Telekova

The Kyrgyz government's hard-necked determination to press forward with concluding the second round of parliamentary elections and rejecting opposition allegations of fraud out of hand has led the situation in the country to boil over. The government has effectively lost control of much of Southern Kyrgyzstan. The possibility of a revolutionary change in Kyrgyzstan is becoming visible, but the risk of an escalation of violence is clear and present.

BACKGROUND: Kyrgyzstan's February 27 parliamentary elections was fraught with multiple violations of the Electoral Code which together with inconclusive results brought about a runoff poll on March 13 in those constituencies where candidates failed to win 50% of votes. Even after the second round, the winner of numerous parliamentary seats remain to be determined.

Meanwhile, the list of successful candidates is already represented by a considerable number of deputies from the pro-Presidential parties "Alga Kyrgyzstan", "Adilet" as well as independent loyalists. One of the challenging districts was the university constituency, where the President's daughter, Bermet Akayeva, contested on her own party ticket, "Alga Kyrgyzstan!", and failed to win a majority on February 27. Thanks to strong 'administrative resources', Akayeva secured the parliamentary seat in the second round of voting. However, her dubious victory echoed the anti-Akayev sentiment among the electorate of Kyrgyzstan. Compared with Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, where authorities managed to steer clear of a runoff poll, Kyrgyzstan's preliminary election results demonstrated the political fragility of Akayev's leadership and the weakness of state governance.

Observers from the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, Russia, China and other Central Asian countries predictably reported that there were no infringements during the first round, both the OSCE and independent local observers found that both the

first and second round of voting were accompanied with a vast rollback of democratic standards. The infringements included the disqualification of former ambassadors from running for Parliament, unequal conditions of campaigning among candidates, the interference of authorities into the electoral campaign in favor of pro-presidential candidates, and an information blockade. The U.S.-funded Kyrgyz-language Radio "Azzatyk" (Liberty) broadcast was closed; the "MSN" opposition newspaper was attacked; and popular internet resources blocked. This provoked protests in Bishkek and other regions including Jalalabad, Osh, Uzgen, Naryn, Kochkor, Ton and Talas.

Although Foreign Minister Askar Aitmatov characterized the situation in the country as stable, the situation has been rapidly deteriorating. The waves of vehement protests in both north and south of Kyrgyzstan are best seen as the people's desperate response to gross infringements of law by authorities, and to what is widely perceived as the usurpation of power by Akayev's clan.

Recently organized People's Assemblies in the Osh and Jalalabad regions of Southern Kyrgyzstan, comprising tens of thousands of protesters, during March 20-22 managed to wrest control of government buildings and airports in these strategic regions. This has shifted the momentum from the government to the opposition forces. At present, the opposition is no longer simply focused on reviewing elections results, but has raised

its ambitions to the resignation of Akayev, regional governors and chiefs of law enforcement bodies. Importantly, opposition leaders also intend to gather a Kurultay similar to those held in the South in the northern Talas province, the native region of Akayev's very influential wife.

Prominent opposition leaders such as Kurmanbek Bakiev and Roza Otunbayeva called for, respectively, the old parliament to convene and assess the elections, and to extend parliamentary powers for a year in order to hold an early presidential election and to pave the way for the election of a new Parliament. Although Akayev's spin doctors seek to mute opposition rhetoric, his disapproval ratings are becoming alarmingly high throughout Kyrgyzstan.

IMPLICATIONS: After Akayev's first presidential term expired, he has manipulated the people's confidence, publicly announcing his determination not to stand for re-election to the presidency. Yet he prolonged his rule by referendums. The continued low level of living standards, the absence of new jobs or a strategy for social security, a huge flow of external migration, increasing drug abuse among young people have characterized Kyrgyzstan along with the simultaneous enrichment of Akayev's family as well as its increasing penetration into the Parliament. This has sparked tremendous resentment throughout the country's regions. Furthermore, by pushing his family, clan and entourage into the Parliament, Akayev swept away the chances of the "centrist" independent politicians and businessmen to win parliamentary seats and antagonized them.

Compared with Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan where presidential power is increasingly consolidated and NGOs are sluggish, Kyrgyz local communities and civil society organizations take a crucial part in the electoral process throughout the country. Having accused the opposition over mass unrest and instability across the country, authorities underestimated the persistent involvement of civil society groups in the democratic process. Independent mass media outlets and NGOs demonstrated their steady commitment to democracy, covering current events with relative impartiality, nominating well-trained independent election observers, facilitating civic actions of peaceful

resistance, and taking mediating role between protestors and authorities in Jalalabad, the first arena of mass protests.

On the other hand, having used various "dirty" technologies during the electoral process, Akayev and his strategists totally undermined their image among the public. A few examples of this include the explosion on March 3 in the apartment of charismatic opposition figure Roza Otunbayeva; the intimidation of university staff and students from the university district where Akayev's daughter Bermet was one of the candidates; and the soviet-styled propaganda through state-run TV and Radio Companies against the opposition. All these suggested Akayev's moral, public and political resources were exhausted and his leadership had undergone an unpredicted agony.

Looking back just few months ago, both international and local analysts argued Kyrgyzstan was not ripe for revolutionary changes, as the opposition movement had failed to implement its political agenda due to its internal divisions. However, by now both the opposition parties, the political elite and independent NGOs have been unified into a civic movement that has established itself as a very effective consultative body between the political establishment, civil society activists, independent politicians, businessmen and the student movement. This forum already represents a substantial danger to the ruling regime. Until recently, the absence of revolutionary leaders in Kyrgyzstan had dominated the views of foreign observers.

Former Foreign Minister and UN envoy Roza Otunbayeva immediately joined the political establishment since her returning to Kyrgyzstan in late summer. Otunbayeva's international experience and in-depth knowledge of the political culture's peculiarity allowed her to become an engine of the current political process. As some observers noted, the apparent alliance of Otunbayeva with Bakiev's impacted the latter's political leadership, which is day by day becoming more determined. An emerging alliance between southerner Bakiev and northerner Otunbayeva, the most influential players of the political establishment, could be seen as a pragmatic and compromising option not only for both southerners and northerners, but also for conservatives and liberals among the public. From a

geopolitical point of view, Bakiev would maintain skillfully a dialogue with Vladimir Putin's Russia and Central Asian neighbors, while Otunbayeva would help Kyrgyzstan regain the credibility of international community.

CONCLUSIONS: A growing chorus of civil society groups and resistance of ordinary voters across the country would be insufficient without frequent and aggressive pressure from key international donors. In light of Bush's second-term foreign policy to end tyranny and to spread democracy all over the world, Akayev's administration is already pressured by the U.S. Government through various statements of U.S. Embassy and U.S. top officials. Simultaneously, international financial institutions and western nations increasingly investing to liberal democracy and market economy of Kyrgyzstan have been late starters in their attention to the current processes.

As hard and unyielding debates between the ruling elite and the opposition establishment is pushing the country towards an unpredictable future, the scope for mediation between the two sides remains strong. Taking into account the geopolitical rivalry between the U.S., Russia and China in the region and specifically in Kyrgyzstan more than any other regional country, the most acceptable choice would be to nominate a neutral actor such as a UN representative to this task. A democratic outcome in Kyrgyzstan, which appears as an increasing possibility all the while as the risk of violence increases, would be beneficial not only for Kyrgyzstan itself. It would radically shift the geopolitical map in Central Asia and would inspire change across the region.

AUTHOR'S BIO: Aya Telekova is a political analyst based in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan.

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DID RUSSIA ESCALATE TENSION IN CHECHNYA BY ASSASSINATING MASKHADOV?

Murad Batal al-Shishani

The assassination of Chechnya's legitimate President, Aslan Maskhadov, on March 8 in a Russian Special operation is no ordinary event. It is a transformation in the dynamics of the contemporary Russo-Chechen conflict. The President who got nearly eighty per cent of the votes in the 1997 elections, endorsed by observers from the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, was the symbol of moderation and Russia's last hope for ending its crisis in Chechnya in a peaceful manner.

BACKGROUND: Aslan Maskhadov was born and raised in Kazakhstan in the middle of the fifties, just like most leaders of the Chechen Independence Movement, such as Jokhar Dudayev and Zelimkhan Yandarbiyev. These leaders have become in the Chechen collective mental recollection an

expression of one of the greatest crimes of the twentieth century, the Stalinist deportation and exile. Maskhadov moved up in his military service after graduating from the Military Academy in 1972 in Georgia. He became a major in the Soviet forces and held a sensitive position in the Republic of

Lithuania. In 1992, he resigned his post in the Soviet Army to join the Chechen Independence Movement and became Chechen Chief of Staff in 1994. In 1996, he led the operation of liberating the Chechen capital of Grozny from Russian forces, which resulted in a humiliating Russian withdrawal from the Chechen Republic.

