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*Central Asia- Caucasus Institute
Silk Road Studies Program*

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THE CENTRAL ASIA-CAUCASUS ANALYST

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The Central Asia-Caucasus Analyst is an English language global Web journal devoted to analysis of the current issues facing the Central Asia-Caucasus region. It serves to link the business, governmental, journalistic and scholarly communities and is the global voice of the Central Asia-Caucasus Institute, 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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KEY ISSUE: A short 100-word statement of your conclusions about the issue or news event on which the article focuses.

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

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

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

Field Reports: Field Reports focus on a particular news event and what local people think about the event, or about the work of an 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.

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RUSSIAN DIPLOMACY USES “KOSOVO PRECEDENT” FOR TACTICAL ADVANTAGE ON ABKHAZIA

Jaba Devdariani

On January 31 President Vladimir Putin did not rule out political recognition of Abkhazia if the West recognizes Kosovo. Russia’s modification of its position on Abkhazia is significant, to the extent that it falls into the pattern of renewed muscular approach of the Kremlin towards its neighbors. It is underpinned by a determination to bend international principles to Moscow’s benefit in its immediate neighborhood. This new policy, however, is flawed as it provides no positive incentives that might generate Georgia’s interest in considering Russian participation in peacekeeping.

BACKGROUND: On January 30, President Vladimir Putin instructed Russia’s Foreign Minister to make sure that the solution on the status of Kosovo is “universal” in character, specifically noting that it should be applicable for the conflicts in the post-soviet space, including Abkhazia. Speaking at a press conference on January 31 he elaborated on the issue and did not exclude recognition of Abkhazia and South Ossetia by Russia, in case Kosovo is granted full independence, quoting of Turkey’s recognition of Northern Cyprus as a precedent.

On January 31 the UN Security Council adopted a resolution on extension of the mandate of UN observer mission (UNOMIG) in Abkhazia. In a coordinated move, the resolution, at Russian insistence, omits the paragraph affirming the commitment to Georgia’s territorial integrity, as well as the reference to the so-called “Boden Document” on “Basic Principles for the Distribution of Competences between Tbilisi and Sukhumi” which foresaw broad autonomy of Abkhazia within Georgia. The resolution also extends the mandate of peacekeepers for 2 months, instead of 6 months as requested by the Secretary General.

On January 23, Russia backed proposals of the Abkhaz de-facto president Sergey Bagapsh that foresees talks with Georgia on all issues except Abkhazia’s political status, based on assertion that the status is “already determined in a 1999 referendum” on independence of Abkhazia, in which the Georgian displaced persons did

not participate. Such a proposal is fundamentally unacceptable for Georgia.

These Russian moves weakened the hand of the Georgian delegation and its western partners during the Georgian-Abkhaz talks in Geneva on February 2-3. In these talks, Georgia hoped to secure a major breakthrough by setting a meeting date between the Abkhaz and Georgian presidents for signing a document on non-resumption of armed hostilities. The Russian position makes it difficult for President Saakashvili to agree to such talks, as he can be seen acquiescing with the modified Russian position.

IMPLICATIONS: In fall and winter 2005, Saakashvili’s administration undertook a multi-component diplomatic offensive. Tbilisi attempted to use the window of opportunity provided by the election of the new leadership of pragmatist Sergey Bagapsh in Sukhumi to foster direct communication with de facto authorities. Saakashvili’s nominee as his special representative on Abkhazia, Irakli Alasania, managed to secure the personal trust and confidence of the de facto Abkhaz leaders. Alasania has articulated a policy shift by Tbilisi, stating that Georgia would no longer seek the isolation of the Abkhaz leadership.

Georgian and Abkhaz authorities cooperated closely on a crucial project to rehabilitate the Inguri Hydropower Plant, which straddles the administrative border between Abkhazia and Georgia proper. Tbilisi also

withdrew its objections to the re-opening of the railway connection between Russia and Georgia through Abkhazia. Previously, Georgia insisted that re-opening the railway is only possible in coordination with the return of Georgian displaced persons to Abkhazia.

On the other hand, Georgia tried to put Abkhazia back on the radar of international organizations. Tbilisi focused attention on the violation of the rights of ethnic Georgian returnees in Abkhazia's easternmost Gali district. Cases of forced conscription to the Abkhaz army, refusal of the right to study in their own language, pressure to abandon Georgian citizenship, intimidation by the Abkhaz militias were well-documented and presented to international agencies. On this wave, Tbilisi demanded launching a Civilian Police Mission in Gali, and opening a UN/OSCE Human Rights Office in Gali.

These efforts brought in an unusual flurry of diplomatic activity in Sukhumi, which was repeatedly visited by U.S. Congress delegation, U.S. State Department officials and Western diplomats stationed in Tbilisi. In November 2005, UN Secretary General Kofi Annan made an unexpected detour to Georgia, where he held closed-door talks with Saakashvili on Abkhazia. Annan stressed the rule of law aspect of the peace process in Abkhazia.

In its diplomatic efforts, Tbilisi concentrated in gaining Western support in Abkhazia to balance disproportional Russian influence there. To Moscow's irritation, Tbilisi undermined Russia's peacekeeping image. Citing recurring gang violence and pressure on local citizens in Gali, Tbilisi questioned the efficiency of the Russian peacekeeping troops stationed in the area. Several cases of Russian servicemen involved in smuggling or turning a blind eye on harassment of locals were also reported. In October 2005, the Georgian parliament voted to review the performance of the Russian peacekeepers on July 1, 2006 and in case no progress is reached, to demand their withdrawal starting July 15, 2006.

Moscow reacted angrily to Saakashvili's attempts to diminish Russian influence in peacekeeping and to internationalize the political and military aspects of the operation in Abkhazia. With Putin's new statements

and Russia's position at the Security Council, Russia seems to be moving from simple reaction to a more proactive, solidified policy. However, this policy lacks long-term vision and seems to be aimed at stalling western involvement in Abkhazia, rather than at finding an acceptable new format for the peace process.

Linking Abkhazia with Kosovo is a rhetorical reinforcement of Russia's concept of "near abroad." Putin considers that if the Western powers will recognize "their protégé" Kosovo, then Russia has the full right to do so in Abkhazia. However, this view is simplistic and will be hard to translate into real action. Russia has no real political muscle to prevent the "conditional independence" scenario in Kosovo. Moscow is not involved in the political or military aspects of the Balkans. At the same time, the EU can offer significant incentives to the Serbian authorities in exchange for their recognition of Kosovo, such as the membership. Russia, in turn, can offer no incentives to Georgia.

The Kosovo administration has acted under international patronage for ten years. There is a significant NATO presence, complemented with civilian police operations and virtual control of international agencies over the autonomous administration of Kosovo. Tbilisi may well demand to use these aspects of the Kosovo operation as a "universal precedent" rather than merely its final status negotiations – a scenario unacceptable both to Russia and the Abkhaz leadership.

The Georgian leadership has succeeded in casting Russia as an unfair broker in the peace process in the eyes of international community. Russia has distributed its own passports in Abkhazia, supplies arms and ammunition to the breakaway states and directly interferes in their politics. The sole leadership of Russia in any revised peacekeeping format will thus be hard to negotiate.

But there are things the new Russian position can do to prevent conflict resolution, or trigger escalation. Moscow's current position reinforces the sense of security and protection from Moscow on the part of the breakaway Abkhaz leadership. This might lead to the growing influence of hardliners in Abkhaz

government, including vice president Raul Khajimba and defense minister Sultan Sosnaliev. Both are prone to support increased pressure on Gali residents, which might trigger armed confrontation with Georgian forces or revival of the armed resistance movement in Gali.

Activism on Kosovo and new muscle at the UN Security Council is aimed at minimizing the degree of participation of the EU and UN, respectively, in any future political format of negotiations. Russia's veto power at OSCE means that this organization is virtually incapable of devising effective policy on conflict issues.

A tactical move not to extend the UNOMIG mandate by the full term is an attempt to provide a credible threat of withdrawing all international presence from Abkhazia in case Georgia moves to vote for withdrawing the Russian peacekeepers. As an additional threat, in late January the "Confederation of the Mountainous Nations of the Caucasus" was revived in Sukhumi. The "Confederation" played an active role in recruiting and training of the Russian citizens to fight against Georgian troops during the 1992-94 conflict in Abkhazia. Tbilisi might thus consider the possibility that voting out the Russian troops means no international presence and facing the mercenaries that are not bound by any law or treaty.

CONCLUSIONS: The new Russian proposals are a tactical political tool for securing a better bargaining position as the revision of the peacekeeping format in Abkhazia seems to become a realistic possibility. This will not affect the situation on the ground much in the medium term, although the potential for isolated incidents, especially with participation of Russian peacekeepers increases. Propensity for conflict escalation will increase as the July deadline for the Georgian parliament to vote on further presence of the Russian peacekeeping troops in Abkhazia nears.

