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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. Articles should normally be based on local language news sources. Each 1000-1200 word analytical article must offer a concise and authoritative statement of the event or issue in question. An article must provide relevant, precise and authoritative background information. It also must offer a sober and analytical judgment of the issue as well as a clinical evaluation of the importance of the event. Authors must cite facts of controversial nature to the Editor who may contact other experts to confirm claims. Since *Analyst* articles are based on solid evidence, rather than rumors or conjecture, they prove to be reliable sources of information on the region. By offering balanced and objective analysis while keeping clear of inflammatory rhetoric, The Analyst does more to inform our international readership on all sides of the issues.

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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: 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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PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS IN AZERBAIJAN: A FAIRER GAME OR SAME OLD STUFF?

Alman Mir-Ismail

With “velvet revolutions” spreading in the former Soviet space, the Azerbaijani government feels increasingly insecure. The upcoming parliamentary elections in November will be a key test to stability and democratic governance of the country. As the opposition parties are gearing up for radical changes, the political leadership of the country attempts to satisfy Western demands for reform in the electoral process so that to downsize the risk of a falsified election and subsequent opposition riots. Since parliamentary elections do not pose a direct threat to the ruling elite and can, at best, bring only a fraction of the parliament under the control of the opposition, the authorities seem to be willing to conduct the most free and fair elections in the recent years. Only this would ensure further support from the international community and could prevent a velvet revolution.

BACKGROUND: Azerbaijani elections have been always problematic. They have been harshly criticized by the international community and domestic opposition alike, and have failed to provide a level playing field for all political forces in the country. Due to the widespread fraud during the elections, the political parties from the ruling and opposition forces in the country have failed to recognize each other's interest and instead focused on antagonism and mutual insult, leading to a high level of distrust and political polarization on both sides.

While the international community seemed to have developed good working relations with the political leadership of Azerbaijan, it has been increasingly frustrated with the high level of corruption, red tape, bad governance and lack of reforms in the country. Thus, lately, President Ilham Aliyev has been coming under pressure from the Council of Europe, OSCE and western embassies on issues of cadre changes, free and fair elections, and economic and political reforms. In many ways, the western players see the upcoming parliamentary election as a “last chance for democracy” in Azerbaijan. Specifically, the Azerbaijani leadership is encouraged to observe the freedom of assembly and permit opposition rallies, which have been banned since the post-election violence in October 2003. Moreover, the authorities are advised to provide access

to TV for all candidates, regardless of their political affiliation.

To respond to these demands, the Azerbaijani President initiated a number of measures that are aimed at smoothing the tensions between the political players in the country and ensuring free and fair elections in November. To the surprise of many, the ruling party YAP invited five major opposition parties to a discussion on ways to build dialogue and common trust between each other. The meeting was the first event of such kind in the history of Azerbaijan and led to the belief that the ruling party was softening up for building a dialogue and not confrontation with its rivals. The parties have agreed to continue these roundtable discussions.

Next, President Aliyev signed a presidential decree on improvement of the electoral process. The decree specifically outlined the range of activities that need to be implemented in order to ensure free and fair elections in November. Specifically, President Aliyev instructed the Central Electoral Commission to better train the election commission officials, warned the local executive heads in the provinces not to interfere with the electoral process under the threat of punishment and requested that they do not prevent any opposition rally or meeting during the electoral campaign. The decree was followed after a broad

meeting of the President with the members of the ruling party, in which he instructed them to conduct free and fair elections. A week before that he has ordered the head of the Baku subway Tagi Ahmadov to allow the sale of opposition newspapers, which he had prohibited for several months. Meanwhile, Ali Hasanov, a senior official from the President's Office, informed ANS-TV that opposition rallies would be permitted from June onwards, and two other senior officials of the Azerbaijani government have traveled to Strasbourg to discuss the changes to the electoral code with the experts from the Council of Europe.

IMPLICATIONS: All of these improvements are certainly positive moves. Both the OSCE and the American embassy in Baku have welcomed the presidential decree and have expressed hope that it will be executed properly. Local experts speculate now whether the government is indeed playing a fairer game, or if it is trying to blindfold the international community.

Several reasons indicate that the former hypothesis is more correct. Foremost, the Azerbaijani government is fearing that the velvet revolutions will spread to Azerbaijan as well. Some of the opposition parties have already started openly talking about it and forming coalitions to increase their chances for victory, whereas the youth groups in the country have become more active than before. This puts much pressure on the Azerbaijani political leadership and requires it to seek ways to prevent a velvet revolution. Engaging in a dialogue with the opposition parties and improving the electoral process is the best way to do so.

On the other hand, President Ilham Aliyev is in a very difficult situation. From one side, the international community is demanding cadre changes, political reforms and better governance, and from the other side his hands are tied with the members of the old guard, who remain very powerful and dangerous. President Aliyev realizes that he can neither upset these powerful members of the ruling clan, because that would weaken

the ruling party prior the crucial elections, nor can he continue working with them as they hinder the economic and political development of the country and cause criticism from the Western democracies. Thus, President Aliyev is trying to play a careful game.

The Presidential decree on the improvement of the electoral process is a clear message from the President that the local executive heads should change their behavior. Western observers note that electoral fraud often takes place not because of the instructions from above but because the local officials try to "show loyalty" to the President by falsifying the elections and boosting the numbers for the ruling party. In order to prevent further fraud, the President will have to show not only political will but also make sure that the local executive officials change their mindset for the electoral process. Nevertheless, the first step seems to have been made.

CONCLUSIONS: At this moment, it is still early to say whether the parliamentary elections in November will be the most democratic elections in the history of independent Azerbaijan or not. Neither is it possible to say whether possible fraud will lead to a velvet revolution or end up with another crackdown on the opposition forces. The political events are unfolding rapidly in the country, yet what becomes clear is that President Aliyev, unlike many members of his administration, is inclined towards playing a fairer game. Only the conduct of democratic elections would ensure continuous Western support for the leadership of the country and eradicate the basis for a velvet revolution in the country. President Aliyev will need further political will and determination to conduct the necessary cadre changes and eliminate unnecessary obstacles on the activities of the NGOs and opposition parties. This would provide, for the first time ever, the opportunity for harmonious relations between the political players in the country.

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KYRGYZSTAN'S "REVOLUTION": POPPIES OR TULIPS?

Svante Cornell and Niklas Swanström

As the Kyrgyz political landscape begins to settle, disturbing reports are beginning to surface on the exact forces that spurred the activists who unleashed the upheavals that concluded with the flight and resignation of Askar Akayev. Political figures with known criminal connections are increasingly powerful in the blurred configuration of forces in the country. Indeed, the main threat to Kyrgyzstan's political process may not be a North-South struggle but the criminalization of its political system. It remains to be seen whether the strength of criminal forces, some connected to the drug trade, is only a transient phenomenon in the current interim period, or whether Kyrgyzstan will go Tajikistan's way.

BACKGROUND: In areas badly affected by organized crime and especially the drug trade, a process has unfolded that is best described as the criminalization of states. Two focal points of this phenomenon can be identified: the Andean region and Central America on the one hand, and the Central/South Asian region on the other. As is well known by now, the Colombian cocaine cartels managed to exert an increasing influence on the country's politics in the early 1990s, to the extent of financing a successful Presidential election campaign. Mexico's high-level corruption problems are also well known.

In this context, the vague concept of corruption is unsatisfactory to understand the processes occurring. The term State Capture is more appropriate, used to describe attempts by organized forces, whether legal or illegal, to buy, control, or otherwise influence administrative decisions, legislative acts, decrees, court verdicts, or state policy in general. This term nevertheless does not differentiate between the types of interests that seek to influence state institutions. When organized crime infiltrates the state in order to influence or affect its decision-making mechanisms, the process is qualitatively different than ordinary state capture, amounting to a criminalization of the state.

In recent years, the former communist states of Eurasia have been particularly badly affected by this phenomenon, to a great extent because of the particular pathologies within the Soviet administrative system. The crippling effect of drug addiction, crime and corruption on the functioning of the already weak states of Central Asia is increasing rapidly, and endangering societal and economic security as well as political stability. Yet the effect of drug trafficking is not limited to this. Through a mix of corruption and violence, organized crime figures and networks in these areas has grown to a position of influence such that they have sought a commanding influence, in fact a degree of control, over the decision-making structures in certain states. The worst hit have been weak states hit by protracted internal conflict, such as Afghanistan, Tajikistan, and Georgia until the Rose Revolution. The first two have seen a growing influence on their political systems by individuals and networks deeply involved in the Eurasian heroin industry. The appointment in 2004 of Ghaffor Mirzoyev, a former warlord with known past involvement in the heroin industry, as head of Tajikistan's Drug Control Agency, only illustrates this point. Indeed, voluminous accusations of high-level participation in the drug trade by high government officials raise the question whether

these states are infiltrated by criminal interests to an extent that merits the use of the term “narco-state”.

IMPLICATIONS: Kyrgyzstan in the late 1990s developed into a major transit corridor for Afghan drugs smuggled northward through Tajikistan. In particular, the southern areas of the country were badly hit by this development. However, few indications existed that the highest political levels had been seriously affected by organized crime networks. In the 2000 parliamentary elections, drug control experts estimate that a handful of individuals connected to the drug trade in the southern areas gained immunity and influence by being elected to parliament. Among these were two persons accused of being leading drug kingpins of Southern Kyrgyzstan.