Upon signing a treaty to end the conflict with then Russian President Boris Yeltsin, who indicated that the treaty ended a 400-year-old conflict between Russia and Chechnya, Maskhadov became President of the Chechen Republic and strove to build a modern nation-state that has a strategic relationship with Russia. Therefore, he tried to control Chechen movements calling for continuing the war with Russia and Chechen gangsters, who began their criminal activities in the Republic in the name of the resistance.

When the Russo-Chechen conflict reemerged in 1999, Maskhadov kept calling for a peaceful resolution and called on Russia to negotiate with Chechens to resolve the conflict and end the war. But these calls fell on the deaf ears of extremists in the Russian Military institution and Russian government hawks, represented by the Russian President, Vladimir Putin.

The assassination of Maskhadov is connected with the nature of the Russian policy in Chechnya since fighting recommenced in 1999. A policy that was characterized by a media blackout that allows foreign media to cover the war only through Russian Army channels, a brutality that led to numerous human rights violations and ethnic cleansing, and filtration camps (the name given to concentration camps) so severe that some observers have compared the policy to genocide.

In addition to that policy, Russia adopted a strategic policy of assassinating Chechen leaders, starting with Jokhar Dudayev, Zelimkhan Yandarbiyev and now Maskhadov, as well as other leading figures. This policy is based on the idea that eliminating these leaders will dissolve the resistance. But so far, it has proven itself wrong as it only led to a further escalation of the conflict.

Russian forces have placed Maskhadov on its assassination list from the start, gave him descriptions similar to those of Osama Bin Laden, and refused to negotiate with him despite the fact that he was the best and most appropriate choice because of his moderation, the international recognition he enjoyed as Chechnya's legitimate President, and most of all his influence on Chechen resistance movements as was proven by the adherence of all factions to his unilateral ceasefire declaration in the beginning of February. However, that ceasefire created a crisis for the Russian and the Pro-Russian government in Chechnya, who had maintained all the while that Maskhadov was "politically dead" and wielded no influence on resistance factions.

IMPLICATIONS: Maskhadov's assassination is concomitant with the attempts to divide power in Chechnya. Ever since Putin's Russia tried to impose impractical solutions by endorsing a constitution for Chechnya and placing the former *Mufti*, Ahmad Kadyrov (whose murder in May 2004 was in itself a product of this Russian policy) at the head of a pro-Russian government, and then bringing his Interior Minister, Alu Alkhanov, to succeed him, power in Chechnya was divided between the pro-Russian wing, Aslan Maskhadov's moderate national wing, and the extremist Chechen resistance wing allied with the *salafi-jihadist* way, including Arab fighters in Chechnya.

Maskhadov proved with his ceasefire declaration, beyond any doubt his power, control and influence. However, Russia gave no heed to his ideas regarding negotiations and peace in Chechnya that was Russia's only way out of its crisis in Chechnya. Maskhadov's demonstration of his influence drove Ramzan Kadyrov to pursue him because he was a real threat to the corruption and illicit formations headed by Kadyrov. Kadyrov the younger was creating a state within a state and exercised more power than Alkhanov, with Russian support. With the extremist Chechen wing losing popularity following the Beslan tragedy and with it its *salafi-jihadist* ally that was also suffering from the lack of funding and the assassination of its leaders,

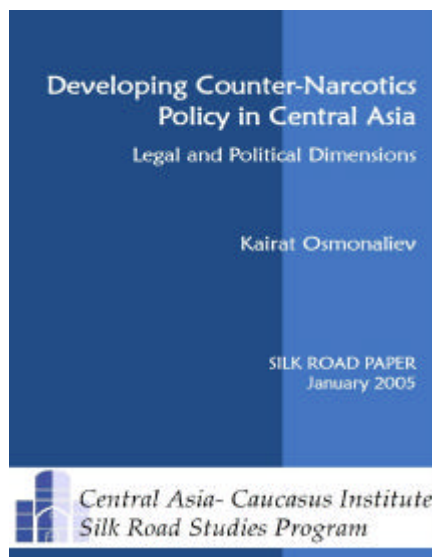
Maskhadov's death apparently will escalate tension in Chechnya.

The moderate national movement will want to avenge the killing of its leader and symbol of Chechnya's independence. Therefore, there are likely to be more attacks on Russian forces and the pro-Russian Chechen government. But they will need time to find another leader who will call for ending the crisis through negotiations. On the other hand, the extremist wing will get the chance to rearrange itself and direct more attacks at Russia. These attacks will not be necessarily restricted to Chechnya because Maskhadov played an important role in refusing any military operations outside Chechen soil. While there were already many attacks outside Chechnya, these will probably increase, especially now that these extremists are free from any obligations to Chechnya's political leader.

As for the pro-Russian government, its loss is twofold: it will now be a target for Chechen resistance attacks; and it will become even less popular and suffer more isolation. The frustration created by Maskhadov's assassination, who was the only hope for peace in Chechnya according to many Chechens, is likely to lead many to join the ranks of resistance in greater numbers and persist in their refusal of any solutions emanating from the pro-Russian government. As a result, Russia's attempts to "Chechenize" the conflict will not succeed, because isolating the pro-Russian government will make it appear a part of the Russian forces and not simply a Chechen power in agreement with Russia.

CONCLUSIONS: Russia has opened the door for more violence in Chechnya. It disregarded advice by academics, non-government organizations and international organizations and powers to negotiate with Maskhadov. While it may not be practical to say that "history repeats itself", the nature of the prolonged Russo-Chechen conflict bears resemblance to many cases such as the imprisonment of the leader of the *Qadiriya* order in 1864, Kunta Hadji. Thousands of *murids* (students and followers) took to the streets in a peaceful march demanding his release. Hadji was a proponent of peace and putting an end to the war that had exhausted the peoples of the North Caucasus with the end of the *Muridi* war with the surrender of its leader, Imam Shamil. The Russian response to the march was to open fire that killed around 4,000 people, in what was to become known later as the Shali incident. Since that date, the *Qadiriya* order became the greatest enemy of Russian forces in Chechnya, and took on the reigns of struggle against Russia which had been restricted to the Naqshbandiya order.

AUTHOR'S BIO: Murad Batal Al-Shishani is a Jordanian-Chechen writer who holds an M.A degree in Political Science, specializing in Islamic Movements in Chechnya. He is author of the book "Islamic Movement in Chechnya and the Chechen-Russian Conflict 1990-2000, Amman 2001 (in Arabic).



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GEORGIA'S DIPLOMATIC OFFENSIVE PROBES MOSCOW'S REAL INTENTIONS ON BASES

Jaba Devdariani

A Georgian delegation travels to Moscow on March 24-25 to try to revamp stalled negotiations over the withdrawal of Russia's Batumi and Akhalkalaki military bases. The talks follow on the heels of a tough parliamentary vote that tasked the Georgian government to outlaw the bases unless the schedule of withdrawal is negotiated by mid-May. Official Tbilisi appears set to interpret the results of the Moscow talks as the final response of the Kremlin on the feasibility of a civilized dialogue between the two countries.

BACKGROUND: Russia retains two military bases in Georgia, the Batumi and Akhalkalaki bases, and the South Caucasus Headquarters, in Tbilisi. The total number of Russian personnel in the country is estimated at 3000 men. Following the 1999 agreement concluded in Istanbul, Russia withdrew the Vaziani base near Tbilisi, and partially also the Gudauta base in secessionist Abkhazia. The same agreement obliged Russia to reach agreement on scheduling the withdrawal of the remaining bases until 2001, but the negotiations were stalled.

Since Mikheil Saakashvili's administration took power from Eduard Shevardnadze, a trend has been apparent in Tbilisi to shift the crux of discussion with Russia away from the bases, hoping that progress can be reached in bilateral relations elsewhere, which would allow Moscow to withdraw its troops without losing face. Georgia took a more relaxed view of the bases especially after Aslan Abashidze was peacefully forced out of office in the Ajaria Autonomous Republic in Spring 2004. Previously, there was an underlining fear that the Russia's Batumi base was propping Abashidze's repressive government and could support it actively if it was endangered, but this failed to happen.

Saakashvili has claimed that the bases only serve a symbolic purpose "to bolster imperial self-confidence [rather] than Russian security". He

offered security cooperation to safeguard the borders and make them terrorist-proof. Georgia's foreign minister Salome Zourabichvili in June 2004 proposed the establishment of a joint anti-terrorist center in exchange for the withdrawal of the Russian military bases.

However, hopes for progress in Georgia's relations with Russia have been dashed. Russia refused to relinquish its support for Georgia's secessionist provinces and allowed Russian volunteers to aid secessionists during the escalation of the conflict in South Ossetia in Summer 2004. Russia also interfered in the presidential election marathon in Abkhazia, aiming to install its own protégé. Russia vetoed the OSCE Border Monitoring Mission on the Russo-Georgian border in December 2004, while continuing to claim penetration of Chechen guerillas into Russia from Georgian territory. Although Tbilisi has awarded several large privatization deals to Russian companies, improving economic relations have failed to drive a political détente.