Russia signals a more solidified policy on post-soviet conflicts, but it provides mainly for preventing Western participation and articulates no long-term vision of the conflict settlement and no political incentives for Tbilisi to agree to a Russian-dominated compromise. Georgian authorities will be compelled to more actively seek the internationalization of the political and military aspects of conflict resolution, while the vote on Russian peacekeepers is likely to be in favor of their withdrawal.

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CHINESE IN CENTRAL ASIA: LOYAL CITIZENS OR FIFTH COLUMN?

Rafis Abazov

Chinese immigration is an issue that irks both citizens and politicians in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. While government-controlled mass media remains silent on the topic, discussions on the possible impact of growing Chinese immigration to the republics is growing. Kyrgyz opposition leaders used this issue as one argument to bring down President Askar Akayev's regime, claiming that Akayev "sold himself out to the Chinese" by accepting the resettlement of ca. 100,000 Chinese in Kyrgyzstan and by promising them a 99-year lease on land and various business properties. But why does the relatively small immigration inflow raise so such fear and anxiety?

BACKGROUND: Large migration waves have become a common phenomenon in the era of globalization, as millions of people have left their homelands, legally or illegally, in search of political stability and/or economic opportunities. The similarities of migration trends end here, though, as governments concerned by immigration have been maintaining different policies dealing with this issue. The size of migration, the political and economic environment, and past experiences play crucial roles in shaping government attitudes.

During most of the 20th century, the borders between Kyrgyzstan and China were tightly sealed. In the 1920s and 1930s, Soviet authorities closed the Kyrgyz borders with China in an attempt to stop the outflow of Central Asian people escaping brutal sedentarization, collectivization and sovietization policies. The sealed borders cut off numerous family, tribal, commercial and cultural ties between the largely Muslim population of Western China and Central Asia, including Kyrgyzstan. Only in the 1950s were the borders with the newly established People's Republic of China and the USSR temporarily opened. Many ethnic minorities who lived in Xinjiang – Kazakhs, Kyrgyzs, Uighurs, Dungans (Muslim Chinese) and others – received the opportunity to travel freely to Central Asia and, in few exceptional cases and under strict control, to settle in the region. However, the growing confrontation between the Soviet and Chinese authorities in the 1960s and 1970s led to the re-

establishment of the iron curtain and the highly strained situation on Central Asia's border with China.

Kyrgyzstan's borders with China were opened for free trade, travel, and cultural exchange following independence in 1991. Throughout the 1990s and early 2000s, Kyrgyzstan became an attractive destination for temporary and permanent immigration (numbering in the thousands each year) from China for several reasons. First, Kyrgyzstan has a much smaller population (about 5.1 millions) than Xinjiang (about 20 million) and a much lower population density in urban areas. Second, living standards in Kyrgyzstan, especially in metropolitan areas are still considerably higher than in Xinjiang. Third, the underdevelopment of the retail, catering, intensive agriculture and services sectors provided golden opportunities for those with appropriate skills and expertise. Finally, immigrants from Xinjiang find communities of compatriots who historically lived in Kyrgyzstan.

In fact, Chinese entrepreneurs quickly found their niches in the Kyrgyz market, filling the gap in the consumer retail and service markets that emerged after the collapse of Kyrgyzstan's trade and technological ties with the former Soviet block. Chinese goods captured up to 60-70 percent of the local market for consumer goods and processed food. Chinese entrepreneurs established several large business and trade centers that expanded their

trade well beyond Kyrgyzstan. Kyrgyzstan's mass privatization program, completed in 2003, provided another opportunity as Chinese managers and farmers were able to lease enterprises and farms. Recently, the Chinese business people entered the lucrative construction sector, regularly winning deals and contracts.

Hence the Chinese community has been steadily growing and became more visible, especially in major metropolitan areas of Kyrgyzstan. According to various estimates, between 20,000 and 120,000 Chinese (if Hans, Uighurs, Dungans and others are counted) have moved to the country during last 15 years, a number likely to double in the next decade. Not all moved to Kyrgyzstan legally: there are reports about Chinese who overstay their visas, moved in through third countries (like Kazakhstan), and obtained Kyrgyz passports through marriage to local women or by simply buying Kyrgyz documents on the black market.

IMPLICATIONS: The growth of the Chinese community will have several important implications. First, if unchecked, this growth will put additional pressure on the labor market (where about 60,000 people are officially registered as unemployed) and especially on the business community. The most worrying development is that during the last 15 years Kyrgyzstan has experienced a steep decline in the quality of its education. Although the official literacy rate remains around 95-97 percent, many local students are falling behind in such important skills as entrepreneurship, mathematics, sciences, computing, and various business skills. Chinese migrants are especially competitive in these fields. Therefore, there might be considerable direct competition for jobs and business opportunities; and serious tensions and in the worst case scenario – open conflict between the indigenous population and the newcomers.

Second, there is also a widespread fear that the Chinese immigrants with their market skills, entrepreneurial spirit and hard working capabilities will establish control over the most important and lucrative sectors of the national economy. Recent

economic developments in Kyrgyzstan and particularly its privatization program also contributes to this perception. The privatization process has been neither open nor competitive, but rather distributive and corrupt. Groups of businessmen acquired enterprises, properties and farms thanks to personal connections to patronage networks, or acquired deals through corrupt transactions. Incompetence and a lack of capital and skills have been driving many enterprises out of business for years, and rumors that successful Chinese businessmen buy businesses through clandestine deals and run them successfully have been around for long. Corrupt Kyrgyzstani politicians and crony entrepreneurs would be the first to resist political and economic transparency and the establishment of the rule of law, which might expose their criminal activity in full light.

Third, the Chinese community has all the potential to amass more economic influence and with it – ethnic exclusiveness. There is already a visible trend in Kyrgyzstan that ethnic or clan-based groups establish exclusive control in niche markets, driving all competitors out of business by both legal and illegal means. Examples include retail gasoline trade, catering and processing of ethnic food, intensive green house agriculture and many other sub-sectors. This trend leads to a further fragmentation of society and opens new avenues for inter-regional, inter-ethnic and inter-communal disputes, grievances and conflicts.

Fourth, red tape, corruption and political uncertainty often push businesses into the shadow economy. It is particularly true with businesses controlled by the Chinese. If the government fails to integrate the Chinese business people into the legitimate business sector and to provide legal guarantees and the rule of law, this community will be forced to operate in the black economy. This could lead to them merging with the criminal world and moving to illicit drugs trafficking and distribution.

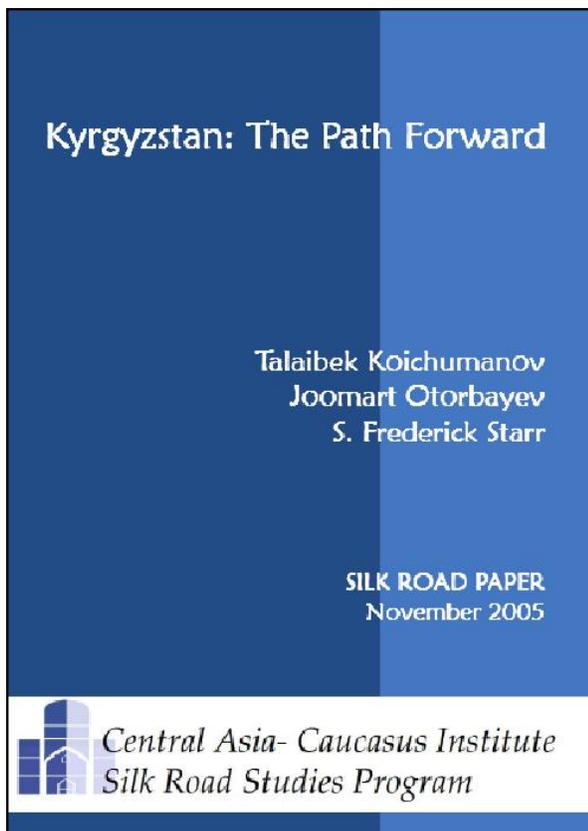
Fifth, if the Chinese newcomers are not integrated into Kyrgyz society, and if they are not treated as legitimate citizens, uncertainty would develop

regarding their political loyalty to the Kyrgyz state. Due to the ambiguity of their status, they might invest into building of their own political base or into existing political groups, creating political imbalance in the country where two large groupings (often called clans) compete for political power. Evidently, already during the March 2005 unrest, the Chinese business community hired its own militia, not the state security forces, to protect their businesses from mobs.

CONCLUSIONS: Chinese immigrants already play an important role in the economic and social development of Kyrgyzstan. So far, the Kyrgyz government has failed to acknowledge their presence and their contribution to the development of the country. In the meantime, some political groups continue to politicize the immigration issue and to stir up xenophobic attitudes. There is an urgent need to establish clear rules about how the government should deal with legal and especially

with illegal immigration. There is a need to promote a public awareness about the positive contribution of the Chinese community to the economic development of the country. The government also needs to make sure that the Chinese business community should be provided with equal rights and should be encouraged to operate in a legal environment, pay taxes and custom dues and support economic and political transparency. Finally, more efforts are needed in the integration of the newcomers into Kyrgyzstani society, making them loyal citizens and utilizing their skills for the benefits of the country.