As these individuals step in where the state is absent in rural communities and distribute welfare, build roads and mosques and provide electricity, they enjoy significant popularity among the local population – which, together with the intimidation of potential rivals explains their repeated election to parliament.

At the lower level, there is widespread involvement of law enforcement agents in underreporting drug seizures or selling confiscated drugs, especially among the counter-narcotics forces of the Ministry of Interior. Field research indicates that most drug dens in the country are known to the law enforcement authorities, and that previously confiscated drugs are sold there. But at this lower level of the state authorities, the problem is mainly related to the dismal working conditions and compensation obtained by officials. Indeed, local officials bluntly argue it is immoral to ask them to fully invest in their job considering the extremely low salaries, the lack of backup and resources of all kinds including fuel for cars, and the dangers involved in this line of work. Indeed, both the Kyrgyz state and the international community have grossly disregarded the law enforcement agencies. As a result, as in other former Soviet states, they remain the most unreformed and corrupt institutions of the state.

Unfortunately, the lower level corruption is not Kyrgyzstan’s only problem. With the 2005 elections and their violent aftermath, the power of organized crime leaders in the country’s politics grew. Southern Kyrgyzstan’s drug barons are known to operate paramilitary forces, under the guise of martial arts sport clubs, in particular the “Alysh” (traditional wrestling) clubs. In the aftermath of the 2005 elections, 2,000 young people from the Alysh clubs were gathered and fed for 25 days, stormed state offices in Jalal-Abad and Osh, and later reached Bishkek.

Initially, the “People’s movement” of Kyrgyzstan did not want to align themselves with these organized criminal figures. But they lacked substantial funds and a wider popularity among the southern clans. Furthermore, the lack of a clear structure within the opposition movement made it possible for criminal leaders to infiltrate the movement and provide financial support.

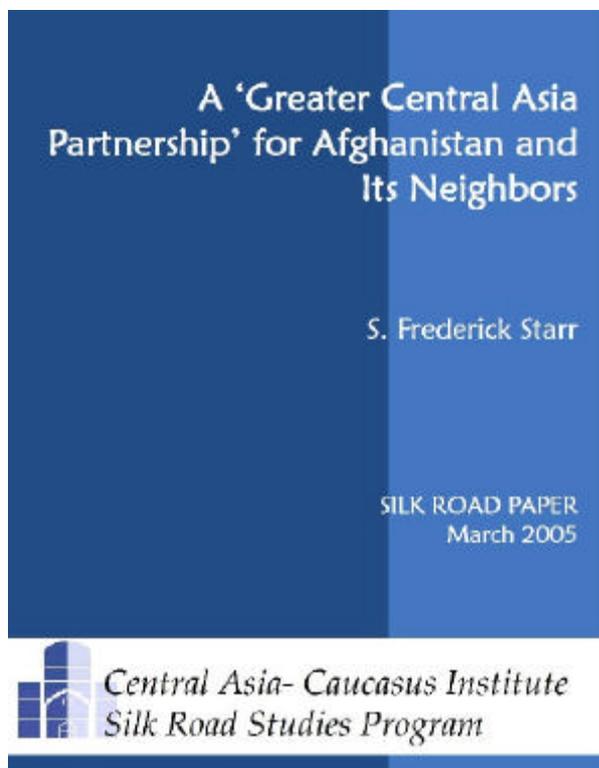
The allegations against specific individuals are found in open sources, especially the Kyrgyz and Russian media. Clearly, given the nature of the process, direct evidence is difficult if not impossible to obtain. Lingering allegations have been voiced for a number of years against numerous figures, most regularly against Bayaman Erkinbayev, one of the richest and most influential men in Southern Kyrgyzstan whose control of martial arts clubs was crucial in the initial phases of the protests in southern Kyrgyzstan. As Erkinbayev is an announced presidential candidate, the need to address these allegations is apparent. While the allegations remain to be proven, they form part of a larger trend spreading deep into the state hierarchy. In recent months, several government appointments have created consternation. Most importantly, the appointment by interim president Kurmanbek Bakiev of Dastan Sarygulov as state secretary was taken as a cause of concern, given Sarygulov’s past high-level involvement in the gold mining business scandals surrounding the disappearance of large quantities of gold revenues.

CONCLUSIONS: At the bottom of the problem is the fact that the state is impotent and its role is

taken over by local potentates with very dubious connections. The general population is not interested in knowing the real background of their deputies, as long as they keep providing services. The present political chaos and vacuum of legitimate power in Kyrgyzstan, and the ongoing power struggles within the political elite, perfectly suit the legalized criminal figures, who have been quick to fill this vacuum. The country's southern regions have practically come under the influence of criminal groups who are well placed in the higher echelons of state institutions. In fact, they have already started to remove their opponents. Thus on April 5, 2005, killers gunned down Colonel Uran Aliev, the head of the Osh regional department of MoI to combat state crimes. The perhaps most worrisome element in this development is the tacit acceptance by political observers in Kyrgyzstan of the presence and influence of criminal figures in the

country's political system. This matter-of-factual acceptance of the criminalization of the political scene indicates a risk that Kyrgyzstan's political development will approximate that of Tajikistan, where the influence of drug lords over politics and society is well known. Whether Kyrgyzstan will be able to shake off the influence of criminal groups over politics or will turn into a narco-state is too early to tell. What is clear is that unless this problem appears on the radar screen of the international community, very little is likely to change.

AUTHORS' BIO: Svante Cornell and Niklas Swanström are researchers in the Research Project on Narcotics, Organized Crime and Security conducted by the Central Asia-Caucasus Institute and Silk Road Studies Program, a Joint Research and Policy Center affiliated with Johns Hopkins University-SAIS and Uppsala University, Sweden.



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BUSH VISITS GEORGIA TO SUPPORT “THE BEACON OF LIBERTY”

Khatuna Salukvadze

On the final step of his European tour to commemorate the 60th anniversary of the defeat of Nazi Germany, U.S. President George W. Bush visited Georgia on May 9-10. The first visit ever of an American president to the former Soviet republic that fiercely resists Russia's influence is being interpreted as strong support for Mikheil Saakashvili's administration, termed by Bush “a beacon of liberty for the region and the world.” Deliberately balancing the U.S. President's Moscow trip with visits to Latvia and Georgia may also have a powerful effect in nudging Russia toward realization of the irreversible geopolitical decay of this ex-colonial power and recognition of the full independence of its neighbors.

BACKGROUND: Arriving to Tbilisi after attending a Russian military parade in the Red Square, George W. Bush appeared notably relaxed as he tried to tune in to Georgian fiery folk dances. The country gave him an impressive welcome as 150,000 Georgians gathered in Tbilisi's Freedom Square to listen to the U.S. President. Bush used this opportunity to stress his second term trademark values – the need for spreading democracy and liberty – and praised the Georgian Rose Revolution of 2003 for its important contribution to the cause of freedom and its inspiration of democratic changes elsewhere in the world: “before there was a Purple Revolution in Iraq or an Orange Revolution in Ukraine or a Cedar Revolution in Lebanon, there was a Rose Revolution in Georgia,” Bush said.

Georgian President Saakashvili, who has also made it his mission to champion democracy in the region, was offered praise for Georgia's drive towards the EU and NATO and for creating a template that triggered the installment of new governments in Ukraine, Moldova and Kyrgyzstan, where Soviet-era officials were replaced by western-aligned democrats. Encouragement for additional efforts to advance power changes in former Soviet terrain ran equally strong – with Belarus, described by Washington as the “last dictatorship in Europe,” on

the top of the list. Belarus opposition leaders arrived to the Georgian capital to attend the meeting in Freedom Square.

IMPLICATIONS: Among the core problems that Georgia faces and that were touched upon in President Bush's address, many are of Russian making. This is particularly the case as regards Moscow's support for separatist territories. This is why Bush's pledge of support, which came amid the heightened long-running dispute over Russia's continued military presence in Georgia, induced immediate and obvious implications from Moscow. Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov reportedly sent a letter of protest to his American counterpart regarding the Latvia and Georgia visits.

Saakashvili has put the Russian bases' withdrawal as a priority on his political agenda. Two bases, one in Akhalkalaki in South Georgia and the other in the Black Sea port of Batumi housing 3,000 troops, are remnants of a much larger Russian military presence in Georgia in Cold War times.

The row over the was the main reason for President Mikheil Saakashvili to boycott celebrations in Moscow after talks between Georgian Foreign Minister Salome Zourabichvili and Sergey Lavrov in Moscow on May 6 failed to reach an agreement

over the final date of the closure of bases. Moscow refused its earlier stance to pullout the bases by January 1, 2008, thus challenging the resolution of Georgian parliament which instructs the government to veto the troops as unlawful foreign military presence on Georgian soil and request their forceful removal by January 2006 unless an agreement over a timeframe for bases' withdrawal is reached with Russia before May 15.

Russia's main fear seems to be that NATO-aspirant Georgia is preparing for NATO and U.S. deployment on its territory. The country is unequivocally looking forward to start its process toward NATO membership as early as in 2007. Following the U.S.-sponsored "train-and-equip" program, Washington has launched a new military assistance program for the Georgian armed forces, and Georgia contributes 850 troops to coalition forces in Iraq.

The issue of the bases was raised by President Bush in his talks with his Russian counterpart. In the difficult task to reassure Russia that the U.S. is not meddling on its borders, President Bush tried to persuade Putin to withdraw bases from Georgia. As Tbilisi will likely continue to mobilize pressures on Russia using the full force of international forums, Russia may soften its stance as it seems to fear the symbolism rather than security effect of withdrawing from Georgia. Militarily, Russia is still keeping the South Caucasus within its orbit by maintaining a large base in Armenia with the Armenian government's consent. If this pragmatic foreign policy view prevails, the likelihood that a final deal on the bases could be imminent increases.