As a result, in January 2005 the new round of talks on the bases has collapsed. Georgia has elevated the issue of base withdrawal to the forefront of the political agenda. After the visit of Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov to Georgia failed to bring progress in February 2005, the Georgian parliament

– with nuanced support of the Foreign Ministry – initiated a resolution instructing the government to outlaw the Russian presence in Georgia, and seek forceful removal of the troops by January 2006, unless the schedule of withdrawal can be negotiated by mid-May 2005.

IMPLICATIONS: The elevation of Russia’s military withdrawal to the forefront of the bilateral agenda points at the frustration of the Georgian authorities in its efforts to find a common language with the Kremlin. The current tough stance in Tbilisi is a part of a plan articulated by Foreign Minister Salome Zourabichvili that can be titled “Russia’s Choice.”

Zourabichvili maintains that Georgia remains committed to the European values of human rights and the standards of state conduct, while it is for Russia to demonstrate the degree of its commitment to these very principles. If Russia agrees to play with Georgia by international rules, and renounces its attempts to have special sway over the country, then Georgia would take steps to accommodate Russian interests regarding its security. If, however, Russian pressure continues, Georgia would not enter into covert deals regarding the bases, but would use the full force of international law and international forums to mobilize pressure on Russia and expose it as a pariah state.

The Russian authorities argue that withdrawal is agreed in principle, but is impossible until the relevant facilities are available in Russia to move the troops. Defense Minister Sergey Ivanov stated he does not intend to “throw men and equipment into an empty field, as happened [with troops from] East Germany.” During negotiations, Russia demanded 11 years for withdrawal and immense financial compensation – according to former Georgian Foreign Minister Tedo Japaridze, the figure demanded was US\$500 million in January 2004. During talks in January 2004, Russia has reportedly agreed to reduce the timeline or withdrawal to lesser, but equally inflated, 7-8 years.

However, Zourabichvili’s policy seems viable especially in light of recent alliance between

Ukraine and Georgia. It falls neatly within the framework of so called “Karpaty Declaration” of Saakashvili and Ukraine’s Viktor Yushchenko, which sees the regime change in these two countries as a part of a wave of democratization, which is to bring the former Soviet states into the European fold.

The decision of the Georgian parliament, taken unanimously on March 10, was unexpected in Russia, and unprecedented not for its tough tone, but for the detailed course of action and the deadlines it imposed on the Georgian government. It also circumvents Russia’s apparent policy to renege on its 1999 commitments: if the parliament’s decision starts to be implemented in May, it would have nothing to do with negotiated terms of Russian presence, but with the sovereign right of Georgia not to have foreign troops stationed on its soil. There are also indications that the issue of the bases has been brought up at the highest level by the U.S. and European leadership in their talks with Russia.

It seems that Georgia’s toughened stance bore fruit. The resolution was still being discussed on the parliament floor, when in an attempt to prevent its acceptance the deputy chief of staff of the Russian defense ministry said Russia would seek 3-4 years for withdrawal, thus almost halving the time requested by the Russian delegation only a month earlier. Following the parliamentary resolution, the date for the new, previously unplanned talks – March 23-25 – was also set, with the Georgian Foreign Minister cautiously optimistic about its results.

In an optimistic scenario, the sides will agree on withdrawal in 3-4 years, which will open the way for signing a framework treaty on friendship and cooperation. President Vladimir Putin would broadcast it in Russia as a decision to *stay* in Georgia for that period, and can use the agreement as short-term political currency, by signing an agreement during the Victory Parade in Moscow in May, compensating for the Lithuanian and Estonian leaders’ decision not to attend. President Saakashvili, on the other hand, would use it as a

long-term currency, quoting Russian withdrawal as a success by the time his first term expires in 2009.

In a pessimistic scenario, the negotiations would fail, and both Georgia and Russia would be committed to the hard-line scenario that might destabilize Georgia, especially Akhalkalaki which is largely populated by ethnic Armenians who largely favor the Russian base.

CONCLUSIONS: A window of opportunity for normalizing relations between Georgia and Russia is rapidly closing. A decision to elevate the withdrawal of Russian military bases to the forefront of Georgia's agenda shows that the Saakashvili administration is running out of

options, and out of patience, in trying to normalize relations with Russia. Vladimir Putin's administration, on its side, resents pressure and is tempted to mount a counter-offensive, only deterred by the fact that it would be hard to frame and justify it on the international arena. While the chance for a breakthrough in the March 23-25 talks remains, the degree of tension between the two states is likely to persist. If the talks were to collapse, instability in Georgia may mount following the May 15 deadline provided by the Parliamentary resolution.

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ARMENIA'S FOREIGN POLICY: TOWARDS REAL COMPLEMENTARITY

Tevan Poghosyan

Since 1999, Armenia declared that its foreign policy would be based on the principle of complementarity, i.e., seeking to bring Armenia's national interests into harmony – rather than antagonism – with the competing priorities of various global and regional powers. Since then, the issue of complementarity, if not of its precise meaning, has been repeatedly discussed both in Armenian society and its elite, as Armenia had traditionally been perceived as coordinating its foreign policy actions and rhetoric with Russian interests. Recent changes in Russia's position and foreign policy behavior, however, have altered the Armenian perception of Russia as an ally and lynchpin of Armenia's security.

BACKGROUND: Armenia's close coordination with Russia in foreign policy matters was natural given the alliance between the two countries and the widely based perception in Armenia of Russia as the main provider of security vis-à-vis the potential Turkish threat. At present, Armenian foreign policy is undergoing some changes that can be best described as putting substance to its long-declared policy of complementarity. There is a real desire to strengthen relations with NATO, to have greater involvement with the EU, and also to behave as a

true member of the Euro-Atlantic community. A discussion of this process requires an explanation of how the perception of the subject by the Armenian public has evolved recently.

Recent polls conducted by the Armenian Center for National and International Studies (ACNIS), a leading independent think tank in Yerevan, show that the pro-Russian orientation, formerly prevalent among the general population, has been eroded. The causes of this change have their roots in Russian

policy actions on issues that are very sensitive and of great interest for Armenians, first and foremost, the open and close relations Russia now has with Azerbaijan and Turkey.

Certainly, Russia has its interests and will pursue them, but it would be reasonable to expect that Russia would take into account the interests of its allies in the process. The would be North-South transport corridor linking Russia, Azerbaijan and Iran, the recent Russian-Georgia border closing, delays with Russian investment into five Armenian companies that have been transferred to Russia in exchange for nullification of the inter-state debt, among other issues, could not fail to have implications on public opinion. For common citizens, Russia's behavior is seen as negatively affecting Armenia, and does not fit in the neat framework of the Russian-Armenian "alliance."

All these issues raise specific challenges to Armenia that the Armenian leadership is trying to address. Although there are limits to Armenia's freedom to maneuver linked to the unresolved conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh and related consequences, Armenia is looking for deeper relations with other institutions and countries that would complement these shortcomings. On the security side, this means NATO and the U.S.; for economic and democracy reforms and development – the U.S. and EU; and for energy needs, Iran.

IMPLICATIONS: Since the first day of re-establishment of its independence on September 21, 1991, Armenia found itself in complex situation vis-à-vis its eastern and western neighbors, namely, Azerbaijan and Turkey. Armenia's desire to establish relations with Turkey faced a Turkish rebuff laced with pre-conditions, even as Armenian-Azerbaijani relations deteriorated parallel to the hostilities in Karabakh and skirmishes on the Armenian-Azerbaijani border, as well as by Azerbaijan's cutting of economic ties with Armenia. Given the demands by both neighbors that would have required major sacrifices from Armenia that it was unwilling to pay, Armenia was pushed to start looking in other directions, that is, the northern direction (Georgia and Russia) and the southern

frontier (Iran). The constraints in place in 1991 – closed borders with Azerbaijan and Turkey – are still in place, and the establishment of an alliance with Russia remains the only feasible option even in retrospect. Armenia's relations with Iran were, and have remained focused on transportation routes and trading. Even then, there is still no infrastructure or basis for deepening relations and given Iran's autarkic economy, and the fact that bilateral trade has stagnated to a point where Iran barely made top ten among Armenia's trading partners in 2004 (with Russia, Belgium, and Israel being the top three). For Armenia, it was sufficient that Iran pursued balanced relations toward both Armenia and Azerbaijan, a position it continues to preserve to this day.

This North-South approach was satisfactory for Armenia's interests and security until the changes brought by the Global War against Terror (GWAT). Subsequent changes in Russia's approach, particularly the warming of its relations with Azerbaijan and Turkey, have definitely undermined the perception of the Russian leadership in Armenian society as trustful ally.