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New Silk Road Paper!

Kyrgyzstan: The Path Forward

by Talaibek Koichumanov,
Joomart Otorbayev,
and S. Frederick Starr

Kyrgyzstan's "Tulip Revolution" remains an enigma. It has indeed brought change, but by no means are all of the transformations positive. For all the rhetoric of revolution, the continuities from the former order are scarcely less striking.

In this paper, two former high-level officials of Kyrgyzstan and a well-known western expert analyze the way forward for the country. The paper strongly argues for a refocusing of attention to reforming public administration as the key to building Kyrgyzstan's future.

RUSSIA'S NEW DOCTRINE OF NEO-IMPERIALISM

Khatuna Salukvadze

The new Russian doctrine, recently presented in an article by Russian Defense Minister Sergei Ivanov, unveils an assertive plan unprecedented since cold war times. Defining as Russia's "sphere of strategic interests" virtually whole post-Soviet space, and terming democratization and European aspirations in the post-Soviet states a direct threat to Russia's interests the article constitutes an openly stated high-level official position acknowledging that Russia still finds difficulty parting with the Cold War logic as a guiding philosophy for its security and military strategy.

BACKGROUND: Much has been said lately about Russia's use of hydrocarbons as a remedy designed to alter the behavior of those neighboring states that have opted for membership in NATO and the EU. Now it appears that Russia fancies the idea to "correct" the democratic and Euro-Atlantic aspirations of its neighbors by the means of traditional military force.

Observers who find such a possibility too hard to believe should reflect on "The New Russian Doctrine", an article by Russia's defence minister, Mr. Sergei Ivanov, published January 11 in the Wall Street Journal.

What is most important about the new doctrine – in addition to its unprecedented level of openness in describing the nation's reliance on nuclear force as means for 'achieving certain defense aims' – is that it represents a break with Russia's declared foreign policy to act as a partner, not a rival of the West and in particular the United States.

Equally alarming is the fact that such new trends in Russian policy may lead to dangerous implications for independent states within the enumerated geographic area, which happens to be parts of the former Soviet Union, as the Doctrine broadens the scope of Russia's accepted maneuvering to consider virtually any event a threat and validate forceful interference in their internal affairs. Russia clearly states its top concern the internal situation or "uncertainty" in some members of the CIS, or as the article puts it, a "process that has a potential to pose a direct threat to Russia's security or to change

the geopolitical reality in a region of Russia's strategic interests". Just how far the above region extends wherein the changing of the geopolitical reality may pose a security threat to Russia is left to free interpretation.

However, in stark contrast to Russia's accusation of its neighbors having an "uncertainty factor" that creates a threat to its security, the core problems such as instability, political or military conflicts and criminal enclaves that many post-Soviet states face, are mostly manipulated by Moscow. In Georgia, Russia has for years supported the separatist regimes of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Along with Russia's covert participation in escalating these conflicts in the 1990s, the Russian leadership has put in place a strategy, under the guise of peacekeeping and mediation, that has all hallmarks of *de facto* annexation of these territories. Granting Russian citizenship to local residents, the illegal operation of Russian banks and cell phone companies, appropriation of real estate including properties of Georgian refugees, arming and training secessionist forces, and even appointing Russian senior military and intelligence officers with experience from Chechnya to leadership posts, in Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Both the Abkhaz defence minister Sultan Soslaniev and the chief of staff Anatoly Zaytsev are Russian citizens and military generals. Likewise, South Ossetia's prime minister Yuri Morozov and chief of soviet-fashioned KGB Anatoly Yarovoy are high-ranking Russian military officials. The recent threat issued by Russian colonel Barankevich, who is also defense minister of

the self-proclaimed South Ossetian Republic, to shoot down any aircraft that might fly over "South Ossetian territory" was intensified by the discovery of the Russian anti-aircraft missile system "Igla" and its launcher in what is supposed to be a demilitarized zone.

It is not hard to guess who provides South Ossetian and Abkhaz secessionist regimes with modern military equipment in violation of every document signed by the sides as well as by the chief mediator. Russia does so in blatant disregard of Georgia's repeated protests, and in breach of compliance with the Treaty on Conventional Forces in Europe which sets a regional ceiling for Russian heavy weaponry.

Just as inadequate as the biased brokerage is the shortsightedness toward dangerous concentration of ammunition and armored vehicles in the conflict regions, particularly given Russia's policies aimed at preventing terrorists from gaining access to arms. Alarmed at this situation, the Georgian government gave Russia yet another chance to fulfill its peacekeeping obligations and set deadlines for improving the performance of its peacekeepers in the conflict zones, or else terminating their activities within the first half of this year.

IMPLICATIONS: What is dubbed by the new Russian doctrine as a "political process that has a potential to change the geopolitical reality in a region of Russia's strategic interest" is none other than the new wave of democratization spreading the ideals of freedom and democracy, and a desire to integrate with Euro-Atlantic structures in the former Soviet states in the aftermath of the Rose and Orange revolutions.

Apparently, stable and prosperous democracies on its borders is not interpreted as serving Russia's interests. To keep the "geopolitical realities" inherited from the times of the Soviet Empire intact, among other things, Moscow consistently exploits energy warfare and uses blackmail by exploiting dependence on Russian supplies. The Russian government's recent actions to manipulate the natural gas 'market prices' and cut off its supplies to Georgia and Ukraine were a litmus test of Russia's true intent to act as a traditional imperialist power and not a reliable business partner

to the West. Similarly, recent explosions on the main pipeline supplying Georgia with Russian gas at a time of brutal cold came after Moscow threatened disloyal neighbors with the use of economic pressures.

Russia's desire to have a stranglehold of Central Asian energy shipments through the state-owned energy conglomerates must also be seen as part of a policy aiming to use its energy resources as a weapon to exert pressure on its neighbors. It is reasonable to infer that Russia's stated policy to be a reliable partner for the West is at variance with Russia's efforts to reanimate its imperial vocation in what Russia forcefully reclaims as its geopolitical territory. Many can question whether this brinkmanship can be accepted as a basis for partnership, particularly given that Russia assumed the presidency of the G8 club of world's leading industrial democracies.

CONCLUSIONS: Russia's backsliding to military pressure, as stated in the New Doctrine, sends a clear, if somewhat unsettling, message to the international community – democratization and European aspirations in the post-Soviet states pose a direct threat to Russia's interests and should be halted, if necessary by force. This approach means, among other things, the false promise of Russia's declarations to join family of European democracies, which has too often been used as an excuse for avoiding real analysis about Moscow's intentions.

Coupled with Russia's aspirations to have a stranglehold on Central Asian energy shipments, the dangerous ideas set forth in its New Doctrine may have far-reaching consequences not only for Georgia and other post-Soviet states, but also for Europe as a whole. For if Russia can routinely and safely interfere in the internal affairs of the small states along its frontiers, its imperialist proclivities may grow and encourage it to target others further afield.

AUTHOR'S BIO: Khatuna Salukvadze is an analyst on the Caucasus and Central Asia. She holds degrees from Harvard University and London School of Economics, and is based in Tbilisi, Georgia.

THE CIS IS DEAD: LONG LIVE THE CSTO

Richard Weitz

The Putin administration appears to have set aside its long-running efforts to restructure the CIS into a more effective institution. Instead, the Russian government has focused attention on expanding the role and capacity of the CSTO, which it controls without Chinese influence, unlike the SCO. The CSTO is increasingly used as a factor legitimizing Russian military presence in Central Asia. In particular, plans to develop a CSTO “peacekeeping” force could provide its members with an instrument to intervene militarily to prevent further regime changes in Central Asia.

BACKGROUND: Since assuming office, the Putin government has conducted a sustained campaign to revitalize the CIS by enhancing cooperation among a core group of pro-Russian governments. In the summer of 2000, Putin successfully proposed that these countries create a CIS Counter-Terrorism Center in Bishkek. The following May, the CIS members authorized the formation of a Collective Rapid Deployment Force (CRDF). In May 2002, the presidents of Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, and Tajikistan agreed to transform the Tashkent Collective Security Treaty into a Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO).

Since its formal inauguration the following September, the CSTO has taken charge of the CRDF and transformed it into a standing force with a small multinational staff and a mobile command center. CRDF units have engaged in several major exercises on the territory of its Central Asian members, including the rapid deployment anti-terrorist exercise “Rubezh-2004” (“Frontier 2004”) in August 2004, and “Rubezh-2005” in April 2005, which involved some 3,000 troops.

Russian officials have used the CSTO to legitimize their military presence in Central Asia. For example, Defense Minister Sergey Ivanov justified Russia’s establishment of the airbase in Kant, Kyrgyzstan, in October 2003 on the grounds that it provided air support for the CSTO area of operations. Russian officials also have described their military base in Tajikistan as a CSTO facility. If Russia were to assume control of the former U.S. military base at Karshi-Khanabad, Moscow might seek to lessen American concerns by also characterizing it as a multinational CSTO facility.