As for Moscow's sponsorship of Abkhazian and South Ossetian secessionists to break away from Georgia, Bush endorsed Saakashvili's proposal to grant broader autonomy to the breakaway regions and raised the possibility of a larger American role in resolving these separatist conflicts, while proclaiming that "the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Georgia must be respected by all nations."

Balancing the drive for democracy with energy supply needs – the cornerstone for cooperation between the two countries – Bush delivered a pledge, according to informed sources, to provide U.S. assistance for Georgia's gas pipeline system that was up for a privatization deal with Gazprom, Russian state-owned gas company. This step would further restrain Russia's desire to have a monopoly over Caucasian energy shipments.

CONCLUSIONS: As Washington's support for Saakashvili's administration comes to validate Russia's enduring fears that Georgia gains enough support to permanently slip from Russia's orbit, Russia will weigh several factors in deciding its next course of action. The most important challenge is the rapidly changing situation where Russia is being encircled by the spread of velvet revolutions in its immediate neighborhood. This will include Moscow's influence waning on its borders, security challenges created by the new power vacuum, and the effect of a potentially democratic Ukraine on Moscow's regional strategic interests.

Bush's visit to Georgia can be seen as symbolic show of support, yet, for Georgia, the symbolism of the visit may well mount the deliverable results as it provides a visible boost to Saakashvili's young term in office. While avoiding open confrontation with Moscow, the Bush' administration is being fairly dismissive of Russian sensibilities about its influence in the South Caucasus. President Bush has proclaimed Washington's desire to promote a new, democratic order in the former Soviet Union. For that order to endure, Russia's traditional imperialist ambitions will have to be curtailed. Georgia may become a good venue to push this agenda as Washington sees the country as a fighter, both in the global war for democracy and in the regional battle against Russian reassertion.

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IS THE SALAFI-JIHADIST WAY STILL AN OBSTACLE TO RUSSIA IN CHECHNYA?

Murad Batal al-Shishani

Russian Federal Authorities some weeks ago announced the killing of a prominent Arab fighter in Chechnya known as Abu Zaid Al-Kuwaiti or Abu Omar Al-Kuwaiti, who was according to Moscow a “sponsor of terrorism”, an “expert on explosives” and skilled at making technological bombs. The Russian Ministry of Interior announced that he blew himself up after his hideout in Ingushetia was surrounded. This incident raises a number of questions, the most significant of which are: Does the incident constitute a success for the Russian forces in their “war on terrorism”, as Moscow calls its brutal war in Chechnya? If so, why has Chechnya still seen no peace?

BACKGROUND: Abu Zaid or Abu Omar Al-Kuwaiti, his real name Ahmad Nasser Eid Abdullah Al-Fajri Al-Azimi, was not the only Kuwaiti who joined the *Jihad* in Chechnya. Many young people from the Persian Gulf went there, and Al-Azimi was one of a group of Kuwaitis with similar biographies. Their journeys started in Afghanistan, Bosnia Herzegovina and then Chechnya. Some, like Hamad Al-Slaiman, went back to Afghanistan and was killed in Tora Bora in 2001.

Al-Azimi was an actor in children programs until he became religious and worked as an *Imam* in Safwan Bin Omayah Mosque in Kuwait, the capital. His services were terminated “for breaking the Ministry of Awaqaf’s regulations regarding collecting donations from mosque goers and he was expelled from his work.” Some newspaper sources indicate that following that incident he moved to Afghanistan in 1998, trained in the al-Farouk camp during the American raids on Afghanistan in 1998, and then went to Chechnya in October 1999. In Chechnya, Al-Azimi got married and had two boys, Omar and Abdullah.

Al-Azimi’s ideology is *salafi-jihadist*, just like all Arab fighters in Chechnya. They followed to us that *Jihad*, as ordained by religion, is directed at Russian soldiers and not civilians.” This pupil is clearly Abu-Omar Al-Saif, who is a *salafi-jihadist* ideologue in Chechnya, because he was a pupil of the Saudi *Sheikh* Mohammad Bin Othaimin’s. Al-Saif wrote a letter in commemoration of Othaimin’s death about his support for Chechnya in *fatwa* and opinion; and there seems to be a great similarity

between the ideology of Al-Saif and that of Othaimin.

After Abu-Omar Al-Saif addressed a recorded letter through qoqaz.com in November 2003 to the Islamists who were performing violent acts in Saudi Arabia, asking them to turn their attention to fighting the Americans instead of the Saudi government, Al-Azimi posted a letter of his own on the website a month later entitled “*Fadl Al-Jihad wal Mujahideen wal rad ala al-Muthabbitin*” (The benefit of *Jihad* and *Mujahideen* and a response to demoralizing attempts). Al-Azimi presented ideas similar to those of Al-Saif, especially with regard to targeting Americans in Iraq instead of local government in an attempt to ease the pressure off funds to Arab fighters in Chechnya, which were what gave legitimacy to their presence there. Since September 11, Gulf governments have created constraints on sponsors and donors to Islamist groups, and these constraints increased in severity with the increase of terrorist attacks in those countries.

In addition to that, Al-Azimi, just like Abu-Saif, considers the American war on terrorism a “crusade” and Iraq a graveyard for American troops, saying that this is a war that concerns all Muslims. They consider democracy a form of heresy, and the *salafi-jihadist* way “a thorn in the side of enemies, hypocrites and apostates. He believes that “monotheism if not achieved by *jihad* will be tradition”, a statement that clearly exemplifies the *salafi-jihadist* way that calls for establishing the rule of religion by the sword.

IMPLICATIONS: Russia misleadingly described the former Arab fighters leader in Chechnya, Abu Al-Walid Al-Ghamidi, who was the successor of the well-known leader Khattab; the Jordanian Abu Haf, Abu-Omar Al-Saif; and then Abu Zaid Al-Kuwaiti as “money wielders”. In addition to that, there is great confusion about the names of Arab fighters in Chechnya, coupled with a lack of adequate information about them. The problem of cutting off funds for terrorism is a fundamental issue for the *salafi-jihadist* way in Chechnya as is clear in the letters and statements issued by Al-Ghamidi and Al-Saif, especially in the latter’s above-mentioned letter. Cutting off funds has been one of the main causes of undermining the *salafi-jihadist* way in Chechnya. Since the assassination of the President of the Chechen Independence Movement, Jokhar Dudayev, Islamic funds from the Middle East played a major role in attracting young Chechens frustrated by the brutal Russian operations and Russia not keeping its commitment to paying the compensations stipulated by the Khasavyurt agreement of 1996 for rebuilding Chechnya. The American war on terrorism and cutting off funds meant bad news for the *salafi-jihadist* way because most donations came from Persian Gulf countries that began imposing restrictions on money transfer.

Secondly, the agenda of the *salafi-jihadist* way is fundamentally different from that of the Chechen Independence Movement, which limits its action in terms of adversary and location to Russia. The agenda of the *salafi-jihadist* way is broad. It encompasses the United States, Israel, India and other countries, and spreads its operations on a wide geographic field covering Iraq, Palestine, Kashmir, etc. Further, the Chechen Independence Movement calls for a secular state and the *salafi-jihadists* want a religious state. This difference becomes more pronounced if we look into the *salafi-jihadist* opinion regarding Iraqi resistance. They are in favor of a guerrilla warfare and the political leadership being linked to the military leadership, in addition to the sectarian perspective in solving the Iraqi crisis as indicated by Al-Saif and Al-Azimi’s writings.

Such ideas might be what drives Russia (and some foreign newspapers) to claim that there are Chechen fighters in Iraq, a claim that was proven to be false. These writings are an indication of the *salafi-jihadist* way’s crisis in Chechnya due to the cut-off in funds

or assassination of its leaders such as Khattab and Al-Walid or his supporters like the former Chechen President Zelimkhan Yandarbiyev, assassinated at the hands of Russian Intelligence agents in the Qatari capital of Doha. A crisis that led the *salafi-jihadist* way to look for another ground to prove its credibility. This is explained by a dichotomy that legitimizes the continuing presence of the *salafi-jihadist* way between the “close enemy” and the “distant enemy”. It is only natural and expected of *jihadists* to start looking for another front, and Iraq seems a likely option. Therefore, it would seem that those ideas were meant for Iraq, but this time around there will be no ethnic Chechens who will leave their war-ravaged country to fight a new war.

CONCLUSIONS: Killing the *salafi-jihadist* leadership will not urge the peace process forward or end the dire human situation in Chechnya. Since the eruption of the second Russo-Chechen war in 1999, Russian forces have taken control of the media outlets in Chechnya and exercised propaganda to make their war look like a war on terrorism. That is why it becomes crucial to clearly distinguish between reality and propaganda. The influence of the *salafi-jihadist* way in Chechnya is already limited if compared with the moderate movement represented by late President Aslan Maskhadov, whose call for a ceasefire at the beginning of February to all Chechen resistance groups was a proof of his power, before being assassinated by Russia. In addition, the negotiations the Mothers of Soldiers organization is holding in London with another leading figure of the moderate movement, Ahmad Zakayev, further proves that Russia is using its propaganda to claim that there is terrorism in Chechnya. In order to end any extremist tendencies, Russia would need to search for policies different from those it is using at the moment. These include ending the mopping-up policy and violations of human rights, and hold negotiations with moderate Chechens, as the call for war and fighting has exhausted the two sides economically and humanly.