NATO and EU enlargement also have an impact in the general expectations of Armenians. The strong wish to become a member of the European family is becoming a more tangible notion with EU borders moving Eastward.

Armenia's geographical situation created another fundamental problem: the high dependence on Russia regarding transport and energy. Considering all possibilities, a situation could develop where Russia would like to exercise its power regarding transport and energy levers to put pressure on Armenia. Turkey's closed border is the main factor impeding Armenia from reducing its dependence on Russia.

At a February 24 meeting with NATO Special Representative to the South Caucasus and Central Asia Robert Simmons, Armenian Defense Minister Serzh Sarkisian stated that "if Armenia did not have an unsettled conflict, it would have had the opportunity for a wider involvement into NATO

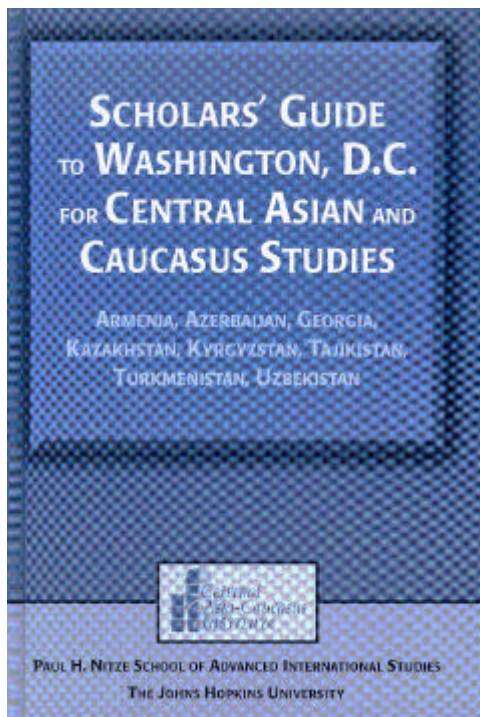
various programs.” Due to the ongoing geopolitical dynamics, Armenia faces the following dilemma. On the one hand, a resolution of the Karabakh conflict would allow Armenia to deepen relations with NATO and in doing so, finally complement and balance its national security interests. On the other hand, a peaceful settlement of the conflict could, from Armenia’s perspective, only be based on mutual compromises that create a situation where the new entity of the Nagorno Karabakh Republic is recognized.

Inclusion of Armenia in the European Neighborhood Policy also has its implications in the Armenian society and the idea of reaching EU membership standards is beginning to be discussed in society. Based on the promotion of the “Armenia 2020” project’s scenarios for the future of Armenia, the most supported scenario was one called “Going Home”, which envisions membership in the EU. Even though ENP does not envision ultimate membership for the country, civil society groups now discuss integration with Europe with renewed

vigor and it appears this demand for European integration will only grow and push Armenia towards the West.

CONCLUSIONS: Armenian’s foreign policy today is closer to the declared principles of complementarity than it has been in the past. However, Armenia’s final decision in terms of choosing to orient itself toward Russia or the West depends on which option will fully satisfy Armenian national interests and enjoy the support of the population at large. Therefore if NATO and the West in general are truly interested in seeing Armenia pursue a more independent foreign policy, achieving this objective would require addressing the Turkish-Armenian border issue, while supporting Armenia’s effort to build an alternative gas pipeline with proper capacity. In this case, Yerevan will have much larger room for maneuver.

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The Central Asia-Caucasus Institute is proud to announce the publication of the Scholars' Guide To Washington DC for Central Asia-Caucasus Studies. The Guide was compiled by Tigran Martirosyan and Silvia Maretti and published by M.E. Sharpe, publishers.

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FIELD REPORTS

A 'TULIP' REVOLUTION DEVELOPS IN KYRGYZSTAN?

Maral Madi

As President Akaev seems to have realized that he cannot continue to be President after the next elections, he seems intent on ensuring his control over the country by creating a pro-presidential parliament. Akaev's determination in clinging to power is best understood in the context that being in power for almost 15 years, his extensive family practically bought out most profitable businesses and control most of the media, thus fearing the political as well as economic – if not judiciary – implications of losing power.

As a result of the two rounds of parliamentary elections, the pro-government parties Alga Kyrgyzstan, Adilet and the Democratic Party of Women and Youth secured a total of 25 out of 75 available seats, and the rest were mainly distributed among pro-presidential independents, including businessmen. As the opposition got about five places, 90% of the new parliament will be pro-presidential. President Askar Akaev's daughter and one son are represented there.

During the past rounds of elections, unprecedented pressure was put on students and state officials to vote for a designated candidate. As mentioned above, most media outlets are controlled by the 'family', especially by Adil Toigoinbaev, son-in-law of the president and husband of Bermet Akaeva, a newly elected parliamentarian. While in Kyrgyzstan, one finds no other information nor does one hear the views of the opposition, since state-controlled TV stations strongly promoted the pro-presidential candidates. In Osh, the gathering of

large amounts of people in front of the state administration building was not even mentioned in a single news item in the Kyrgyz state media, indicating a complete blackout. Attempts to reach opposition or even neutral websites were futile, as these were blocked. After the Moya stolitsa newspaper issued an article with a list of immovable property owned by the Akaev family, all their issues were bought out or confiscated; as a result the volunteers were passing the papers around for free on the streets.

Of the main opposition leaders, only three were elected to parliament. Roza Otunbaeva and Dooronbek Sadyrbaev (Ata-Jurt party) were barred from contesting seats. Kurmanbek Bakiev (Ata-Jurt) lost his electoral district. Adakhan Madumarov (Ata-Jurt) first was reported to have lost but the Central Election Commission reviewed the case and declared him the winner after he gathered 20,000 people to support him. Finally, Omurbek Tekebaev (Ata-Meken) and Azimbek Beknazarov (People's Movement of Kyrgyzstan) got elected.

One noticeable fact is that most opposition leaders are from the south, which has been deprived of any substantial decision-making role in the northern-dominated parliament in Soviet and post-Soviet times alike. However, the artificially accentuated North-South difference is very handy for the president, as it allows the use of divide-and-rule tactics. It is crucial to note that the waves of protests have been rocking the whole of Kyrgyzstan.

They first started in Kochkor, a very northern stronghold and even spread to Talas, the birthplace of First Lady Mairam Akaeva and the Issyk-Kul region, also in the North.

On March 10, opposition groups established the Coordinating council of People's unity in order to send their message across by organizing a kurultai (congress). On March 15, there were large scale gatherings in Alai and Uzgen, where Adakhan Madumarov and Marat Sultonov's supporters occupied the administration buildings.

The building of the Jalalabad administration was held by the opposition groups from March 4, and the one in Osh from March 18. State officials initially stated that no force would be used, but after realizing that the state was losing control over its southern regions, groups of OMON (special purpose police forces) were deployed on March 19 in order to regain the state administration buildings. There is no reliable information on how many people died or were wounded during the clashes. The only reliable information is that buildings were stormed by OMON and soldiers from MoI who arrived from Bishkek, and no local forces were participating in the storming of buildings.

Both state administration buildings in Osh and Jalal-Abad were taken back by the opposition. A crowd of thousands of people burnt down the building of the Ministry of Interior in Jalalabad, and occupied the airports in order to preclude the landing of planes with military reinforcements. A mutiny among Ministry of Interior forces was reported. In Jalalabad. In Osh, besides taking full control of the airport and the state administration building, demonstrators destroyed the Mayor's office. On March 21, opposition forces blocked a group of 96 soldiers of the elite Kalkan forces in Osh airport.

Opposition leaders want Akaev to step down; to review the election results and to hold talks with the president. The interesting question would be what are they going to talk about with the president? It seems that after such violent events in Jalal-Abad and Osh it would be very difficult to reach any

compromise, thus the only way it is indeed if Akaev steps down. With such dynamics it could be said that compromise will be of temporary nature until opposition will regain strength and wider support. However, apart from demands to take down Akaev, opposition still did not propose their own platform and it would be far-fetched to state that it is a united opposition. Given their various backgrounds and after regime is taken down then strong differences can surface.

In lieu of an official reaction, presidential spokesperson Abdil Segizbaev has repeatedly talked about the purported infiltration of extremist or terrorist groups. These statements are not coincidental, given two crucial facts: firstly, there are not enough military forces to control the situation; and secondly, on March 15, President Akaev ratified an agreement between the government of Kyrgyzstan and the CIS Anti-terrorist center (ATC) on the conditions outlining the presence of the ATC branch on the territory of Kyrgyzstan. Rhetoric used by the president's office can be viewed as an attempt to present the ongoing events as extremist and terrorist actions, which could legitimize the deployment of CIS troops to stabilize the situation. Segizbaev also tried to brand these events as a coup planned by "criminal elements connected to the drug mafia...struggling to gain power". This latest branding could also be used to mobilize either the anti-terrorist center of the CIS or even the Shanghai Cooperation Organization.