Russian and CSTO leaders have stressed that the organization represents more than just a military bloc and can contribute to meeting a range of security problems. For example, countering narcotics trafficking and terrorism within Central Asia have become CSTO priorities. Since 2003, the CSTO governments have conducted annual “Kanal” (“Channel”) operations to intercept drug shipments from Afghanistan. Azerbaijan, Iran, Uzbekistan, and other non-CSTO members have participated in these exercises. The CSTO has established a working group on Afghanistan to strengthen its government’s law enforcement and counter-narcotics agencies. For several years, the CIS Counter-Terrorism Center has been compiling a common list of terrorist and extremist organizations that operate in the member states—though these efforts have encountered the same problems of changing nomenclature, diverging definitions, and disagreements over threat assessments that have impeded reconciling databases in Europe and the United States.

The Russian government recently has taken additional steps to promote the CSTO’s role in security affairs. For example, while reducing its troop deployments outside the CIS (e.g., from Balkan peacekeeping operations), Russia has increased spending on military facilities and forces related to CSTO missions. Moscow allows CSTO members to purchase Russian-made defense equipment and supplies for their CRDF components at the same prices charged the Russian military. The Russian Ministry of Defense also subsidizes the costs of training officers from CSTO militaries.

As a result of Moscow’s support, the CSTO has become much more active in recent months. In

June 2005, CSTO members signed agreements to enhance joint military training, including by compiling a list of testing sites and target ranges for use during joint exercises. They also decided to create a commission to promote closer ties between their defense industries. It will help promote more joint ventures and establish common standards for equipment. In December 2005, Russian Defense Minister Ivanov announced that he and his CSTO colleagues had agreed to coordinate their anti-terrorist programs relating to nuclear, biological, or chemical security. At present, CSTO governments are addressing the technical, financial, and organizational issues raised by their June 2004 decision to create a collective peacekeeping force, which also would be available to respond to "emergency situations."

IMPLICATIONS: The member governments historically have found it difficult to implement many CIS agreements. The problems of achieving consensus among twelve governments with increasingly divergent agendas, combined with the organization's weak, opaque, and inefficient institutions for making and implementing decisions, have led to its stagnation and steady decline relative to the other major multinational institutions active in Central Asia. President Putin himself complained the CIS employs "obsolete forms and methods of work." Frictions between Russia and other members have arisen over the appropriate prices for Russian energy and Russia's restrictions on labor mobility. Perennial plans to reform its ineffective decision-making structures have failed to achieve much progress.

Thanks to its limited membership and shared support for Russia's defense and security policies, the CSTO constitutes a more coherent and active institution than the CIS. It already entails some collaboration among the members' general staffs. Proposals exist to establish common training, military research and development, and logistic support systems. Nevertheless, the CSTO does not enjoy the degree of military coordination found in NATO today, let alone that of the Soviet-era Warsaw Pact. In May 2002, its members explicitly rejected a Russian-backed proposal to create a joint military coordination body within the Russian

General Staff. The much-touted CRDF has never been used, not even during the revolution in Kyrgyzstan. The absence from the CSTO membership roster of Uzbekistan, which has the strongest military of the Central Asian countries, has hindered the organization's role in the region. It is debatable whether governments join the CSTO to enhance their security or to secure Russian energy and defense subventions.

Notwithstanding these subsidies, the Central Asian governments appear to prefer working through the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), which is not dominated by a single country like the CIS or CSTO. China also favors the SCO's assuming a more prominent security role in Central Asia.

CONCLUSIONS: Russia benefits from the current situation in which Moscow can veto SCO actions whereas Beijing lacks the equivalent power to affect CSTO decisions. The developing CSTO "peacekeeping" force could provide that organization with the military power required to suppress a future revolutionary situation in a member country, especially when Islamic extremists might emerge dominant. When Russia intervened in the Tajik civil war in the 1990s, it did so under the auspices of the original CIS Tashkent Treaty. Even if Moscow endorsed SCO military intervention to bolster an incumbent member government, the organization currently has no such capacity, lacking an integrated command structure or a combined planning staff. For this reason, at some point Beijing may seek to integrate the CSTO into the SCO framework, perhaps as its military component. Securing Russian agreement for such an arrangement could be difficult. The April 2004 Memorandum of Understanding between the SCO Secretariat and the CIS Executive Committee limits cooperation to non-military issues such as commerce, anti-terrorism, and humanitarian exchanges. In practice, the two institutions have yet to undertake any joint initiatives. Despite its weaknesses, the CSTO likely will remain Central Asia's preeminent multinational military organization for some time.

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FIELD REPORTS

TEENAGE FIGHT SPARKS VIOLENCE BETWEEN DUNGAN AND KYRGYZ VILLAGERS

Erica Marat

On February 4, a violent clash between ethnic Kyrgyzs and Dungans erupted in the small village of Iskra in northern Kyrgyzstan. About 250-300 inhabitants from neighboring villages gathered in front of Iskra administration to demand the eviction of several Dungan families after two Kyrgyz teenagers were severely beaten by a group of Dungans on January 31.

After the village administration refused to meet the protestors' requests, hundreds of protestors began to throw stones at Dungan houses, where the Dungan teenagers involved the conflict with the Kyrgyz teenagers lived. The situation went out of control of the security forces when four Dungans from Tokmok city drove against the crowd and opened gunfire. Later, the police found grenades in the car.

Although there were no human casualties, seven houses, one vehicle, and 250 kilograms of hay stacks owned by Dungans were burned down as a result of these violent clashes. The crowd tried to hamper the firemen's efforts to extinguish the fire. A special envoy of the security forces had to break up the aggressive mob.

The scope and intensity of the conflict between Kyrgyzs and Dungans in Iskra village is unprecedented for both ethnic groups living in Kyrgyzstan. Skirmishes between small gangs of Russian and Kyrgyz teenagers living in rural areas are frequent. Everyday street showdowns occur between school students, unemployed, and alcoholics. Kyrgyzs and Dungans, however, have never clashed before.

There are 50,000 Dungans living in Kyrgyzstan. Dungans form the majority of Iskra's population, representing over 1,400 households out of a total of 2,353. Iskra is one of the few villages in northern Kyrgyzstan where ethnic Kyrgyz are still a minority.

Dungans are ethnic Chinese from northwestern China and practice Hanafi Sunni Islam. They live in a number of other former Soviet states as well. In the mid-nineteenth century, thousands of Dungans fled to Kazakh, Kyrgyz, Uzbek and Russian-inhabited territories following a failed revolt against the Chinese Emperor. The Dungans speak Mandarin Chinese, but it was converted to the Cyrillic script in the 1920s and significantly influenced by Turkic and Slavic languages. In addition to Dungan, many Dungans speak Russian and Kyrgyz.

Despite intensive russification during Soviet times, the Dungans preserved a strong religious identity and live in distinct communities and collective farms, mostly in rural areas. Dungans also kept primordial traditions of peasantry up to the present day. In Kyrgyzstan, they are known as hard-working peasants who grow high quality rice, fruits and vegetables. Dungan agricultural products dominate in many local food markets. Because of farming and peasantry, Dungans are among the wealthiest rural dwellers, but also the most conservative in terms of inter-ethnic integration. Most Dungans still value intra-ethnic marriages. The Kyrgyzs adopted some features of the Dungan culture, too. Especially Dungan cuisine and farming

skills were incorporated in daily life throughout northern Kyrgyzstan.

The reaction of the Kyrgyz public to the ethnic confrontation in Iskra was mixed. The level of aggressiveness between Kyrgyzs and Dungans was surprising to many Bishkek residents, where both ethnicities lived peacefully for decades. Many rushed to compare Kyrgyz-Dungan tensions with the Kyrgyz-Uzbek conflict in the early 1990s in southern Kyrgyzstan. The local newspaper *Vechernyi Bishkek* commented that the fight between Kyrgyz and Dungan teenagers was a tipping point of the tensions accumulated throughout the past few years. The newspaper also blames the village administration for taking the side of ethnic Kyrgyz and participating in violence against Dungans.

The Kyrgyz NGO Coalition for Democracy and Civil Society sees the violence to be a result of the weak performance of law enforcement agencies, widespread corruption, and the government's ties with criminal groups. This viewpoint coincides with the recent criticism expressed by Kyrgyz Prime Minister Felix Kulov against the National Security Service for its failure to stop organized crime, contract murders and racketeering. Kulov implicitly pointed at the government's inability to prosecute a well-known mafia boss, Rysbek Akmatbayev, who announced his intention to run for a parliamentary seat.

Another explanation of the Kyrgyz-Dungan conflict is the lack of education facilities, and high levels of unemployment, alcoholism, and drug addiction in Kyrgyz villages. Teenagers in rural areas are unable to receive basic school training and find jobs, they are therefore often involved in racketeering and stealing. Ethnic divisions only exacerbate the level of aggressiveness between young people.

A minority of observers think that the Kyrgyz-Dungan conflict was inspired by some "third forces" interested in destabilizing domestic security. Similar clashes, according to this view, might soon be intentionally instigated between local Uighurs, Koreans, and Uzbeks. The definition of the "third forces", however, varies between drug barons, state officials, and members of the former government.