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 Islamic Movement in Chechnya and the Chechen-Russian Conflict 1990-2000, Amman 2001 (in Arabic).

FIELD REPORTS

KYRGYZSTAN HOSTS THOUSANDS OF UZBEK REFUGEES AFTER VIOLENT RIOTS IN ANDIJAN

Erica Marat

Most western media report that approximately 600 people fled to southern Kyrgyzstan to find refuge following the May 13 bloody clash in the Uzbek city of Andijan. But it is difficult to estimate the real extent of human migration in the last days as the Kyrgyz-Uzbek frontier stretches for several hundred kilometers and border areas are densely populated.

Andijan, Uzbekistan's fourth largest city, is located forty kilometers from Kyrgyzstan and is the closest Uzbek city to Kyrgyzstan's 'southern capital' Osh. Zumrat Salmorbekova, an NGO leader currently working in Batken, says the number of refugees reached 6,000. According to the Kyrgyz Ombudsman Tursunbai Bakir, if the tensions in Uzbekistan continue the number of Uzbek refugees might rise up to a million.

Most refugees were reported to escape through a bridge in the Karasuu town that separates Kyrgyz and Uzbek territories. The bridge was unilaterally shut by the Uzbek security structures in 1999 and completely ripped up in 2002. On May 15 Andijan refugees rebuilt the bridge within several hours. Along with refugees, the restored bridge instantly boosted local trade in fruits and vegetables. The Ferghana Valley's largest bazaar is located on the Kyrgyz side of the bridge. During the Soviet times Karasuu residents used the bridge on everyday basis for family and trade communications.

As the conflict in Andijan mounted, it was clear that the bulk of immigrants will try to escape to Kyrgyzstan and not Tajikistan because the Kyrgyz part of the Ferghana Valley is economically better

developed. There are thousands of seasonal labor migrants from Tajikistan and Uzbekistan already working in Kyrgyzstan's southern cities.

Refugee flows continued for several days, after new clashes broke out in Pakhtaabad on May 16. A number of people injured by Uzbek military were hospitalized in Kyrgyzstan. All refugees are accommodated in tents provided by the Red Cross and Kyrgyz Special Forces in a neutral area. It is not clear how many people seeking asylum in Kyrgyzstan were directly involved in the Andijan riots.

A representative of the Kyrgyz government Almanbet Matubraimov, and governor of the Osh oblast Anvar Artykov met with the Uzbek refugees. People demanded full restoration of the Karasuu bridge to allow communication between Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan. Uzbek refugees in Kyrgyzstan are also revealing new facts about the Andijan massacre. Many say they fled because of poverty and unemployment.

Kyrgyz military forces are mobilized at the Kyrgyz-Uzbek frontier, and Osh local law-enforcement structures alone stationed twenty-five additional military centers. But according to the Kyrgyz media reports, the situation along the Kyrgyz-Uzbek border remains calm. Kyrgyz security structures opened the border for five days for the Uzbek citizens, although the possession of entry visas is required.

In the first days after the riot the Uzbek security forces were not capable of controlling the border. Kyrgyz and Uzbek citizens crossed the border,

experiencing unaccustomed freedom of movement. Uzbek refugees destroyed the border post in Karasuu and border guards abandoned it to escape from the angry crowd. The border control was restored by Monday, May 16. However, the Kyrgyz news agency Aki Press reports that the control of the border is currently conducted only on the Kyrgyz side.

The Kyrgyz government is worried that insurgents and former prisoners freed in Andijan will cross the border along with the civilians. The control of immigrants from the Kyrgyz side is minimal and the likelihood that criminals might have already fled Uzbekistan is high.

Since Tashkent officially refers to Andijan and Pakhtaabad protestors as Islamic militants of Hizb-ut-Tahrir and Akromia movements, the Kyrgyz government will likely face disapproval from president Islam Karimov for allowing criminals on its territory. At a May 14 press conference Karimov said that many terrorists escaped in Kyrgyzstan. Some Kyrgyz experts worry that on the basis of these statements, Uzbekistan might launch unilateral activities that will contradict Kyrgyz interests.

Previously, Karimov has accused the Kyrgyz government of hosting Islamic radical groups on its territory. During the Batken conflicts in 1999-2000 the Uzbek president blamed the Kyrgyz and Tajik governments for allowing the IMU to challenge state borders. While all CIS members offered military and humanitarian aid to Kyrgyzstan following the Batken conflicts, Karimov conducted unilateral military actions on the Kyrgyz territory that infringed the country's sovereignty.

The dangerousness of religious radical movements in Kyrgyzstan's stability is widely debated among local politicians. Felix Kulov, a leading politician from northern Kyrgyzstan, is alert to the allegedly growing activity of Hizb-ut-Tahrir in the Ferghana Valley, but a representative from the south, Kurmanbek Bakiyev, thinks that the problem is not as important for the domestic security.

Karimov also shut the Kyrgyz-Uzbek border during the March events in Kyrgyzstan. The country is delaying with its promise to de-mine borders with Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. Naturally, any changes in the border regime directly affected local residents.

Another problem Kyrgyzstan might face is Uzbek refugees' reluctance to return to Uzbekistan. Kyrgyz Colonel-General Myrzykan Subanov thinks that the Kyrgyz side must refrain from identifying the Uzbek immigrants as people in exile and it is up to international organizations to decide on their official status. Mr. Subanov also added that independently from their status, Uzbek citizens cannot remain on the Kyrgyz territory because this will undermine Kyrgyz-Uzbek relations. He referred to the bilateral agreement on "Eternal Friendship" between the countries.

Bloody events in Uzbekistan raised a wide disapproval among the Kyrgyz public. There are protests in southern Kyrgyz cities and in front of the Uzbek Embassy in Bishkek in support of Andijan residents. Uzbeks abroad compare the recent events with holocaust, naming Andijan a city of dead.

In the wake of presidential elections these are unwanted problems for the Kyrgyz interim government that is struggling to establish a stronger state. Financial and human resources will be diverted from setting voting stations, settling issues of spontaneous land seizures in Bishkek and investigating Akayev's corruption records.

However, Kyrgyzstan has an ample experience in hosting large flows of refugees in the past. In the mid 1990s up to 20,000 Tajik refugees, mostly women and children, fled to Kyrgyzstan. The country also dealt with several thousands of immigrants from Afghanistan. This practice allowed the local NGOs and individual experts to learn strategies of dealing with immigration issues. It is also clear that many refugees see Kyrgyzstan as a transit point for further exodus to Russia, Europe or North America.

OPPOSITION TRYING TO GAIN SOLID GROUND IN ARMENIA

Grigor Hakobyan

According to Armenian mass media reports, on April 20th, 2005 the leader of the Armenian opposition party 'New Times', Aram Karapetyan, organized a public rally in the city of Sevan, where he accused the President and Armenia's ruling government of corruption and illegitimacy, citing a large number of recorded irregularities that took place during the presidential and parliamentary elections of 2002 and 2004. Western observers had made similar criticisms in the past. In its April 21st, 2005 issue, the Armenian newspaper *Hyekakan Jamanak* (Armenian Time) reported that during the rally, a group of drunken people began to shout insults at the rally organizers, which led to a brawl between them and rally participants.

During the scuffle, as some rally organizers attempted to break up the fight, a shot was fired, which wounded the leader of the youth wing of the New Times Party, Garegin Petrosyan. Petrosyan was rushed to the local hospital for emergency aid and later was transported to another hospital in the capitol city Yerevan. The gun used in the shootout was confiscated by rally organizers from an unidentified man and handed over to local police.

On April 21st, the Azg daily newspaper reported Aram Karapetyan's account of the events as follows: "A group of provocateurs who, by the way, were not local residents were sent for this purpose. When people began asking questions, down below, they began to yell insults. People began to beat them mercilessly. About 300 people beat up a group of 20. Some of our people began to separate those engaged in the fight and somebody shot at one of them and wounded his leg. We took him to the hospital."

The brawl at the rally was publicly condemned by 34 political organizations, including the triumvirate of coalition parties in Armenia's

ruling government. According to a May 3, 2005 *Arminfo* report, speaker of the Armenian National Assembly and head of the *Orinats Yerkir* [Law-Governed Country] Party Artur Bagdasaryan commented that: "*Orinats Yerkir* believes that it was right to sign the statement supported by the 34 political forces. In the statement, we only condemned the participation of criminal elements in political processes, and the Armenian President himself said that the essence of the statement was acceptable to him." Furthermore, *Arminfo* reported that the leader of the ARFD-Dashnaktsutyun parliamentary faction Levon Mkrtchyan and the deputy speaker of the Armenian National Assembly, who also serves as the deputy chairman of the Republican Party, Tigran Torosyan also made separate statements on this matter. Specifically Mr. Mkrtchyan said that: "...by signing the statement, the ARFD only condemned the participation of criminal elements in political processes, and there is nothing wrong with that." Mr. Torosyan said that: "...by signing it he fulfilled the decision of his party".

As REF/RL reports, "Speaking on state television on Monday, Kocharian said 34 political groups, among them the three parties represented in his cabinet, put themselves in an 'awkward position' by issuing a joint statement that implicitly blamed 'criminal elements' for the trouble." Specifically the President accused the *New Times* Party leader, Aram Karapetyan, of provoking the incident. The brawl resulted in the arrest of 13 opposition members including

Aram Karapetyan and his deputy, Alexander Minasiyan who were all released later by the city police.