In Russia, meanwhile, voices calling for intervention are increasingly loud. The Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs stated that the actions of the opposition "lead to the escalation of the situation and negatively affect the political situation in general and should be criticized" and asked the OSCE not to agitate the situation. Members of the Duma Rogozin and Margelov stated that Russia needs to interfere in Kyrgyzstan's affairs and to take action against the opposition. Vladimir Zhirinovskiy stated that "it is necessary to take strong measures in order not to let Akaev be deposed, otherwise Russia will lose Central Asia, and later Armenia

and Azerbaijan” and called to use military forces to suppress the demonstrations. The pro-government Russian channel one started covering events in Kyrgyzstan only after an official statement of the Kremlin. Judging from the scarcity and carefulness of official Moscow’s reaction, it can be assumed that Moscow does not really know what to do in Kyrgyzstan, understanding perhaps that the demise of Akaev’s regime is just a matter of time. It seems that Akaev has so far not succeeded in demanding the deployment of CIS troops under the pretence of activation of “extremist or even terrorist forces”.

The Government has exaggerated the threat of ethnic clashes, and the activities of extremist and terrorist organizations. One of the opposition leaders, Anvar Artykov, is the self-appointed head of the popular government of the Osh region, and

an ethnic Uzbek, which is a positive development. Opposition forces are now planning to hold a Kurultai in Bishkek. While military forces are more organized and stronger in the capital, they are still not enough to peacefully withstand thousands of demonstrators.

Even if the Kyrgyz tulip revolution fails to take place now, it is likely to resurface again in the nearest future and in a more pronounced and violent way. The developments will depend greatly on whether the opposition groups will be able to mobilize the citizens of Bishkek. The stakes are running high, considering that there is little possibility for dialogue after President Akaev on March 22 stated that elections were free of fraud and that the new parliament will start working, ignoring the demands of the opposition to cancel the results.

NO PROGRESS IN NURISTAN

Daan van der Schriek

Nuristan means “the land of light.” Yet it is one of the darkest places in Afghanistan. It suffers from violent local conflicts and in addition, insurgents fighting the government in Kabul feel free to travel in the area. The same cannot be said of government officials, who hold less influence in this mountainous, isolated area than fundamentalist clerics. And a change for the better does not seem to be imminent.

Nuristan is a world on its own. Located in the northwest of Afghanistan and bordering Pakistan, it is isolated from the rest of the country by mountains of up to 6,000 meters. Bad roads that are usually blocked in winter add to the region’s isolation that was an important supply route for the Afghan mujahedin in the war against the Soviets in the 1980s. Also today, Nuristan is one of the major areas of infiltration by insurgents crossing the border from Pakistan. “Insurgents feel free to travel

in this area,” says an official of the Afghanistan NGO Security Office (which advises NGOs working in Afghanistan on security threats) in Jalalabad, the nearest safe big town to Nuristan.

But insurgents not only feel free to travel in the area. Helped by violent local conflict (with rival tribes firing rockets at each other and whole villages being burnt down) foreign aid workers and even government officials travel only with the risk of their lives. “Everyone here is at risk, [both] aid workers and government officials, from insurgents and people from local disputes,” a government official in Nuristan told the United Nations’ Integrated Regional Information Networks (IRIN) in February. Abdul Bari-Siddiqi, who works with the media NGO AINA in Jalalabad, even says “a civil war” is taking place.

In May last year, two Britons working for the private security firm Global Risk that was helping

to provide security for the presidential elections of October 2004 were killed in Nuristan. Perhaps, as observers in Kabul believe, the men were at the wrong place at the wrong time. But the incident helped to make the elections a failure in Nuristan, which does seem to do its best to oust all foreigners. Afghan Aid, the only NGO that was still working in the area, decided to close down its Nuristan operation after an attack on its office there in September 2004. As a result, more than 50 people lost their job.

Other than Afghan Aid, no other organization offered job opportunities - or any other help. This winter, blocked roads and lack of medicines contributed to the death of at least 25 children in Nuristan, which has no phones, electricity, or big towns. Nuristan has become a sad example of an Afghanistan where local and foreign radicals have managed to scare aid and government workers away and force people to live according to their orthodox views. Because bleak as the situation in Nuristan is, as much do Taliban-linked insurgents and al-Qaeda prosper. They would even have bases in the area (except in winter when it is too cold) said Nick Downie, who heads ANSO, in October last year. Coalition Forces apparently try to take action

against the fighters and are conducting operations in the area but they are "not very talkative" about it, says the ANSO official in Jalalabad.

But locals do not suffer only from insurgents. In the absence of any credible government authority, any Kabul-style post-Taliban enlightenment still has to take place in Nuristan. While a first female governor was appointed to the province of Bamyan in early March, life for women in Nuristan, if anything, seems to be getting worse. Religious elders for example forced a local high school to turn girls away and transform into a Madrassa (religious school) serving boys only. "We have been forced to hand [the school] over to fundamentalists," a local teacher told IRIN. "You cannot talk of Afghan progress here."

Infidel Nuristan was only forcibly converted to Islam at the end of the 19th century - when its name changed from Kafiristan (the land of the infidels) to Nuristan. But since then, Nuristanis seem to have become more orthodox than many an Afghan in other parts of the country. Here, clerics still force people to publicly burn their televisions and CD players. And in the absence of any government authority they can probably do so for some time to come.

SMUGGLING AND CORRUPTION CONTINUE TO PLAGUE GEORGIA

Kakha Jibladze

On March 13, President Saakashvili publicly upbraided his staff for passively allowing smuggling to flourish in Shida Kartli, the Georgian region that borders South Ossetia. The rebuke was brought on by recorded telephone calls implicating the regional chief of police, Aleko Sukhitashvili, and several of his associates in a smuggling racket. Saakashvili's reaction was swift and severe - arrests were carried out that very evening - but it will take more than

his political will to stop the culture of contraband and smuggling that has taken root over the past decade.

Since coming to power, President Saakashvili has implemented a loud - and at times violent - war against smuggling and corruption. Sixteen Georgian soldiers and an unknown number of South Ossetians died over the summer after an operation to close the Ergneti black market in the separatist

region led to clashes with the local population. Although there have been reports that the crackdown reduced the amount of contraband coming into the country, it obviously did not stop the problem. The fact that people in the region are still willing to trade in smuggled goods after people gave their lives to stop the flow of contraband seems to give weight to the theory that, after decades of corruption, Georgians have little respect for the law. In fact, when a regional chief of police is arrested for smuggling, there is little motivation for the average Georgian to heed the government's warnings and follow the letter of the law, especially if few other options are present.

According to an article published in the Georgian newspaper 24 Hours, 250 regional police officers in Shida Kartli have been arrested for ties to smuggling operations in this year alone. While such figures show that the problem is epidemic, they also underline the role smuggling plays in the local economy. When police seized smuggled cigarettes and other goods from people near the Georgia/Azerbaijan border earlier this year, a massive riot broke out. No matter how quickly laws are passed in Tbilisi, they don't change the simple fact that for average Georgians, smuggling and corruption is how they live and take care of their families.

Government officials outside of the capital are also not setting a particularly good example. Even after the arrests in Gori, Georgians in other regions continued to try and work the system. Days after

that scandal broke, Saakashvili called all regional governors to Tbilisi for a meeting. To fulfill a pledge he made promising every family living in the regions 20 liters of diesel fuel from the government, he asked each governor for a list of families in his region. In response he received inflated population lists from the regional governors. During the televised meeting, he ordered each governor to provide an accurate figure for his region's population. The president went on to say he would personally oversee the manner the diesel was distributed to guarantee nothing was 'saved' for later sales. The fact that the president himself has to threaten governors into providing accurate data proves that Georgians are not only not mentally ready to live without corruption and the black market, but are also not yet afraid of the law.

One disturbing aspect of the Gori scandal is the fact that the governor of the region, Mikheil Kareli, was appointed to the position by Saakashvili himself. While there is no proof that Kareli is guilty of smuggling or that he even knew about the trade, if it was actively taking place without his knowledge that does not inspire confidence in the level of attention government appointees are paying to dictates from Tbilisi. Regardless of how much emphasis Saakashvili himself places on the need to eradicate smuggling and corruption, the incident in Shida Kartli proves that without the active assistance and intervention of his administration, his policies will not be successful.

CENTRAL ASIAN EFFORTS TO COMBAT HIV/AIDS

Nazgul Baktybekova

A round-table meeting was held in February in Bishkek, capital of Kyrgyzstan, with the participation of government officials and NGO representatives from three Central Asian states – Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. The purpose of the meeting was to develop a

HIV/AIDS Regional Program, which would aim at supporting the effective implementation of comprehensive National AIDS Programs in each partner country.