As the situation remains worrisome, the Kyrgyz Security Service had to toughen controls on the Kyrgyz-Kazakh border. Kyrgyz President Kurmanbek Bakiyev and Prime Minister Kulov formed a special committee to investigate the case more thoroughly. In his public address, Kulov stated that the government will not allow the escalation of the conflict in Iskra into an inter-ethnic confrontation. He tried to assure that the conflict took place because of a routine brawl between teenagers, who did not presume any ethnic discrimination.

ASTANA PLAYS AFGHAN GAMBIT TO ENSURE SECURE ENERGY SHIPMENT ROUTES

Marat Yermukanov

Speaking at the recent London-hosted international conference on Afghanistan, Kazakh Foreign Minister Kasymzhomart Tokayev voiced his country's readiness to render all possible assistance to Kabul to restore Afghanistan's economy. In fact, the diplomatically correct statement carries more

than just economic substance. Even long after the reported defeat of Taliban fighters, Astana is still concerned over drug trafficking, illegal migration and growing threats from Islamic militants.

It is not the first time that Kazakhstan pledges economic assistance to war-torn Afghanistan. From a geopolitical point of view, active cooperation with Kabul would be welcome for Astana as an important bridge to partnership with NATO and U.S.-sponsored international organizations. In December 2005, Foreign Minister Kasymzhomart Tokayev, addressing the Brussels summit on security issues, said that Kazakhstan would like to see Afghanistan involved in regional security cooperation. In London, the Kazakh Foreign minister went further and tabled a proposal that Kabul should conclude an intergovernmental agreement on fighting drug trafficking. He underlined that Kazakhstan calls on other states to create an anti-drug security belt around Afghanistan.

The Foreign Minister's speech apparently went down well with the foreign audience, but was jeered by observers at home as a mere propaganda gesture. Very few in Astana believe that the Afghan government, unable even to bring to order its own corrupt police forces and provincial governors, would play any significant role in inter-governmental cooperation to stem drug trafficking. On the other hand, Kazakhstan will hardly ensure security in its southern backyard until similar agreements with Tajikistan and Uzbekistan are reached.

So far, effective anti-narcotics cooperation between Kazakhstan and its next-door neighbors remains in the domain of wishful thinking. The director of Tajikistan's Drug Control Agency Rustam Nazarov, who visited Almaty on January 30, admitted that 25 percent of Afghan heroin is trafficked through Central Asia annually, practically unhindered. He blamed the lack of interaction between Kazakh and Tajik anti-narcotics units. However, the state of cooperation with Uzbekistan is no better. Rustam Nazarov lamented the lack of significant progress in fighting drug trafficking in 2005, and the situation would remain so in 2006.

Astana's security concerns on the Afghan issue are not limited to drug trafficking. Experts are frequently debating the reliability of Kazakh

military units in the Caspian region. According to Lt. General Aitkozha Isengulov, the leader of the Association of retired army officers, military personnel in the Caspian region, understaffed and lacking sophisticated equipment, is very vulnerable to terrorist or other military attacks. He believes that Kazakhstan could incur the attacks of Islamic militants due to its involvement in anti-terrorist operations in Iraq or Afghanistan on the side of the U.S., Israel and other states. The attempt of Western states to widen the fight against terrorists globally to make others share their headaches does not bode well for Kazakhstan and the Central Asian region.

Such a neutral attitude, however, does not reflect the official line of Astana, which on many occasions demonstrated its commitment to fighting terrorism within its partnership with NATO. Just before Tokayev's trip to London, the National Security Committee of Kazakhstan (KNB) announced its intention to include the notorious Jamaat of Mujahedins of Central Asia militant organization as well as the Aum Shinrikyo sect into the list of terrorist organizations banned in Kazakhstan. Such a step may have purely symbolic meaning rather than a serious crackdown on extremist groups, since both of the above named organizations are almost unknown in Kazakhstan. Incidentally, at a press conference on February 6, a foreign ministry spokesman reiterated that Kazakhstan had terrorist training camps on its territory. There is no apparent reason to fear that remnants of Taliban militants will infiltrate into the country. Kazakhstan's anti-terrorist frenzy in this situation looks more like a politically motivated activity rather than a response to a real imminent threat.

Russia actively uses the Chechen card to internationalize its never-ending war against separatists in the North Caucasus and never abandoned its plans to entangle Central Asian states into anti-terror operations. Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan and Iran supported Moscow's initiative to create a joint Casfor navy force allegedly to protect Caspian oil reserves from potential terrorist attacks. Russian Admiral Vladimir Masorin assured that Casfor is

not directed against any foreign power and 'will be used to suppress terrorist attacks and prevent the threat of proliferation of weapons of mass destruction'.

Obviously, any great power rivaling for Caspian oil will capitalize on 'terrorist threat' to concentrate huge military muscle in the region. These developments run counter to the intention of Astana to demilitarize the Caspian. At the same

time, Kazakhstan seeks closer cooperation with all Caspian states to ensure security of the planned south-western gas shipment route to Afghanistan and Iran via Turkmenistan as an alternative to the Russian pipeline network increasingly used by Moscow as a leverage of political pressure. In this context, the Kazakh foreign minister had good reasons to thank in London international forces for maintaining peace and stability in Afghanistan.

KYRGYZSTAN - FIRST PARLIAMENTARY REPUBLIC IN CENTRAL ASIA?

Nurshat Abubakirov

In late December, Kyrgyz President Kurmanbek Bakiev agreed to conduct a referendum on the form of government to determine the future of the Kyrgyzstan's constitution. Along with abolishing the death penalty, reforming the judicial branch, and reorganizing the oblasts (administrative entities), the debate over the form of government is proving to be intense and of great importance for Kyrgyzstan after the eventful year of 2005. President Bakiev has been eager to keep the current structure, under which the president has most of the power, while leading political figures including members of parliament, are speaking in favor of a parliamentary republic.

At the meeting of the Constitutional Council on December 21, President Kurmanbek Bakiev spoke about the need to determine the form of the government before proceeding to drafting a new constitution. Therefore, he suggested postponing constitutional reforms until 2009. Although the president expressed enthusiasm for reforms, many critics have pointed out the fact that his government has so far fallen short of bringing about the changes anticipated after the March revolution, when demonstrators stormed the Kyrgyz White House with the aim of dismantling the Akayev regime.

Increasing numbers of political figures, including leading members of parliament and some members of the cabinet, have voiced their support for a parliamentary republic as a barrier to authoritarian rule. President Bakiev, however, said the preconditions for a parliamentary republic are a robust economy, a vibrant civil society, the rule of law, and strong political parties. On other occasions, he has challenged the preparedness of political parties for such a change. "I do not oppose making the Jogorku Kenesh (parliament) consist exclusively of political parties, but where are those parties?" he said. Moreover, he added that Kyrgyzstan could not afford to have chaos caused by weak and disorganized political parties. "I can not experiment with our people," he concluded.

Kyrgyzstan, with a population of 5 million people, has around 70 officially registered parties. Many of them are new parties founded after the March revolution and often one-person parties or parties of special groups, for example the party of disabled. However, there are also time-honored and experienced parties like the Social Democrats, Democratic Movement of Kyrgyzstan, Communist, Ar-namys, and others. Local experts believe that 70% of the political parties are associated with their leaders' personality rather than with their political stance. The director general of Tribuna newspaper,

Yrysbek Omurzakov, says that most of the parties “only have their names, leaders, and regulations.”

As various issues of the constitutional reforms are being discussed, many political parties have already embarked on building coalitions in preparation to the elections to the municipalities and the future parliamentary elections. It has been proposed that a part of the 75-member Jogorku Kenesh will be elected proportionally through party lists and another part through single-mandate constituencies. However, the exact proportion of seats to be accorded to proportional representation is not decided yet, nor is the number of seat in the parliament. It has been suggested that the number of seats should be increased from 75 to at least 105.

On November 18, a number of right-wing parties, lead by the Erkindik (Freedom), Republican, Erkin Kyrgyzstan (Free Kyrgyzstan) and Kyrgyzstan Kelechegi (Future of Kyrgyzstan) parties, announced they were forming a bloc. As one of largest parties, Topchubek Turgunaliyev’s Erkindik is known for collecting signatures for dissolution of the current parliament.

Another loose coalition of parties is the People’s Congress of Kyrgyzstan, which includes Ar-namys (Dignity), co-founded by current Prime Minister Felix Kulov, Atameken (Fatherland), led by Parliament Speaker Omurbek Tekebayev, Adilet (Justice) of Toychubek Kasymov and the Social Democratic Party, led by Minister of Industry, Trade and Tourism Almaz Atambaev. Analysts have suggested that the Congress joins forces with similar parties, such as the Union of Democratic Forces, spearheaded by parliamentarian Kubatbek Baybolov, Moya Strana (My Country) of former Vice-Prime Minister Joomart Otorbaev, and Justice and Progress of former Foreign Minister Muratbek Imanaliyev. If the merger goes ahead, the coalition, whose main goal is to turn Kyrgyzstan into a parliamentary republic, can become one of the strongest parties in the country.