The political opposition in Armenia, whose activism follows the cyclical routine of remaining dormant in the winter and getting active in the spring, has yet to prove whether its members will be able to muster any serious initiatives this year to improve the political situation in the country. The

extent of their resolve to improve the political situation in Armenia will be tested during upcoming debates over the package of constitutional amendments that the Parliament of Armenia is set to review this summer. The amendments, if enacted, include various provisions that would limit the power of the president and create greater separation between the executive and judicial branches of the government.

GEORGIA PAINTS THE TOWN FOR PRESIDENT BUSH

Kakha Jibladze

President George W. Bush's visit to Tbilisi on May 9-10 was important for many reasons. While a lot of attention has been paid to what the visit means for Georgia's international relations – and specifically the Georgian-American relationship – perhaps the most important is what this visit means for the reforms and future development of Georgian domestic politics.

Already before the visit took place, it seemed like Georgia was receiving immediate gratification. Literally, Tbilisi painted the town in preparation for Bush's 20-hour stay in the city. All along the itinerary of American President's planned route, buildings that hadn't been painted for over a decade were splashed with bright pastel shades. The roads designated for the motorcade were repaired and resurfaced. More city maintenance was undertaken during the three weeks prior to the visit than during the previous 15 years. But not everyone was happy with the transformation, some complained that the city was wasting needed funds and just putting on airs. The mayor of Tbilisi, Zurab Chiabirashvili, promised that the work would continue long after Bush will have gone. One week after the historical visit some workers can still be seen, but substantially less than before.

According to a press release published by the American Embassy in Tbilisi, the purpose of the visit was to highlight the great strides toward

democracy that the Georgian people have taken since the Rose Revolution. For the Georgians, the fact that Bush came at all was a cause to celebrate. Although Georgia is not the first former Soviet Republic to host an American President, the fact that Tbilisi earned a place on his itinerary symbolizes that the country has achieved the transition from 'a former Soviet republic' to a country of its own standing.

Equally important was the message Bush delivered to the Georgian people. While addressing a crowd of over 100,000 Georgians from throughout the country, Bush spoke about the hard road ahead towards stable democracy with protected rights and freedoms for every citizen, which was still to be completed. Georgians interviewed after the speech were impressed by Bush's words. However, his statements have the power to create an effect that lasts much longer than the ride home from Freedom Square. After seven decades of communism and over a decade of chaos, the average Georgian does not understand that democracy is about more than just President Saakashvili and his parliament. Bush's speech shed light on the meaning of democracy - hard work and commitment from every citizen for the good of the country.

Another highlight of Bush's visit was his pledge to help to resolve the outstanding problems within Georgia -namely peaceful negotiations with

Abkhazia and South Ossetia, as well as to put pressure on Moscow to close the two remaining Russian bases. By accenting peaceful means of resolving issues, Bush sent an invaluable signal to the Georgian authorities. He also gave the Georgians hope that the Russian bases would finally be closed and Russian troops would leave. While it might be risky for the Georgians to overbalance their expectations on behalf of the United States, the euphoria that Georgia has developed after this visit could help to balance the sensation of inertia that was gripping the country.

Bush's declared support for Georgia also boosted Georgia's image in the international sphere. While some times ago potential investors from Europe and America thought of Georgia as of a haven for terrorists and kidnappers, now they increasingly perceive Georgia as a country stable enough to insure the American President's safe visit. That is

vital for the future of Georgian business and privatization; without new investors the country would not dispose of means necessary to rebuild factories and restore the job market.

President George W. Bush's visit was more than just a symbolic gesture to Saakashvili and the Rose Revolution. It was a chance for Georgia to celebrate the progress it has made over the past 18 months - and take a look at the work ahead. It was also a reminder that Georgians can rely on their new Western allies when seeking for assistance to deal with their serious internal problems such as the ongoing crises in Abkhazia and South Ossetia. By bringing the world's attention to the tiny country of Georgia, Bush also gave the reforms a second wind and reminded the Georgians that the sacrifices they have made to create a stable country were not in vain -but their work is not complete yet.

HALF-HEARTED ANTI-DRUG EFFORTS BREED CORRUPTION IN KAZAKHSTAN

Marat Yermukanov

Kazakhstan is a place notorious for its world- high corruption rate. Until recent years, the root causes of rampant bribery and other crimes have been attributed mainly to poverty. While this assumption is essentially true, other breeding grounds for corruption, such as thriving narcotics business in Central Asia should not be overlooked.

The stifling atmosphere of corruption is pervading every sphere of public life in Kazakhstan. Sadly enough, press reports more frequently mention representatives of law-enforcement bodies involved in corruption-related crimes. In socialist years a uniformed police officer was someone to be considered sacrosanct, an incarnation of integrity and high moral code. But this vision in public mind is changing. Not only the police, but also high-placed judiciary bodies have fallen victim to their own proclivity to bribe-taking and inherent greed.

What alarms the public is that corruption among law-enforcement bodies is increasingly assuming the form of drug-related crimes. Obviously, officials can no longer hush up rampant crimes in their own ranks which already got out of control.

In April this year the Prosecutor-General's Office indicted a judge of Almaty district court for bribery. Investigations showed that the judge extorted \$5000 from a wife of a defendant who was charged for selling narcotics. Although the guilt of the defendant was not proven the judge demanded the round sum of money from his wife promising her to review the case and withdraw the criminal charge against her husband. On the same day, April 20, National Security Committee Department officers in South Kazakhstan region detained a senior inspector of police for drug dealing in Shymkent. The suspected police lieutenant was caught with

packages of 1 kilogram of raw opium in the boot of his car parked in a car-repair shop.

Regrettably, this is not an isolated incident which signals the rise of drug-related criminality in police ranks. Earlier this year security officers detained another policeman in South Kazakhstan with 238 kg of opium and 36 kg of heroin. But everybody knows that all these cases is only the visible part of deep-rooted crime in law enforcement bodies. The chief of Shymkent city police Kurmanbek Artykbayev, speaking at a press-conference, reported 140 criminal cases related to drug trafficking. Amazingly, according to him in 58 cases narcotics have actually been sold to drug users and only an insignificant amount of it, about 30 kilograms were seized, of which only 4 kg of heroin. Kurmanbek Artykbayev did not bother to explain the causes of low efficiency of anti-narcotics efforts of the police.

The number of teenager drug users is growing every year. And it is hardly surprising given the miserable state of anti-drug education and the spread of drug addiction among secondary school and university students. Last year the national paper *Kazakhstanskaya Pravda*, famous for its proclivity to depict the reality in rosy colors, waged a veritable verbal war against the state-owned Eurasian University stating that university professors were closing their eyes to drug sale in student canteens which took threatening proportions. The administration of the university reacted angrily, but could not deny the fact. On March 5 this year the Russian ITAR-TASS news agency reported the case of a teacher of Taraz University (South Kazakhstan) who was selling hashish to students right in the classroom. The detainee admitted that he himself was a drug addict. Curiously, the

information about the incident came from a Russian source.

To a considerable degree, the reluctance of law-enforcement bodies to discuss openly the drug-related corruption cases is a reason for the low efficiency of fighting crime. Despite the declared transparency and openness, authorities still tend to whitewash reality, manipulating statistics and barring access to “confidential” reports for journalists. It is impossible in this situation to assess the real scale of drug-related crimes in law enforcement bodies. The increasing flow of migrants from turbulent Kyrgyzstan, and impoverished Uzbekistan and Tajikistan also contributes to the rise of crime. Labor migrants and refugees from Central Asian countries and Afghanistan are seen in Kazakhstan as potential drug traffickers and criminals, and they are in no way protected from arbitrariness and extortion.

Believing that widespread corruption in law enforcement bodies is caused by low income, the government raised the salary of police officers a year ago, but bribe-taking did not abate, even though police officers and judges are among the highest paid. Ironically, most of the drug-related corruption cases have taken place after the adoption of the presidential decree on fighting corruption on April 14 this year. This raises doubts about the ability of authorities to establish law and order by administrative methods which have never led to success in the past. Some circles in the Interior Ministry seem to understand the importance of public associations, journalists and NGO's joining the fight against drug-related corruption. But for the top echelon of power that kind of collaboration is more dangerous than corruption itself.