Since 2000, Central Asia has witnessed a steady growth of the HIV/AIDS epidemic. The already

high rate of sexually transmitted diseases, growing drug addiction and lack of state resources have made the region even more vulnerable to the HIV/AIDS epidemic. Currently, the official number of HIV/AIDS infected persons in Kyrgyzstan is 669, while the figure for Uzbekistan is 5,680 and for Tajikistan 370. However, according to local and international experts, real figures are several times higher.

Representatives of health care systems and NGOs of the three Central Asian states gathered to develop a four-year program to combat and prevent the HIV/AIDS epidemic in the region, RFE/RL reports. In addition to unsafe practices among drug users such as needle sharing, as the participants of the meeting noted, the location of the Central Asian region on the drug trafficking chain stretching from Afghanistan to Russia and Europe heightens the risk of a large-scale HIV/AIDS outbreak in the region.

According to the Kyrgyz Minister of Health Mitalip Mamytov, another important problem is the lack of information among the local population with regard to HIV/AIDS. "Firstly, there is a lack of information. Secondly, preventive measures and explanatory work is not being carried out properly. In addition, poor living conditions among local population and the drug route which runs through the southern regions is intensifying the situation", RFE/RL reported Mamytov as saying. The Deputy Minister of Health of Tajikistan, Zievuddin Avgonov, agreed with his colleague saying that campaign against HIV/AIDS would be successful only when every person knows what HIV/AIDS is, how it is transmitted and how dangerous it is. Therefore, the participants of the meeting stressed the importance of including the launch of an

extensive information campaign on HIV/AIDS among the local populations. They also pointed out the necessity of involving NGOs into this campaign and rendering them technical assistance.

In the meantime, The Global Fund against AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria granted Kyrgyzstan US\$17 million to fight these diseases. Kyrgyz Deputy Prime Minister Toktobubu Aitikeeva and Program Manager of the Global Fund Valeriy Chernyavskiy said that due to this financial assistance, Kyrgyzstan now has a chance to stop the spread of these diseases and halt the HIV/AIDS epidemic in 2006, Kabar News Agency reported. The first installment in the amount of US\$3,2 million has been made.

Valeriy Chernyavskiy said that Kyrgyzstan is at present at the early stage of the HIV epidemic, however, the rapid growth of new infections in the southern regions of the country is alarming. Traditionally, no treatment has been offered to HIV-infected patients due to the absence of state resources and the high cost of antiretroviral medication. Fortunately, the Global Fund's support stands to remedy this situation. In an interview with RFE/RL, Elden Kalchakeev, representative of the Global Fund, said that US\$79,000 were spent for the purchase of antiretroviral facilities. From now on antiretroviral treatment will be available for all HIV/AIDS infected persons free of charge.

669 HIV-infected persons in Kyrgyzstan, of whom 586 are Kyrgyz citizens and 83 are foreigners, are going to benefit from the financial assistance provided by the Global Fund. Government representatives, the National AIDS Center and National Phthysiology Center decided to create a united structure with a common secretariat with the aim of better coordination of the management of these funds and ensuring transparency.

NEWS DIGEST

GEORGIAN PARLIAMENT SETS DEADLINE FOR CLOSURE OF RUSSIAN MILITARY BASES

10 March

The Georgian parliament passed on 10 March by a unanimous vote a resolution demanding that Russia agree by 15 May to close its two remaining military bases in Georgia by 1 January 2006. Should Moscow fail to meet that deadline, the Georgian Parliament will ask the Foreign Ministry to stop issuing visas to Russian military personnel and instruct the Finance Ministry to designate Russia's outstanding debts for use of the bases part of Russia's state debt to Georgia. Nika Rurua, deputy chairman of the parliament's Defense and Security Committee, calculated the sum involved at between \$300 million-\$400 million. (Caucasus Press)

SLAIN CHECHEN LEADER'S SON VOWS 'WAR WILL CONTINUE....'

11 March

Anzor Maskhadov, 29, the only son of murdered resistance leader Aslan Maskhadov, told journalists on 10 March in Baku, where he now lives, that the war in Chechnya will continue despite his father's death. He said he will continue the fight for Chechen independence but without returning to Chechnya and taking up arms. Maskhadov told RFE/RL's North Caucasus Service on 9 March that Russian arguments that his father was "a terrorist" cannot be substantiated, and that he can prove they are untrue. He further denied that his father bore any responsibility for the Beslan hostage-taking in September 2004, asserting that, on the contrary, Maskhadov was on his way to Beslan to try to negotiate with the hostage takers when Russian special forces stormed the school where the militants were holding over 1,000 children, parents and teaching staff hostage. (RFE/RL)

CHECHEN LEADER: MASKHADOV'S BODY SHOULD BE RELEASED TO FAMILY

11 March

A top Chechen government figure, a Kremlin aide and a high-profile Russian lawyer have expressed disapproval of the Russian authorities' refusal to hand over the body of Chechen separatist leader Aslan Maskhadov, who was killed on Tuesday, to his family for burial. The Russian Prosecutor General's Office earlier cited a law that prohibits terrorists' bodies from being released to their families. Deputy Prosecutor General Nikolai Shepel told Interfax on Thursday that Maskhadov would be buried

in an unmarked grave and that his family would not be notified about his burial. Asked when Maskhadov would be buried, Shepel said: "I think all these measures will take about two weeks." (Interfax)

MOSCOW SEES DOUBLE STANDARDS IN FOREIGN REACTION TO MASKHADOV SLAYING

12 March

The Foreign Ministry on 12 March issued a statement saying that it is closely monitoring global reaction to the 8 March slaying of Chechen resistance leader Aslan Maskhadov. The ministry statement said that Maskhadov was "a figure of the same type" as radical field commander Shamil Basaev. The statement said that the "liquidation of Maskhadov" has activated the enemies of normalization in the Chechen Republic, including "emissaries and abettors of terrorism who at present are abroad and using the information tribunes of a number of foreign governments." The ministry criticized unspecified foreign media outlets for transmitting terrorist "threats" that are aimed at creating nervousness in Russia and "sowing in the population a feeling of defenselessness and fear." The ministry called on foreigners to avoid "double standards." "In words, many come out for an active struggle against international terrorism, while the liquidation of one of the most odious international terrorists is greeted by expressions of regret," the statement read. (lenta.ru)

AZERBAIJANI PRESIDENT RULES OUT COMPROMISES OVER KARABAKH...

12 March

Speaking to journalists on 12 March after a ceremony to mark the 13th anniversary of the forming of Azerbaijan's Interior Ministry troops, President Ilham Aliyev said Baku will not change its negotiating position with regard to resolving the Karabakh conflict, and he excluded any compromises by Azerbaijan in the course of the negotiating process. Aliyev said Azerbaijan's negotiating position has become much stronger as a result of unspecified political and diplomatic successes. He termed the recent ceasefire violations a "provocation" on the part of Armenia. Speaking earlier at the anniversary celebration, Aliyev said Azerbaijan "does not want a war" over Nagorno-Karabakh, but added that Azerbaijan's patience "is not boundless" and the country will never reconcile itself to the loss of Karabakh. (Azertaj)

KYRGYZ OPPOSITION LEADERS TO GATHER IN SOUTHERN REGION MARCH 15

13 March

Kyrgyz opposition leaders are planning to meet in Dzhahal-Abad in southern Kyrgyzstan on March 15 to discuss the outcome of the second round in the Kyrgyz parliamentary elections, being held on Sunday. Opposition forces will gather for a congress in Dzhahal-Abad on March 15, said sources in the organizing committee of the protest rally being held in Dzhahal-Abad. The organizers of the congress expect representatives of local communities from most of the country's regions to attend the congress alongside opposition leaders. Sympathizers of the Popular Movement of Kyrgyzstan and Fatherland opposition coalitions have been holding protest rallies in front of the administrative buildings in Dzhahal-Abad and in the Osh region since March 4. They are demanding the resignation of President Askar Akayev. The main opposition leaders are running to parliament in electoral districts located in southern Kyrgyzstan. (Interfax)

LUKOIL, KAZAKHSTAN CREATE OIL JOINT VENTURE

14 March

Vagit Alekperov, president of Russia's LUKoil, and Timur Kulibaev, vice president of Kazakhstan's state oil and gas company KazMunayGaz, announced at a news conference in Moscow on 14 March that the two companies have set up a parity joint venture to develop Kazakhstan's Khvalynskoe oil field. Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbaev and Russian President Vladimir Putin signed an agreement three years ago on the division of Khvalynskoe and two other oil fields in the northern Caspian. The project may require more than \$1 billion in investment and should begin production in 2010, Alekperov said. Alekperov also stressed that the project will involve strict adherence to environmental standards. ("Kazakhstan Today")