On the left, the Communist Party of Kyrgyzstan, now led by Iskhak Masaliyev, the son of Apsamat Masaliyev, the First Secretary of Communist Party

in the late 1980s, is believed to be planning to team up with Jany Kyrgyzstan (New Kyrgyzstan), associated with Presidential Chief of Staff Usen Sydykov.

Kubatbek Baybolov, the parliamentarian and the leader of the new “Union of Democratic Forces” party demands that the government create a favorable environment for the development of political parties. “Do we need to wait for 40 years, hoping strong parties will emerge?” he asks bewildered. He argues that if the constitution authorizes elections by party lists, these sixty parties will easily merge to produce six stronger ones.

On the other hand, the head of the non-governmental organization Coalition for Democracy and Civil Society Edil Baisalov expresses his concern over the feasibility of parties. “Leaders created parties out of personal ambitions and interests, and thought only of how to further their own political and economic goals.” Emil Aliyev, the leader of Ar-namys party, said strong political parties in a parliamentary republic could prevent tribal and north-south divisions, thus making parties compete with each other on the national level with their platforms. Independent parliamentarian Omurbek Babanov, one of the ardent advocates of the parliamentarian system, points out that in the current presidential system “one person makes all the decisions, while the Prime Minister and his cabinet bears the responsibility.” He reproaches the 15-year Akayev regime for its flaws such as the centralization of power and duplication of some responsibilities by the Cabinet and Presidential Apparatus.

The December 18 local government elections, held with 52 percent turnout, showed little improvement in diversion from clan-based voting. It was reported that voters had turned out to support their relatives or tribe members in the elections, and, in case of a loss, protested against the results.

THE ARAL SEA: A DISASTER KNOCKING ON THE DOOR

Muhammad Tahir

Increasing concerns over the Aral Sea's environmental impact on Central Asia continue to create headlines in international reports and surveys. The United Nations Development Program's (UNDP) recent report on Human Development once again highlighted this issue as a matter of concern.

According to the UNDP's report for 2005, the Aral Sea, once considered one of the world's largest inland lakes, is now not only losing this position but is also turning into a disaster zone for surrounding regions, affecting Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and now Turkmenistan. The Sea has increasingly become a dead body of water, leaving behind a harmful layer of chemicals, pesticides and natural salts blown by the wind into noxious dust storms. This not only raises tremendous health risks, but also creates huge economic problems for the region. According to statistics published on the Aral Sea website, roughly 60% of the basin's population has been affected in different ways: irrigated agriculture in the deltas suffer from a limited water supply because of greatly reduced river flows, which in turn reduces employment opportunities and forces people to migrate while the health of those left behind declines dramatically. Due to a lack of international and regional interest, little has so far been achieved by organizations struggling to cope with these problems.

Many experts find it hard to predict a bright future for the region, since countries such as Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan continue to increase the area of farmland irrigated by the Amu Darya River, the crucial source of water for the Aral Sea.

The ongoing Golden Century Lake project in the Karakum desert of Turkmenistan is raising more concerns, not only in terms of the loss of more Aral Sea water but also in terms of the environmental impact for a region already suffering.

According to the UNDP report, this US\$9 billion Turkmen initiative, which was started in October 2000, began without even consulting regional powers. This depression covers 3,500 to 4,000 square kilometers and has a maximum depth of 70 to 100 meters. Once completed, the lake will contain some 132 to 150 cubic kilometers of water. The semi official news source Turkmenistan.ru, quoting Turkmen officials, stated in May 2005 that this scheme will guarantee water and security and will create some 4,000 square kilometers of farmland. But scientists fear that this large-scale project will wreck the already fragile ecosystem and the water will simply evaporate in the desert, creating another situation like that of the Aral Sea.

Besides the possible environmental impact there is also a possibility of conflict regarding upstream and downstream water rights to the Amu Darya. Uzbekistan possibly would be the first victim of the project, since water will be drained from the Amu Darya to maintain the level in the lake.

Due to economic problems in the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) countries, in the early days of their independence little progress was seen in coping with issues such as the Aral Sea and other environmental problems. In March 1993, however, regional heads of state established the Interstate Council for the Aral Sea basin, the 'International Fund for Aral Sea salvation' and the 'Intergovernmental Sustainable Development Commission'.

Initially, these institutions played an important role in working to save the Aral Sea and in coordinating other regional environmental and water initiatives. But neither the effort of NGOs nor intergovernmental moves seem sufficient to cope with the challenges of the day.

Afghanistan's new long-term agriculture project called Kohi-Ghashang 'Good Hill' seems to be one

of the most important challenges to the future of water resources in the region. If this project is realized, Afghanistan will increase its irrigated area of land from 500,000 hectares to more than 1.5 million hectares. This will mean current water usage in Afghanistan will increase from 1 billion cubic meters to up to 10 billion cubic meters from the Amu Darya which carries a total 11.6 billion cubic meter water. According to an international agreement signed in 1946 between the Soviet Union and Afghanistan, Kabul already has the right to withdraw 9 billion cubic meters of water. The 1,415-kilometer long Amu Darya has the highest water bearing capacity of the region, and it originates from Panj Darya in Afghanistan, around 12.5 % of the Aral Sea flows from Afghanistan. The Amu Darya continues along nearly the entire border between Tajikistan and Afghanistan, and later also forms the border between Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan.

Lack of cooperation and coordination on water management issues continues to create unprecedented potential risks for the future of the region.

The efforts to save the Aral Sea look even more difficult since Tajikistan started to build two hydropower stations. The running of these stations will rely on water from Amu Darya or from canals that feed into the river. According to the World Bank, Tajikistan is actively pursuing the completion of these two hydropower schemes initiated during the Soviet period to reduce the country's energy dependence on Uzbekistan. A less contentious option, Sangtuda 1 & 2 involves two schemes [670 MW and 220 MW] at an increased cost of US\$560 million. These are expected to start working in early 2009.

If a second project under development in Tajikistan – the Rogun Dam – is realized, it will spell disaster

not only for the Aral Sea, but for the agricultural sector of the entire region as it gives full control of the Amu Darya to Tajikistan. Russian companies are involved in this US\$2.5 billion project. This is a 3,600 MW storage scheme that could start producing electricity in 2014. If this dream comes true, Tajikistan will be able to sell its electricity to Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan. This plant was begun in 1980s, but the project was stopped when the Tajik civil war began. Then a massive flood in 1993 destroyed most of what had already been built. Today, despite controversy and strong opposition from Uzbekistan, the Tajik government seems set to restart this project, as it will be an important source of income for this landlocked country. But the impact of such projects will be unprecedented. According to a 2004 World Bank report, the Aral Sea has been shrinking rapidly: between 1960 and 1990 it retreated to about half its size [from 66,900 to 36 500 square kilometers], and its volume dropped by two-thirds [from 1,090 to 310 cubic meters]. By the end of the 1990's this Sea had reportedly lost 90% of its volume. The salt content in the water also increased 2-3 times. As a result of the lack of comprehensive and effective coordination, cooperation and water management strategies among regional countries, and the lack of International efforts and funding, the desiccation of the sea has had far-reaching consequences for the climate and biodiversity of the surrounding region. Desert winds transport sand and salt long distances, depositing millions of tons of [often polluted] salts on agricultural fields all over the basin area, and reportedly endangering the glaciers of faraway mountain ranges. The worsening ecology of the region makes living conditions in previously heavily populated areas inhospitable, forcing the active population to immigrate and increases the health risk to those left behind.

NEWS DIGEST

GEORGIA IS IN ENERGY BLOCKADE - GEORGIAN PREMIER

26 January

Georgia is in fact facing an energy blockade, Georgian Prime Minister Zurab Nogaideli said. "Mainly this deals with the sabotage at a cross-country gas pipeline and the suspiciously long time the repair work on Russian territory is taking," Nogaideli said at a briefing on Thursday. The Georgian government takes all measures to stabilize the situation: in particular, it is planned to increase electrical energy deliveries to Georgia from Armenia and Azerbaijan, he said. Due to the crisis situation in the country, Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili interrupted his visit to Davos, where a number of important meetings were scheduled, and is returning to Tbilisi in the evening, Nogaideli said. (Interfax)

TBILISI EXPERIENCING ELECTRICITY, GAS CUTS

27 January

Gas and electricity cuts continue to plague life in Tbilisi, where several heavily populated neighborhoods have also been left without drinking water due to the power cuts. Traffic in the Georgian capital has been unusually light in recent days, public transport has virtually ground to a halt and streets all over the city are buried in snow. The local administration said on Thursday that kerosene would be sold at three locations in Tbilisi at a quarter its market price. Long lines of people have already formed, but nobody is selling kerosene at moment. People are also queuing up near mobile filling stations. All schools and theaters have been closed. The Georgian authorities have promised to restore electricity supplies in full by Friday evening. (Interfax)