NEWS DIGEST

SITUATION IN UZBEK-KYRGYZ BORDER AREA RETURNING TO NORMAL -UZBEK OFFICIAL

17 May

The situation in the border areas of Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan is returning to normal, Kyrgyz National Security Council secretary Miroslav Niyazov has said. "I am getting the impression that the situation in Uzbekistan is stabilizing judging by the fact that there have been no significant changes on the Kyrgyz-Uzbek border in the past 24 hours," he said in an interview with national TV Tuesday morning. Niyazov named as an indication of stability "trade in which Uzbek nationals engage in areas bordering on Kyrgyzstan." "Uzbek nationals staying in Kyrgyz territory are offered all the necessary assistance, filtration efforts among them continue," he said. Quoting early reports Niyazov said that out of the Uzbek refugees 30 are ethnic Kyrgyz. The press service of the Ministry for Emergency Situations told Interfax on Tuesday that 537 Uzbek nationals remain in Suzak district of Jalal-Abad region of Kyrgyzstan. Electricity supplies to their camp have been organized, a telephone has been installed and regular meals organized at the expense of the district administration and local residents, the press service said. Additional humanitarian aid is expected in the district shortly along the lines of the UNHCR, a spokesman added. (Interfax)

RUSSIAN BASE WITHDRAWAL PROBLEM SOLVED - SAAKASHVILI

17 May

Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili said the question of the withdrawal of Russian bases from his country's territory has been solved. "The question of the Russian bases' withdrawal has been solved and we have many other themes to discuss," Saakashvili told a briefing during the Council of Europe summit in Warsaw. "We have managed to find a civilized model, and there is some progress in talks on the time of the withdrawal," he said. He added that he will not make any specific statements

on the matter until a corresponding document is signed. Saakashvili invited the heads of committees and deputies from the Russian State Duma to come to Georgia to discuss the issue. (Interfax)

FORMER KYRGYZ LEADER'S DAUGHTER LOSES PARLIAMENTARY MANDATE

16 May

Bermet Akayeva, daughter of former Kyrgyz president Askar Akayev, has been deprived of her mandate as a member of parliament, Kyrgyzstan's Central Elections Commission said on Monday. Bolot Maripov, who lost the last election to Akayeva in a constituency in Bishkek, disputed the election results and provided the Central Elections Commission and Kyrgyz Prosecutor General's Office with evidence of offenses against election law by Akayeva's campaign office. (Interfax)

ABKHAZIA READY TO PLACE RUSSIAN BASES ON ITS TERRITORY - BAGAPSH

16 May

Abkhazia's President Sergei Bagapsh said his breakaway province is ready to allow Russia to deploy its military bases on its territory. "We are ready to allow Russia to deploy its military bases on our territory if Russia has such a desire," Bagapsh told Interfax on Monday. "Russian military bases can be stationed not only in Gudauta, which once housed such a base. Abkhazia has plenty of other places where Russian military bases could be deployed," he said. (Interfax)

CONSERVATIVES IN GEORGIAN PARLIAMENT CALL FOR QUITTING CIS

16 May

The conservative opposition in the Georgian parliament is planning to include in the agenda the question of quitting the Commonwealth of Independent States. Prominent conservative Zviad Dzidziguri told reporters on Monday that Georgia's withdrawal from the CIS would become "a reply to the Russian policy of pressure on Georgia on the issue of the pullout of Russian military bases and disregard for the 1999 Istanbul agreement." "We should be responding adequately to the unfriendly

steps of the Russian side," he said. He said conservatives are ready to draft legislation on Georgia's withdrawal from the CIS. (Interfax)

GEORGIA OFFERS REWARD IN CONNECTION WITH BUSH GRENADE INCIDENT

16 May

The Georgian Interior Ministry posted a reward of 20,000 laris (nearly \$11,000) on 16 May for information leading to the arrest of the person or people responsible for throwing a dud hand grenade at U.S. President George W. Bush while he addressed a crowd of thousands in Tbilisi on 10 May. A group of FBI agents arrived in Georgia on 13 May to assist the Georgian authorities in their investigation of the incident. (Caucasus Press)

SOME 70 RIOTERS DETAINED IN ANDIZHAN

16 May

The Uzbek authorities have detained at least 70 organizers of the riots in Andizhan, Interior Minister Zakir Almatov told public representatives of the town on Sunday. He said that some of the inmates returned to the local pre-trial detention facility voluntarily. Almatov urged the people of Andizhan to unite efforts to restore order. He was satisfied that locals are assisting the authorities. "People are surrendering the arms left behind by the criminals and providing the police with the necessary information," he said. (Interfax)

OVER 500 UZBEK REFUGEES REMAIN IN KYRGYZSTAN

16 May

The first four Uzbek refugees staying on the Kyrgyz side of the Kyrgyz-Uzbek border since Saturday have returned home. The press service of the Kyrgyz Emergency Situations' Ministry told Interfax Monday morning that 537 refugees remained in Suzak district in south Kyrgyzstan near the border, 89 of them women and 19 children. The local hospital admitted 10 Uzbek nationals - seven people with gunshot wounds and three children with pneumonia. The local authorities are offering three hot meals a day to the refugees. The Interior Ministry and Red Cross are also providing the refugees with relief aid. Representatives of the OSCE, UNHCR and other international institutions are at the scene. The press service said

that the mission of the UN Development Program in Kyrgyzstan is ready to help the refugees with clothing and other necessities. However, it will do so only after the Kyrgyz authorities make a corresponding request. The press service said that Sunday night was calm on the border with no incidents registered or new refugees arriving from Uzbekistan. (Interfax)

KAZAKHSTAN TO EXPORT 1MLN BARRELS OF OIL A DAY IN 2005 - EXPERT

15 May

Oil production is one of the leading sectors of Kazakhstan's economy, and exports are projecting exports of 1 million barrels per day in 2005, said Kazakh presidential international and economic affairs advisor Karim Masimov. He quoted this figure in Washington during a working visit to the U.S., an Interfax correspondent reported. "By 2010, we expect oil exports to increase to 2 million, and by 2015 to 3 million barrels per day," Masimov said at the Carnegie Foundation and Nixon Center in Washington. (Interfax)

UZBEK REFUGEES DON'T WANT TO LEAVE KYRGYZSTAN

14 May

Most of the Uzbek refugees currently staying in Kyrgyzstan do not plan to return to their homeland. "We've been receiving meals and medical aid from the Kyrgyz authorities since yesterday. We are grateful to Kyrgyzstan. Most of the Uzbek citizens do not intend to go back to Andizhan," an Andizhan resident who introduced himself as the refugees' coordinator told Interfax. Over 500 Uzbek citizens broke through into Kyrgyzstan's Suzak district in the southern Dzhahalal-Abad region on Saturday. A source in Uzbekistan's Security Council told Interfax that "Kyrgyzstan does not consider the Uzbek citizens to be refugees. Consultations have been held on the situation by Uzbek and Kyrgyz diplomats since Saturday," the source said. Representatives of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, the International Committee of the Red Cross and other international organizations are expected to arrive in the Suzak district for talks with the Uzbek citizens. (Interfax)

KULOV OUT OF PRESIDENTIAL RACE IN KYRGYZSTAN

14 May

Leader of the Dignity Party Felix Kulov will not run for the Kyrgyz presidency for fear of triggering people's discontent during the election race.

"Lopsided economic development, social inequality, corruption and nepotism evoke people's outrage. In this situation, any attempt to fuel these moods to gain political capital will inevitably spark violence all across the country. This is inadmissible," Kulov said in a statement circulated on Saturday. "The tragic events in Andizhan, our closest neighbor, showed how very fragile peace in our region actually is. Violence and hatred have easily prevailed over order and common sense. Our people have the right to normal lives. This is the aim of any policy," the statement says. "This considered, I changed my mind concerning the presidential race," Kulov said. (Interfax)

NINE KILLED AS AFGHANS RAGE AT US

13 May

At least nine more people - including civilians and policemen - have been killed in a fourth day of anti-US protests in Afghanistan, officials say. Many demonstrations started after traditional Friday prayer meetings. The protests started after a report that US guards at the Guantanamo Bay detention centre desecrated the Koran. Newsweek magazine reported on 9 May that interrogators at Guantanamo Bay placed Korans on toilets to upset suspects, and in one case "flushed a holy book down the toilet". Police officers are reported to be among four dead in Ghazni province, 150km south-west of the capital, Kabul, after security forces clashed with protesters. Interior ministry spokesman Lutfullah Mashal told the BBC that some of the demonstrators involved in the Ghazni protest were armed with AK 47s and handguns. "They tried to attack the governor's house and office", he said, "and fired on police and afghan army troops." Another three people were killed in the north-eastern province of Badakhshan after police opened fire on what reports described as a large group of protesters who were shouting "Death to America!". "It's like a tsunami, anything can happen. It's difficult to predict," provincial police chief Shah Jahan Noori told Reuters news agency, adding that demonstrators had fired on aid agency offices. Security sources say one person was killed in the city of Gardez south-east of Kabul and another protester shot in the north-western town of Qal-e-

now. US forces are reported to have gone to the aid of a UN compound in Gardez when it was besieged by demonstrators. In Kabul though, imams preaching to Friday worshippers called for calm, saying it was acceptable to demonstrate over the allegations of the Koran being abused but not to resort to violence. "We respect the Koran and support those who demonstrate," Sibghatullah Mojaddedi, who heads the country's peace and reconciliation commission, told worshippers in Kabul's main Blue Mosque. Friday's deaths come after seven people were killed in protests on Wednesday and Thursday. (BBC)

UZBEK MEDIA CLAMPDOWN STIFLES UNREST NEWS

13 May

State TV and radio issued official statements saying the situation in eastern Uzbekistan was under control, as the government blocked foreign news broadcasts in the country. Authorities cut all foreign TV news programming, including CNN and the BBC, replacing them with Uzbek and foreign entertainment channels. In its news bulletins, Uzbek state TV said "an armed group of criminals" had attacked the security forces in Andijan. "The bandits seized dozens of weapons and moved on to attack a correctional colony, setting some convicts free," the TV said. Describing the armed men as "extremists", state TV reported that nine people were killed and 34 wounded in clashes in the city. One Russian news agency reporting from the city said local Radio Diydor had gone off air and mobile telephones and the city's telephone network were working only intermittently. The Ferghana.ru website, a Russian-language site which provides up-to-date reports from the restive Uzbek region, was reported to be inaccessible by Russian news agency RIA. But BBC Monitoring later accessed it and saw it carried a statement by one of the accused in the criminal case against Uzbek Islamic businessmen in the city, calling for Russian mediation to resolve the crisis peacefully "and avoid mass bloodshed". "In the morning, troops fired from APCs on women," the website said. Official Uzbek sources, both broadcast and print media, have failed to mention the peaceful protests in the city about the trial that have been going on for the past week. (BBC)