KARABAKH CEASEFIRE VIOLATIONS CONTINUE

14 March

Sporadic shooting was reported on 11 March for the fourth consecutive day on the Line of Contact separating Armenian and Azerbaijani forces east of the unrecognized Nagorno-Karabakh Republic (NKR), RFE/RL's Armenian Service reported. The NKR Defense Ministry issued a statement on 11 March blaming the exchanges of fire on repeated attempts by Azerbaijani forces to penetrate behind Armenian lines. A spokesman for the NKR Defense Ministry said one Armenian soldier has been killed and two wounded in recent days;

one Azerbaijani serviceman was reported wounded in the head on 11 March. (RFE/RL)

ELECTION RESULTS DISAPPOINTS KYRGYZ OPPOSITION

15 March

According to results available for 71 of the 75 seats in Kyrgyzstan's new unicameral parliament, the opposition will only control about 10 percent of the legislature, RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service reported on 14 March. Moreover, preliminary results of the 13 March runoffs indicate that former Prime Minister Kurmanbek Bakiev, an opposition leader who has already declared his intention to run in the October presidential elections, failed to win a seat. Opposition leaders pointed to numerous violations and questioned the legitimacy of the elections. Viktor Chernomoretz, the leader of the Democratic Movement opposition party, told RFE/RL, "I have never seen such dirty elections." Other opposition representatives echoed his comments. But presidential spokesman Abdil Segizbaev said that the results simply reflected a lack of popular support for the opposition. (RFE/RL)

TURKMEN OPPOSITION LEADER CALLS FOR INTERNATIONAL PRESSURE

15 March

Khudaiberdy Orazov, a former Turkmen deputy prime minister and now an exiled opposition leader, told Russia's "Nezavisimaya gazeta" in a 14 March interview that change will come about in Turkmenistan only if the international community exerts heavy pressure on Turkmen President Saparmurat Niyazov. Orazov criticized the United States for lacking a "thought-out policy" on Turkmenistan and noted that such U.S. companies as General Electric, John Deere, and Boeing do business in the country. Orazov said that Russian policy, which he described as a conscious effort to ignore the plight of Turkmenistan's Russian minority in order to maintain energy cooperation, is "short-sighted and doomed to fail." Nevertheless, Orazov said the "harsher tone of recent statements" by U.S. officials pointed to a "shift...in American policy" indicative of a harder line on Turkmenistan. But he concluded, "When we speak of the need for pressure from the United States, we remember that the removal of Niyazov from political life is the task of the Turkmen people." (RFE/RL)

TWO OPPOSITION PARTY MEMBERS ARRESTED IN TAJIKISTAN

15 March

Rahmatullo Zoyirov, head of Tajikistan's Social Democratic Party, told a news conference in Dushanbe on 14 March that Tajik police have arrested two party members in Soghd Province, RFE/RL's Tajik Service

reported. In a statement published the same day by Avesta, Zoyirov said that Nizomuddin Begmatov, a candidate in the 27 February parliamentary elections, and Nasimjon Shukurov, Begmatov's representative, were arrested on 12 March and charged the next day with defamation and hooliganism. Likening the event to the Stalinist repressions of 1937, Zoyirov said that the party members were targeted on trumped-up charges for attempting to stand up for their rights and the rights of others. He demanded that the authorities free the two men, drop the charges against them, and file criminal charges against the local authorities who harassed them. The Social Democratic Party, which did not win a single seat in recent parliamentary elections, has alleged fraud, joining three other parties in a complaint to the Central Election Commission and a demand for new elections in Dushanbe. At the 14 March news conference, Zoyirov said that his party will ask for permission to stage a protest if the complaints "are not dealt with in accordance with the law," Avesta reported. (RFE/RL)

NEW RESISTANCE LEADER SAYS CHECHENS 'WILL FORCE RUSSIA TO ACCEPT PEACE'

15 March

In his first address to the Chechen people, posted on 14 March on chechenpress.co.uk, Abdul-Khalim Sadulaev, who was identified last week as the legitimate successor to slain Chechen President Aslan Maskhadov, said the latter's death will not change the Chechen leadership's commitment to "the total restoration of the country's independence from Russia." Sadulaev said that "the Chechen people are capable of demolishing the pride of its foe in the person of the Russian empire and forcing it [to accept] peace." He added that "we do not accept every conceivable form of violence against innocent people," but went on to qualify that statement by adding that "we have the right to act against the enemy using the methods that are acceptable to God." Similarly, Sadulaev affirmed the Chechens' willingness to act within the framework of international law, but added that Chechens' respect for democratic values should not be abused in order to impose on the Chechen people "laws that contradict our national values." Sadulaev spoke at length and in respectful terms of Maskhadov's role as president and military leader, and he appealed to the Chechen people to demonstrate "watchfulness and patience" in the ongoing struggle against Russian forces. (RFE/RL)

PAYMENT OF MASKHADOV REWARD TO INTENSIFY SEARCH FOR BASAYEV - ALKHANOV

15 March

Chechen President Alu Alkhanov hopes that the Federal Security Service's (FSB) steps to pay its promised reward for information on the whereabouts of separatist leader

Aslan Maskhadov will help intensify the search for guerrilla leader Shamil Basayev. "I am confident that now Basayev will hardly be able to feel safe wherever he is hiding - a region, a community, a forested area or the mountains," Alkhanov told Interfax on Tuesday. "After the promise to pay most of the pledged money was kept, and the population knows that it is no myth, people will appear who will launch their own search for Basayev and his associates and inform the authorities of their progress," the president said. Massive funds and energy have been devoted to large-scale anti-guerrilla operations underway in the republic, he said. (Interfax)

EX-AJARIAN LEADER ABASHIDZE'S PROPERTY CONFISCATED

16 March

The property belonging to former leader of the Georgian province of Ajaria, Aslan Abashidze, and his close relatives has been transferred to the state's ownership by court bailiffs acting under an Ajarian court ruling. The property includes 105 items, among them houses, apartments, land plots, enterprises, filling stations, and other things, the Georgian Justice Ministry told Interfax. Abashidze's property was frozen six months ago at an Ajarian court hearing. The confiscated property has been estimated to be worth several tens of millions of dollars. (Interfax)

GEORGIA, SOUTH OSSETIA REAFFIRM COMMITMENT TO DEMILITARIZATION

17 March

Following a 16-17 March meeting in Moscow of the Joint Control Commission that monitors the situation in the South Ossetian conflict zone, Georgian Minister for Conflict Resolution Giorgi Khaindrava said the two sides have signed a protocol setting specific dates for the resumption of the demilitarization process. Under an agreement signed in November 2004 by the late Georgian Prime Minister Zurab Zhvania and Eduard Kokoity, president of the unrecognized Republic of South Ossetia, that process should have been completed by 20 December, but according to Khaindrava it was delayed by bad weather. It was also agreed to schedule a meeting between Kokoity and Zhvania's successor, Zurab Noghaideli. Khaindrava positively assessed the role of the Russian peacekeeping contingent deployed in the conflict zone. Boris Chochiev, the South Ossetian co-chairman of the commission, proposed convening a meeting of human rights activists to discuss an exchange of Georgian and Ossetian prisoners. (Caucasus Press)

ASSASSINATION ATTEMPT ON AZERBAIJANI DIASPORA LEADER FAILS

18 March

An unknown assailant on 18 March fired bullets at a car carrying National Cultural Autonomous Federation of Azerbaijanis in Russia leader Soyun Sadykov. Sadykov was not injured, but his driver received gunshot wounds to the shoulder and head. Sadykov is also the chairman of the Karabakh charitable fund, which assists Azerbaijani refugees from Nagorno-Karabakh. The vice president of Sadykov's organization, Dzhamil Sadykhbekov, told newsinfo.ru that Sadykov has been planning a celebration on 14 May of the 200th anniversary of the joining of the Azerbaijani khanate with Russia. Sadykhbekov said Armenia does not look favorably on this celebration. He denied that there is any kind of internal struggle within the Azerbaijani diaspora. Gazeta.ru reported that Sadykov's banking activities also might have attracted hostility. He was chairman of the board of directors of Moszhilstroibank, which lost its license in 2004 and has had trouble repaying its creditors and customers. (RIA-Novosti)

REPORTS INDICATE UZBEKISTAN REFUSES U.S. INSTITUTE ACCREDITATION

18 March

Uzbekistan's Justice Ministry has denied accreditation to the U.S.-based International Republican Institute (IRI), RFE/RL's Uzbek Service reported on 18 March. Although there has been no official announcement, a Justice Ministry spokesperson did not deny the report when contacted by RFE/RL. If confirmed, the denial of accreditation would add IRI to a list of international organizations no longer active in Uzbekistan. In 2004, the Soros Foundation and Internews were also denied registration in Uzbekistan. (RFE/RL)