GAS SUPPLIES TO RUSSIAN EMBASSY IN TBILISI TO BE CUT OFF

28 January

Tbilisi Mayor Gigi Ugulava has given orders to cut gas supplies to the Russian embassy in Georgia and the Gazexport office. "I believe it is more important to heat at least two apartment buildings with gas than organizations that have been playing an immediate role in the energy blockade of Georgia and have alternative heating sources," Ugulava told journalists on Saturday. "Gas supplies will be restored to these organizations simultaneously with other institutions, without any privileges being conferred," he said. (Interfax)

US SOLDIER GUILTY OF AFGHAN ABUSE

30 January

A US soldier has been found guilty by a court martial in Kabul of assaulting prisoners in an American military base in Afghanistan's Uruzgan province. Sgt Kevin D Myricks was found guilty of one count of conspiracy to maltreat and two counts of maltreatment, a US military statement said. Myricks has been reduced in rank and sentenced to six months' detention. On Saturday, another soldier, James Hayes, was sent to four months in prison for the same incident of abuse. Human rights groups have often accused US forces of abusing Afghans held at detention centres in the country. The US military says the detainees did not require medical attention as a result of the assault last July. Myricks has been demoted to the rank of a private and he is being held in custody at Bagram airfield, the US led-coalition's headquarters in Afghanistan. He will be transferred to Kuwait soon to serve his six-month sentence. "The court martial and subsequent punishment in this case reflects the seriousness with which this command views this incident," Maj Gen Jason Kamiya, the coalition's operational commander, said in a statement. "Incidents of this nature are not reflective of the standards adhered to by this command. We are fully committed to investigating all allegations... and will hold accountable those who are found to have acted inappropriately." Myricks was assigned to Company C, 96th Engineer Battalion, when the incident took place last July. A third soldier is also facing "non-judicial punishment for allegedly having knowledge of the abuse and not reporting it through the unit's chain of command", the US military has said. At least eight prisoners have died in US custody since 2001. In September, a US military interrogator was sentenced to five months in prison for assaulting a detainee in Afghanistan who later died. Five other US soldiers have been convicted following the deaths of two prisoners at the military base at Bagram, outside Kabul, in 2002. (BBC)

AID PLEDGE BOOST FOR AFGANISTAN

31 January

International donors have said they will provide nearly \$2bn (£1.1bn) in aid to help transform Afghanistan. The US has promised \$1.1bn while the UK says it will give \$800m, as part of a five-year development plan being discussed at a conference in London. Afghan President Hamid Karzai said his country had made great strides towards peace and democracy, but warned drugs and terrorism remained grave threats. Officials from about 70

nations are attending the two-day gathering. The plan, known as the "Afghan Compact", aims to promote stability and development in Afghanistan in return for economic and military support from the international community. The BBC's Nick Childs in London says one major theme at the conference has been that the world as a whole still has a major direct stake in Afghanistan's future. With more than four years passed since the US-led overthrow of former Taleban regime, he says a key question is whether the outside world will back up its pledges of support with real commitments. (BBC)

POLL SHOWS JUST 17 PERCENT OF PUBLIC TRUSTS KYRGYZ PRESIDENT

31 January

Kyrgyzstan's "Agym" newspaper published poll results on 31 January showing that 74 percent of respondents said they distrust President Kurmanbek Bakiev. The telephone poll queried 3,416 Kyrgyz citizens in Bishkek and a number of other cities. Asked whether they trust Bakiev, 74 percent replied "no," 17 percent said "yes," and 9 percent said they did not know. Asked whether they expect a second revolution in Kyrgyzstan, 58 percent said "yes," 30 percent said "no," and 12 percent did not know. (akipress.org)

KAZAKH OFFICIAL SUPPORTS EASING OF LAWS FOR MIGRANT WORKERS

31 January

Marat Pistaev, head of the migration police in Kazakhstan's Interior Ministry, told journalists in Almaty on 31 January that he opposes efforts to tighten legislation on migrant workers. "In Russia now, they want to legalize labor migration, they want up to legalize up to 1 million people who have entered legally and are working illegally," Pistaev said. "We want to study their experience and then make our proposals to the Labor Ministry." Pistaev said the Interior Ministry estimates that 300,000 illegal migrants from Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan were employed in Kazakhstan in 2005. He said he disagrees with estimates that put the number of migrant workers in Kazakhstan at 1 million, although he admitted that illegal labor migration is on the rise. (Interfax-Kazakhstan)

GEORGIAN OFFICIALS REJECT PUTIN'S KOSOVO ANALOGY

31 January

Speaking to journalists in Tbilisi on 31 January, Georgian Foreign Minister Gela Bezhuashvili claimed that "most" of the states engaged in mediating a settlement of the Kosova conflict do not agree with the argument adduced during by Russian President Vladimir Putin during his televised press conference earlier that day. Putin argued that there is a need for "universal principles" to find a

"fair solution" to "frozen" conflicts like the one in Kosova or those in Abkhazia and South Ossetia. "If people believe that Kosovo can be granted full independence, why then should we deny it to Abkhazia and South Ossetia?" he asked rhetorically. Bezhuashvili said that the Kosova settlement requires "a very delicate, very cautious approach" that cannot be applied universally to other conflicts. Georgian Prime Minister Zurab Noghaideli similarly argued that "the Kosova solution cannot be applied to Georgia" because solutions to the Abkhaz and South Ossetian conflicts must preserve Georgia's territorial integrity. (Caucasus Press)

SOUTH OSSETIA BLAMES KILLING ON GEORGIANS

31 January

The Foreign Ministry of the unrecognized Republic of South Ossetia issued a statement on 31 January implicating Georgia in the recent murder of a local resident. South Ossetian members of the Joint Control Commission tasked with monitoring the situation in the South Ossetian conflict zone issued an analogous condemnation the same day. The Ossetian side claims the dead man was abducted on 26 January in the Georgian village of Kekhvi, close to a Georgian police post, brutally beaten, and then publicly executed. Local Georgian officials say he froze to death. On 1 February, South Ossetian President Kokoity accused Georgia of deploying 500 servicemen to the conflict zone later on 31 January with the aim of provoking an armed clash with the Russian peacekeeping contingent there. (Caucasus Press)

COUNTER-TERRORIST OPERATION IN CHECHNYA ALMOST COMPLETE - PUTIN

31 January

Counter-terrorist operations in Chechnya have almost been completed, President Vladimir Putin said. "I believe we can speak of the completion of the counter-terrorist operation with the understanding that Chechen law enforcement agencies are assuming the bulk of the responsibility for the state of law and order," he told a Tuesday news conference in the Kremlin. "All necessary government bodies have been set up in Chechnya. This means that all law enforcement bodies, the prosecutor's offices, courts, lawyers, notaries and, of course, the Chechen Interior Ministry can and will be strengthened," Putin said. "I hope that all this taken together will lead to furthered stabilization," he said. (Interfax)

RUSSIA DOES NOT NEED ANOTHER AFGHANISTAN IN CENTRAL ASIA

31 January

Russian President Vladimir Putin has said that Russia does not want to see a second Afghanistan in Central

Asia and the region should follow an evolutionary path of development, and not a revolutionary one. "We do not want to have another Afghanistan in Central Asia, there should be no revolutions, but evolution that would bring about the establishment of democratic governments," Putin said about the situation in Uzbekistan. "We know what happened in Andijan, who fomented tensions in that city and how. It is likewise clear to us that Uzbekistan still has very many problems," he said. (Itar-Tass)

GEORGIAN PRESIDENT MEETS WITH AMBASSADORS

1 February

Mikheil Saakashvili met on 1 February in Berlin with Georgia's ambassadors to 20 European countries. He warned them that Georgia faces a "strong, experienced and wealthy" opponent, meaning Russia, that "regards a united Georgia as a threat and does its best to prevent Georgia from becoming stronger." Saakashvili encouraged the ambassadors to do more to secure European support for Georgia's strategic goals of integration with NATO and the EU. Until recently, Europe has ranked a poor second to the United States in Saakashvili's strategic thinking: he has never once met with outgoing EU Envoy for the South Caucasus Heikki Talvitie in the numerous times Talvitie has visited Tbilisi over the past two years. (Caucasus Press)

MINSK GROUP CO-CHAIRS VISIT AZERBAIJAN

1 February

The French, Russian, and U.S. co-chairmen of the OSCE Minsk Group arrived in Baku on 31 January and held behind-closed-door talks the following day with Azerbaijani Foreign Minister Elmar Mammadyarov and with President Ilham Aliyev, Azerbaijani media reported. In a break with customary procedure, the co-chairmen did not hold a press conference before departing for Yerevan. The presidential press service reported only that the discussion focused on the current stage of talks aimed at resolving the Karabakh conflict. Aliyev is scheduled to meet near Paris next week with his Armenian counterpart Robert Kocharian to discuss, and possibly formally approve, what are described as "fundamental principles" that could form the nucleus of a formal peace settlement. Also on 1 February, President Aliyev affirmed at a cabinet meeting that he will never sign any Karabakh peace agreement that does not preserve Azerbaijan's territorial integrity. "The territorial integrity of Azerbaijan is not and never will be the subject of negotiations," he said. And in an implicit rejection of the referendum that is rumored to be a key component of the hoped-for peace settlement, Aliyev continued: "No decision will be taken that would make it possible, either today or in 100 years, to remove Nagorno-