NEW ESTIMATE PUTS KYRGYZ LOOTING DAMAGE AT \$24 MILLION

13 May

Kyrgyzstan's Interior Ministry has announced that its preliminary estimates suggest that looting in Bishkek on the night of 24 March caused nearly 1 billion soms (\$24 million) of damage, RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service reported on 12 May. Earlier estimates had ranged as high as \$100 million (see "RFE/RL Newslines," 29 March 2005). The Interior Ministry has opened 188 criminal cases in connection with the looting and filed criminal charges against 87 individuals. Twelve of them are currently in jail, while an unspecified number of others are under house arrest. At present, only 3.3 million soms' worth of merchandise has been returned to merchants whose businesses suffered during the chaos. (RFE/RL)

KYRGYZ POLICE STOP HIZB UT-TAHRIR PRINTING PRESS

13 May

Kyrgyzstan's National Security Service (SNB) has shut down an underground printing press in Jalalabad that produced materials for the banned extremist group Hizb ut-Tahrir, Bishkek Public Educational TV reported on 11 May. The two-month operation reportedly resulted in the confiscation of 300 leaflets, 400 magazines, and more than 1,000 brochures, most of them printed in Uzbek. Jalalabad SNB head Marat Imankulov told Bishkek Public Educational TV that an investigation is under way to determine who financed the press, which was located in a private apartment. Members of the family who occupied the residence are in custody and a criminal case has been opened. (RFE/RL)

GERMANY, TAJIKISTAN SIGN 27 MILLION-EURO AID PACKAGE

13 May

Representatives of the German and Tajik governments signed an agreement in Dushanbe on 12 May for Germany to provide 27 million euros (\$33 million) in financial and technical assistance, RFE/RL's Tajik Service reported. "Under this agreement, on a cooperative basis, we have allocated 20 million euros for the modernization and reconstruction of the Norak hydropower station and facilities, 17 million in the form of a 10-year,

interest-free loan, and 7 million in the form of a grant," Hubertus Klink, economic attache to the Germany Embassy in Tajikistan, told RFE/RL. Klink said the remaining funds will go to fight tuberculosis, support small and medium-sized businesses, and promote educational reform. (RFE/RL)

UZBEKISTAN'S MOST ORDERLY PROTEST

12 May

Every day for the past four days, protesters in the eastern Uzbek town of Andijan have gathered outside a court where 23 local businessmen have been on trial. The men were accused of belonging to an extremist religious group, a charge they and their relatives strongly deny. The court hearing formally ended on Wednesday and verdicts are expected quickly. But the protests have been an almost unprecedented show of defiance, in one of Central Asia's most authoritarian states. At first the number of protesters was small, but as the trial entered its final stages, more and more people came to join in, until there were as many as 3,000 people in the crowd. The protesters have been quiet, orderly and very well organised, and there have been no slogans or banners - people are simply gathering along the roadside. There are rows of benches for the older people, and room at the back for mothers with babies. Everyone seems to be dressed in their best clothes, and in Central Asian style, the men sit on one side, in dark suits and traditional Uzbek skull caps, and the women on the other, in long dresses and colourful headscarves. The organisers have been handing out food and water to the demonstrators. They have even organised their own security - men in dark glasses with earpieces, keeping an eye on the crowd. The protesters are keen to stress that this is a peaceful demonstration, and that they are doing everything they can to ensure it stays that way. "People here have to learn how to demand their rights in a civilised way," said Rustam Sobitov, a relative of one of the accused men. "There's no need for violence... but it's just no longer an option to stay silent here," he said. The 23 men who are on trial are all local businessmen. Many owned shops or factories producing anything from building material to cakes and sweets. Many of the younger men taking part in the demonstrations are former employees of these businesses, who lost their jobs when their bosses were arrested. Relatives said

many of the accused had also tried to help their local community - setting up computer classes, and helping the elderly and the poor. "My sons have been accused of terrible things," said Rahbarhan Shakirova, the mother of two of the men on trial. "All they wanted was for life in Uzbekistan to improve, and for all of us to be able to live normal lives like normal people," she said. Relatives of the accused dismiss the charges of religious extremism which have been made against them. They say the men have been singled out because they were independent-minded and prominent members of the community. (BBC)

TURKMEN PRESIDENT'S STATEMENTS AT CIS SUMMIT IN MOSCOW RAISE EYEBROWS

12 May

Russian press accounts of the informal CIS leaders' summit in Moscow on 8-9 May indicated that Turkmen President Saparmurat Niyazov drew notice with his unrestrained behavior and off-the-cuff remarks. Quoting anonymous members of the Ukrainian delegation, "Kommersant-Daily" reported on 11 May that at the 8 May CIS summit, Niyazov derided the selection of former Ukrainian President Leonid Kuchma as CIS chairman two years ago. Niyazov reportedly said, "Then again, he had elections coming up. Well, where is he now with his elections?" Niyazov also ridiculed the prospect of cooperation in the natural-gas sphere with Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbaev, saying, "Who should I cooperate with? With him?" Addressing Nazarbaev directly, Niyazov reportedly continued, "All of your facilities, your whole infrastructure is from the last century. I'm better off looking for other markets and other partners." The report indicated that Nazarbaev maintained a diplomatic silence in the face of his Turkmen colleague's remarks. Meanwhile, "Vremya novostei" reported on 11 May that Niyazov violated protocol at a photo opportunity with Russian President Vladimir Putin on 9 May, attempting to stretch a one-minute session into a longer conversation. The report noted that Niyazov was denied a one-on-one meeting with the Russian president during his stay in Moscow. (RFE/RL)

ARMENIAN PREMIER VOWS TO FORCE TURKEY TO REOPEN BORDER WITH

ARMENIA

12 May

Armenian Prime Minister Andranik Markarian said on 12 May that Yerevan will exert diplomatic pressure on Ankara to reopen Turkey's border with Armenia by the end of the year. Speaking at a news conference marking his fifth year as prime minister, Markarian said the opening of the border will not result in any serious damage to the Armenian economy and asserted that Armenian goods are "quite competitive" with similar Iranian and Turkish products. He added that the establishment of bilateral trade is natural and cited the fact that Armenia is already engaged in indirect trade with Turkey, mainly through Georgia and other third countries. (Arminfo)

EU SPECIAL ENVOY MEETS WITH AZERBAIJANI OPPOSITION

12 May

EU special envoy for the South Caucasus Heikki Talvitie met with representatives of several leading Azerbaijani opposition parties at the British Embassy in Baku on 12 May, Turan reported. Talvitie briefed them on his recent meeting with President Ilham Aliyev and said the EU remains committed to ensuring that the parliamentary elections set for November are free and fair. Participants included Popular Front leader Ali Kerimli, Musavat Party Deputy Chairman Sulhaddin Akper, Democratic Party of Azerbaijan leader Sardar Jalaloglu, and prominent opposition figures Lala Shovket Gadjeva and Eldar Namazov. Gadjeva and Namazov, both former presidential advisers, formed a new opposition electoral bloc last month known as Yeni Siyaset (New Policy) that advocates a "nonviolent transition from a corrupt, authoritarian clan-society to a democracy" and plans to field a number of candidates for parliament. (RFE/RL)

AZERBAIJANI FOREIGN MINISTER BRIEFS EU ENVOY ON NAGORNO-KARABAKH

12 May

Meeting in Baku on 12 May, Azerbaijani Foreign Minister Elmar Mammadyarov told visiting EU special envoy Talvitie in Baku on 12 May that while Azerbaijan remains committed to the Nagorno-Karabakh peace process, any resolution requires the return of Armenian-held areas of Azerbaijan beyond

Nagorno-Karabakh and the "restoration of rights" for Azerbaijani displaced persons, according to the Trend news agency and ANS TV. Commenting on the approaching parliamentary elections, Mammadyarov insisted that the Azerbaijani government is working to ensure free and fair elections and stressed that it is in Azerbaijan's national interest to conduct elections that meet international standards. (RFE/RL)

GEORGIAN DEFENSE MINISTER CALLS FOR ENFORCEMENT OF PARLIAMENTARY RESOLUTION ON RUSSIAN BASES

12 May

Georgian Defense Minister Irakli Okruashvili said on 12 May that the Georgian government must enforce the recent parliamentary resolution on the status of Russian bases in Georgia. While he said nothing should undermine Georgian-Russian negotiations, Okruashvili vowed to impose new restrictions on the deployment of Russian military equipment and personnel if the terms of the March resolution are not met. The Georgian parliament voted to set a 15 May deadline for Russia to formulate the terms of its withdrawal from Georgia by January 2006. Parliamentary speaker Nino Burdjanadze recently criticized Foreign Minister Salome Zourabichvili for not finalizing an agreement on a timeframe for the Russian withdrawal during recent talks in Moscow. (RFE/RL)