GEORGIAN COAST GUARD DETAINS RUSSIAN TANKER

19 March

Georgian Coast Guard units detained a Russian tanker late on 19 March outside the port of Batumi for "violating navigation rules." The ship's 15-member crew was allowed to go ashore, although the owner must pay a 50,000 lari (\$27,000) fine before the vessel is released. The Georgian coast guard has detained more than 30 foreign vessels for similar violations over the last two years, including another Russian ship in June 2004. (ITAR-TASS)

AZERBAIJANI PRESIDENT ISSUES PARDON FOR POLITICAL PRISONERS

20 March

Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev issued a decree on 20 March pardoning 115 prisoners. The prisoners, including 53 who are considered by the Council of Europe to be political prisoners, include three leaders of the opposition Musavat party and leaders of two other political

opposition parties. The release of the political prisoners follows a demand by a Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly delegation that was in Baku last week. (Turan)

MOSCOW FURIOUS OVER WARSAW'S PLAN TO HONOR FIRST CHECHEN PRESIDENT

21 March

The Foreign Ministry on 21 March expressed "outrage" at a proposal by the Warsaw City Council to name a city street after Dzhokar Dudaev, the first president of the Chechen Republic, who was killed by federal forces in 1996, Russian and international media reported. "It is difficult to see this decision as anything but an assault on the memory of Russia victims of terrorist attacks in Moscow and other cities and as support for international terrorism," the ministry's statement said, according to . The ministry's statement called Dudaev a "leader of nationalist extremists" and said Warsaw's action could harm bilateral relations. (RosBalt)

KYRGYZ PROTESTERS TAKE OVER TOWN

21 March

Opposition demonstrators in Kyrgyzstan have taken control of a town, as protests continue a week after the second round of disputed elections. In Jalal-Abad, a police station was set on fire, and protesters took control of the airport to prevent reinforcements being flown in. Protesters say President Askar Akayev's party used fraud to win the elections. The US administration says it is watching the situation closely and has urged both sides to show restraint. The prime minister says the government is ready to talk to protesters, and has promised that force will not be used. "Not the president, not me, and not the interior minister will allow weapons to be used against our own people," said Nikolai Tanayev. There are unconfirmed reports that a number of policemen and protesters have been beaten, with some sources speaking of fatalities. "We hope there will be no further violence," said presidential aide Abdil Seghizbayev. But an opposition leader said talks would only be worthwhile if President Akayev himself took part. "All other lower level negotiations will be just a waste of time," Kurmanbek Bakiyev of the People's Movement of Kyrgyzstan told the Associated Press news agency. About 10,000 people besieged the police station in Jalal-Abad on Sunday morning, forcing police to take refuge on the roof of their station. The protesters were said to be armed with sticks and home-made petrol bombs as they entered the police compound. Police officers were firing shots in the air from the roof of their headquarters, but a spokesman said they were only using blanks. Protesters allowed the mainly inexperienced police forces to leave the station before they set it on fire, but insisted they leave riot gear behind. The assault on the Jalal-Abad police station came a day after protests in the city and in

Osh. Several demonstrators and a police officer were reported injured on Saturday, as the authorities tried to clear people from official buildings. (BBC)

GEORGIAN POLICE DETAIN FOUR DRUNKEN CIS PEACEKEEPERS

22 March

A Georgian rapid-response unit detained four CIS peacekeepers on 21 March near the unofficial border between Abkhazia and Georgia, Rustavi-2 television reported. The armed peacekeepers were held after reportedly entering a private residence in the village of Ganmukhuri in the Zugdidi District. The peacekeepers, who were reportedly found to be intoxicated, initially told the Georgian police that they were "searching for a lost horse," but later admitted that they were lost. Russian Defense Ministry spokesman Nikolai Baranov confirmed that the peacekeepers were detained after wandering from their assigned location in the Gali District, Interfax reported. The four soldiers were later turned over to a detachment of CIS peacekeepers sent to the village to take custody of the detainees. (RFE/RL)

AKAYEV WILL NOT DISCUSS RESIGNATION WITH OPPOSITION

22 March

Kyrgyz President Askar Akayev said he will not resign from his post as the Kyrgyz opposition has been demanding. "As for my resignation, this issue lies outside the capability of any political forces," Akayev said in a televised speech on Tuesday evening. "This decision can only be made by the people or the parliament, and we will not negotiate on this subject," Akayev said. (Interfax)

RUSSIAN BASE WITHDRAWAL FROM GEORGIA WOULD COST \$250-300MLN - IVANOV

22 March

Russian Defense Minister Sergei Ivanov said that withdrawing Russia's military bases from Georgia would cost about \$250-300 million. "The price of withdrawing our bases from Georgia would be \$250-300 million," Ivanov told journalists in St. Petersburg on Tuesday. "This sum includes withdrawing troops and vehicles, providing the servicemen with housing, setting up new places of deployment and constructing new ammunition depots and barracks," Ivanov said. (Interfax)

OSCE CRITICIZES OPPOSITION'S ACTIONS IN KYRGYZSTAN

22 March

Officials from the Organization for Cooperation and Security in Europe (OSCE) have criticized the actions of the local opposition forces in Kyrgyzstan that have triggered disorder and unrest in the southern part of the

country, a source close to the OSCE Center in Bishkek told Interfax on Tuesday. "Representatives from this organization in Bishkek have made harshly critical comments on the opposition's actions, assessing them as anti-constitutional and going beyond the acceptable limits," the source said. In private conversations, OSCE representatives "agree that among the motives behind the opposition's unfolding destructive actions was the conclusion that the monitoring mission of the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) made following the first round of the elections," he said. The OSCE Center in Bishkek issued a statement on Monday expressing concern over the way the post-election situation in Kyrgyzstan is developing and to note that the latest events in Dzhahal-Abad and Osh might lead to an escalation of violence and undermine stability, the source said. (Interfax)

PROTESTS FORCE KYRGYZ POLL REVIEW

22 March

Kyrgyzstan's president, Askar Akayev, has ordered a review of some parliamentary poll results amid growing protests over alleged irregularities. His office said a review would be held in districts of the Central Asian state where the poll results had sparked "a strong public reaction". The announcement came as opposition protesters seized two towns, including the country's second city Osh. Russia's Foreign Ministry condemned the protests, blaming "extremists". "Extremist forces must not be allowed to use political instability to create a threat to the democratic foundations of the Kyrgyz statehood," it said in a statement. Russia also rebuked the Organization for Security and Cooperation (OSCE) for declaring that the elections had fallen short of democratic standards. It urged the body to be "more responsible" in its election monitoring conclusions "to prevent destructive elements from using these assessments to justify their lawless actions". (BBC)

ONE KILLED, SIX INJURED IN SOUTHERN AFGHANISTAN PRISON RIOT

22 March

One prisoner has been killed and six people including three policemen injured during a clash at a jail in southern Afghanistan, officials said. The incident took place Monday night in the city of Kandahar, the former stronghold of the ultra-Islamic Taliban regime. "One prisoner was killed and six others including three police were injured in Kandahar prison," city police director General Salim Khan told AFP Tuesday, declining to give more details. The trouble started when an inmate attacked a prison police guard and opened fire, injuring him and two other policemen, a police source said. In a subsequent exchange of fire the attacker was killed and three prisoners were wounded, the source said. Interior

ministry spokesman Lutfullah Mashal was not available for comment. On December 17 four guards and two prisoners were killed in Kabul's main jail as clashes erupted after an escape attempt. In the Kabul riot, a Pakistani and an Iraqi detainee were killed after attacking a guard at Pul-e-Charki jail with a razor blade and stealing his gun. They were killed after intervention by the national army. (AFP)

AFGHANISTAN OPENS WEST POINT STYLE CADET SCHOOL

22 March

Mentored by advisers from the prestigious U.S. Military Academy at West Point, Afghanistan has opened its own cadet school to groom an officer class versed in democratic values for its fledgling army. The Afghan National Army has 22,000 men trained and deployed so far, many of them helping U.S. forces quash an insurgency by remnants of the ousted Taliban regime in the south and east of the country. Afghanistan aims to eventually have an army of 70,000 strong, but in the

meantime the presence of NATO peacekeepers and U.S. forces acts as a security guarantor. "What we're going to produce is officers who can understand the role of the military in a democracy and could anticipate and respond effectively in a changing world as they assume positions of leadership in the Afghan Army and Afghan nation," West Point's dean, Brigadier General Daniel J. Kaufman, told Reuters following a ceremony to mark the academy's opening on Tuesday. An election won by President Hamid Karzai last October was seen as a turning point for a nation that had known only conflict and repression since it was invaded by the Soviet Union in 1979. "They (Afghans) are experienced fighters, there's no doubt about that. What's new is defending a republic," said Kaufman. The new National Military Academy of Afghanistan will ensure cadets are chosen from all the country's different groups in order to forge a national identity. There were 120 cadets aged around 18 in the first intake at the academy, but the plan is for the number to be raised to 250 in subsequent years. (Reuters)