GEORGIAN PARLIAMENT BLAMES FOREIGN MINISTER FOR FAILURE TO SIGN RUSSIAN WITHDRAWAL AGREEMENT

12 May

Georgian parliamentary speaker Nino Burdjanadze wants Foreign Minister Salome Zourabichvili to explain to legislators the reasons why the anticipated agreement stipulating the timeframe for the closure of Russia's two remaining military bases in Georgia was not finalized during her talks in Moscow on 6 May with her Russian counterpart Sergei Lavrov. It was hoped the agreement could be signed during a visit to Moscow by Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili to participate in the ceremonies to mark the 60th anniversary of the end of World War II in Europe. The Georgian parliament adopted a resolution in February threatening to declare the Russian bases illegal if an

agreement were not signed by mid-May on their closure by the end of this year. Speaking on 11 May in Brussels, Russian Chief of Armed Forces General Staff Colonel General Yurii Baluevskii repeated the estimate of Defense Minister Sergei Ivanov that a minimum of four years is needed to prepare alternative facilities in Russia for the troops to be withdrawn from Georgia. (RFE/RL)

'JUST KAZAKHSTAN' MEMBERS HAND OVER MATERIALS ON 2 MAY ATTACK

11 May

Representatives of the opposition bloc For a Just Kazakhstan told "Kazakhstan Today" on 11 May that they have handed over to police video evidence of an attack on a conference the bloc held in Shymkent on 2 May. Bloc representatives said they have made the materials available in order to further an investigation of conduct by the police, who they allege failed to intervene as a group of aggressive young people shouting slogans in support of President Nursultan Nazarbaev assaulted members of For a Just Kazakhstan, including presumptive joint opposition presidential candidate Zharmakhan Tuyakbai. ("Kazakhstan Today")

TAJIK COURT SENTENCES SEVEN HIZB UT-TAHRIR DEFENDANTS

11 May

A court in Tajikistan's Sughd Province on 10 May sentenced seven defendants to prison terms ranging from three to nine years for involvement with the banned extremist organization Hizb ut-Tahrir, RFE/RL's Tajik Service reported. This was the third trial of alleged Hizb ut-Tahrir members in Sughd Province in 2005. Sughd Province Prosecutor Abdughaffor Qalandarov told RFE/RL that the prosecutions are driving the organization to greater secrecy. Qalandarov said that while Hizb-ut-Tahrir, which espouses the creation of an Islamic caliphate throughout Central Asia, presents a danger, economic crimes cause greater damage to the country. (RFE/RL)

RUSSIAN MILITARY SPOKESMAN ACCUSES AZERBAIJAN OF HARBORING CHECHEN 'TERRORISTS'

11 May

Major-General Ilya Shabalkin, who is the spokesman for the Russian forces deployed in Chechnya, claimed on 10 May that Chechen militants based in Baku are engaged in the fabrication of videocassettes showing Russian military personnel torturing Chechen civilians, the online daily echo-az.com reported on 11 May. Shabalkin specifically named the Society of Prisoners of Filtration Camps of the Republic Ichkeria of producing such materials. Azerbaijan National Security Ministry official Arif Babaev rejected Shabalkin's allegations as untrue. Prominent Azerbaijani human rights activist Eldar Zeynalov admitted that some criminal elements from Chechnya might have found refuge in Baku. But at the same time, Zeynalov pointed out that in order to produce such video footage, the Chechens would need access to a complete film studio -- which they do not have. Zeynalov said the video material in question is filmed by the Russians for archive purposes while they torture prisoners, and then sold. He added that he personally has viewed such cassettes and is confident that they are genuine. (RFE/RL)

UZBEKS PROTEST AT COURT RULING

10 May

An unprecedented demonstration has taken place in the central Asian nation of Uzbekistan. At least 1,000 people gathered in the eastern town of Andizhan to demand justice for a group of 23 young men accused of being Islamic extremists. Long lines of protestors stretched down the streets around the courthouse - women on one side, men on the other. Tuesday's unprecedented call for justice was extremely well organised. The protesters were dressed in their best clothes, and the scene was peaceful and good humoured. They had made long wooden benches especially for the women to sit down, and they had also brought supplies of food and water. The demonstrators even had their own guards and a cameraman to ward off any interference by the militia. There have been many such court cases in Uzbekistan in recent years, but this is the first time that there has been such a large-scale protest. It has been organised by the families of the accused, many of whom have several sons already in jail. (BBC)

CHECHEN FIELD COMMANDER THREATENS TO EXTEND WAR BEYOND CAUCASUS

10 May

In an interview with RFE/RL's North Caucasus Service summarized on 9 May by chechenpress.com, senior Chechen field commander Doku Umarov said that by the end of this year the Chechen resistance will begin large-scale military activities in Russian regions beyond the borders of Chechnya. Umarov explained that previously the resistance refrained from extending the war outside Chechnya at the insistence of President Aslan Maskhadov, but now that the abductions and murder of Chechen civilians by Russian and pro-Moscow Chechen forces have become more frequent, that restraint is no longer considered appropriate. He added that resistance forces are already regrouping in preparation for new attacks. Umarov described Maskhadov's successor, Abdul-Khalim Sadulaev, as a "brilliant" expert on Shari'a and traditional Chechen law, and said he is respected by resistance fighters for his "crystal honesty and [sense of] justice." (RFE/RL)

AZERBAIJAN FOREIGN MINISTER SEES NEED FOR MEETING WITH ARMENIAN COUNTERPART

10 May

Elmar Mammadyarov told ANS News Service on 9 May that the anticipated meeting in Warsaw next week between the presidents of Armenia and Azerbaijan to discuss approaches to resolving the Karabakh conflict should be preceded by talks between himself and his Armenian counterpart Vartan Oskanian. Mammadyarov said "we have determined in which direction we need to continue," but added that a meeting with Oskanian "will help us to see the situation [more clearly.]" Oskanian, for his part, told journalists in Yerevan on 5 May that he did not travel the previous week to Frankfurt to meet with Mammadyarov and the OSCE Minsk Group co-chairs because his schedule did not allow him to leave Yerevan, and because he saw "no need" for a meeting with Mammadyarov before the two presidents meet in Warsaw, RFE/RL's Armenian Service reported. On 21 April, Oskanian implied that he and Mammadyarov have reached consensus on those

issues within their competence, and the remaining unresolved questions can be addressed only by the Armenia and Azerbaijan presidents. Also on 9 May, Armenian Defense Minister Serzh Sarkisian told journalists in Yerevan that the upcoming Warsaw meeting between Armenian President Robert Kocharian and his Azerbaijani counterpart Ilham Aliyev may prove decisive in determining whether or not a compromise Nagorno-Karabakh peace agreement can be reached, RFE/RL's Armenian Service reported. "We shall probably be able to say after that meeting whether the peace process is continuing or has entered a deadlock," Sarkisian said. (RFE/RL)

TURKISH FOREIGN MINISTER VISITS KYRGYZSTAN

9 May

Abdullah Gul met with Kyrgyz acting President and Prime Minister Kurmanbek Bakiev and Foreign Minister Roza Otunbaeva in Bishkek on 6 May, Anatolia and RFE/RL's Kyrgyz Service reported. At his meeting with President Bakiev, Gul said that he hopes the post-24 March period in Kyrgyzstan "will bring a bright future to Kyrgyzstan." At a meeting with Kyrgyz Deputy Prime Minister Daniyar Usenov, Gul stressed the importance of economic stability for Kyrgyzstan's future. Gul also met with a number of Turkish businessmen, some of whose businesses suffered from the 24-25 March looting in Bishkek. They said that they do not plan to leave Kyrgyzstan, but told Gul that they need \$9 million-\$10 million in assistance to recoup losses, Anatolia reported. Gul also met with Feliks Kulov, head of Kyrgyzstan's Ar-Namys party. (RFE/RL)

AZERBAIJANI NGOS TO APPEAL TO PRESIDENT OVER ELECTION MONITORING

7 May

At a press conference in Baku on 6 May convened by the election bloc Public Leaders, the heads of several NGOs decided to appeal to President Ilham Aliyev to use his right of legislative initiative to propose abolishing the article of the election law that prohibits those NGOs that receive funding

from abroad from participating in election monitoring. (zerkalo.az)

U.S. PRESIDENT VOICES HOPES FOR GEORGIA-RUSSIAN WITHDRAWAL AGREEMENT

7 May

U.S. President George W. Bush told journalists on 6 May that at Saakashvili's request he will raise the issue of the Russian military withdrawal from Georgia with President Putin during his visit to Moscow. In an 8 May interview with Rustavi-2, Bush said he hopes it will prove possible to resolve that problem peacefully. Bush, who will travel to Tbilisi on 10 May for a one-day visit, also expressed the hope that Georgia will find a way to cooperate with Russia in ridding the Pankisi Gorge of any remaining international terrorists.

At the same time, he warned that Georgia and Ukraine should not expect to be admitted to NATO "overnight." (Caucasus Press)

GEORGIA, RUSSIA FAIL TO REACH AGREEMENT ON BASES CLOSURE

6 May

During talks in Moscow on 6 May, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov and his Georgian counterpart Salome Zourabichvili failed to finalize the timetable for the closure of the two remaining Russian military bases in Georgia, Russian and Georgian media reported. Zourabichvili told the independent Georgian television station Rustavi2 on 6 May that she and Lavrov agreed on measures for beginning the withdrawal in 2005-2006, but failed to agree on a deadline for its completion, which Tbilisi wants no later than early 2008. Zourabichvili added that Russia has agreed to permit international monitoring of the former Russian base in Gudauta, Abkhazia. Tbilisi has repeatedly questioned Russian claims to have withdrawn all personnel and materiel from that base by July 2001 in line with a 1999 pledge. (ITAR-TASS)