Karabakh from the composition of Azerbaijan." (zerkalo.az)

KYRGYZ PARLIAMENT NIXES PRESIDENT'S COURT CHOICES

2 February

With 38 votes against, Kyrgyzstan's parliament on 2 February rejected the candidacy of Sultangazy Kasymov to head the country's supreme court. Kasymov had been chief justice of the court since 1996, and President Kurmanbek Bakiev had resubmitted Kasymov's candidacy when his term expired. Deputy Ulukbek Ormonov said that "new, young faces" should come to the high court. Deputies also voted down two other Bakiev choices: Ermek Sharsheev, proposed as a judge for an economic court in Issykkul Province; and Jyrgalbek Mamaev, proposed as a judge in the Aksu regional court of Issykkul Province. (akipress.org)

REPORT SAYS UZBEKISTAN SETS CONDITIONS FOR GERMAN BASE

2 February

Germany's "Der Spiegel" reported on 30 January that Uzbekistan's Foreign Ministry has informed the German government that Germany could lose its base in Termez, Uzbekistan, if it fails to make substantial investments in local infrastructure. The report said the Uzbek authorities are asking Germany to embark on projects that will cost a total of 20 million euros (about \$24 million), including the construction of a hotel and hospital. German officials, who have already invested 12 million euros in the region and pay the Uzbek government 240,000 euros a month to house 300 German troops at the base, are unenthusiastic about the request, "Der Spiegel" reported. A German delegation is slated to visit Tashkent in February to discuss the issue. After the Uzbek government's decision to evict the U.S. air base in July 2005, Germany's base in Termez, which supports operations in Afghanistan, is the only remaining NATO facility in the country. (RFE/RL)

SWITZERLAND JOINS EU SANCTIONS AGAINST UZBEKISTAN

2 February

Switzerland has moved to join the sanctions the European Union imposed on Uzbekistan after the Uzbek government refused to allow an independent investigation of massacre allegations in Andijan, the BBC's Uzbek Service reported on 31 January. The sanctions include an embargo on arms sales and a visa ban for 12 high-ranking officials. Rita Baldegger, spokeswoman for the Swiss State Secretariat for Economic Affairs, told RFE/RL's Uzbek Service on 1 February, "We are very strongly against internal repression, and this is a way of showing that and, of

course, hopefully a way of making the [Uzbek] government think about their actions." Baldegger added, "These sanctions do not mean that our relationship with Uzbekistan is indefinitely harmed. It just means that we really want to uphold the civil rights, human rights." (RFE/RL)

COLOR REVOLUTIONS AIMED AT WEAKENING RUSSIA - ANTISOROS ORGANIZATION

2 February

Regime changes brought about through color revolutions in a number of former Soviet republics are aimed at weakening Russia, not at the strengthening of the CIS, head of the Antisosros organization Maya Nikoleishvili said at a press conference in Tbilisi on Thursday.

"Saakashvili's coming to power with the support of Soros and his policy is a vivid example of attempts to discredit Russia in the international arena," she said. The Antisosros organization has conducted a poll dealing with Tbilisi residents' attitudes to Soros' activity in Georgia in January, she said. "The poll was conducted amongst 1,500 respondents and 70% of them assessed Soros' activity in Georgia as negative," Nikoleishvili said. (Interfax)

ARMENIA REACHES NEW ENERGY ACCORD WITH IRAN

2 February

A new bilateral memorandum of understanding on energy cooperation was signed in Tehran on 2 February during the latest session of the Armenian-Iranian intergovernmental commission. The new accord formally endorsed plans for the construction of the second section of the Iran-Armenia natural-gas pipeline, for a third electrical-power transmission line, and regarding the modernization of the fifth unit of Armenia's Razdan power station. The meeting produced a further agreement on the establishment of cultural and education centers in each country. (Arminfo)

GEORGIA'S UN ENVOY ACCUSES ABKHAZIA OF GENOCIDE

2 February

Speaking at a press conference in New York on 1 February, Revaz Adamia, who is Georgia's ambassador to the UN, accused the unrecognized Republic of Abkhazia of engaging in genocide and ethnic cleansing during the 1992-93 war, and he condemned the participation in that conflict of Russian mercenaries and regular troops, according to a UN press release. He also repeated earlier Georgian allegations that Abkhazia harbors terrorists and condones money laundering and arms smuggling. On 2 February, Abkhaz President Sergei Bagapsh denied Adamia's genocide allegations, saying he has "a warped imagination," Caucasus Press reported. Adamia also

expressed concern at last week's decision by the UN Security Council to renew the mandate of the UN Observer Mission in Georgia (UNOMIG) for only two months, rather than for six months. Adamia further described as "worrisome" Russian President Vladimir Putin's proposal during his 31 January press conference that "universal principles" be applied in resolving the Kosova conflict that could be extended to other conflicts in the CIS, including Abkhazia. Adamia argued that the situation in Kosova differs fundamentally from that in Abkhazia. (RFE/RL)

MOSCOW REGRETS IRRESPONSIBLE STATEMENTS BY GEORGIANS

2 February

The recent statements by Georgian representatives about Russia are irresponsible, deputy head of the Russian Foreign Ministry information and press department Mikhail Troyansky told Interfax. Georgian Permanent Representative in the United Nations Revaz Adamia accused Russia of genocide and ethnic cleansing of Georgians in Abkhazia on Wednesday, and he claimed that Moscow no longer supports the territorial integrity of Georgia. "We do not see it fit to comment on such pronouncements. May they rest on the conscience of their authors," Troyansky said. "The recent rhetoric of many Georgian officials is another confirmation of the fact that the way they communicate with Russia is irresponsible," he said. "We have just witnessed another example. The only thing we can do is regret that such stylistic 'gems' are spoken at the UN and distract busy people from really pressing problems," Troyansky said. (Interfax)

REPORTS CITE ANXIETY OVER TURKMEN PENSION REDUCTIONS

3 February

Recent reductions in pensions and other social benefits in Turkmenistan have caused widespread anxiety among retirees and other beneficiaries of social programs. Deutsche Welle reported that the social-security minister spoke on national television on 30 January, explaining that 100,000 retirees will no longer receive pensions while the pensions of 200,000 others have been reduced. "Vremya novostei" reported that the reductions began in January, although the government provided incomplete information and many pensioners only learned of the changes once they tried to pick up discontinued payments. The newspaper reported that President Saparmurat Niyazov signed a law on 25 January ordering some pensioners to repay sums they had already received as a result of alleged miscalculations. Both reports indicated that the reductions sparked panic among beneficiaries who had rely on pensions to survive. Central Asia analyst Michael Laubsch told "Vremya

novostei" that Niyazov is "consciously embarking on the destruction of the elderly segment of the population, which still remembers the time before Niyazov and is thus socially dangerous to him." (RFE/RL)

RELATIONS WITH RUSSIA TENSE BECAUSE OF GEORGIA'S NATO BID - SAAKASHVILI

3 February

Georgia's NATO ambitions have put a strain on relations with Russia, Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili said at a Berlin forum sponsored by the German Society of International Politics. "Georgian-Russian relations have soured after Georgia openly announced its aspirations for NATO membership," he said. "We told the Russians openly that we want to join NATO. We heard from them in response that our friendship would not be possible in this case," the president said. "Georgia made its choice in favor of the European Union and NATO, because it shares their fundamental values," Saakashvili said. The president accused third parties of standing behind the conflicts inside Georgia, he said. "We have no problems either with the people of Abkhazia or South Ossetia. Rather, we have problems with the governments appointed by Russia to rule Abkhazia and South Ossetia. But, in spite of all this, we are trying to settle these conflicts peacefully, but the Russians are standing in our way even in this effort," he said. (Interfax)

Afghanistan battle leaves 25 dead

4 February

A district governor is among 25 people killed after a fierce battle between Afghan troops and Taleban fighters in Afghanistan, officials say. Abdul Qoudoas, the district chief of Musa Qala, was killed by Taleban fighters fleeing after a 12-hour battle in the neighbouring Sangeen district. Helmand's deputy governor told the BBC that at one point, he and 100 soldiers were surrounded by 200 Taleban. It is the most serious fighting between the two sides for two years. Five police officers and some 20 Taleban fighters are said to have been killed in the fighting in Helmand province. Taleban spokesman Qari Mohammad Yousuf denied reports of Taleban deaths, saying only two fighters had been wounded. Mirwais Afghan of the BBC Pashto service, who has been to the area, says most of the villagers have fled. "The actual fighting is over in Sangeen but a search operation is ongoing," Afghan interior ministry spokesman, Yousuf Stanizai, is quoted as saying by AFP. "The area has been sealed off." An estimated 600 Afghan government troops along with 200 policemen have been rushed to the area, the deputy governor of Helmand province, Haji Mullah Mir, told the BBC. American soldiers are also present, he said. (BBC)

AZERBAIJANI VILLAGERS DEMAND MEETING WITH PRESIDENT

4 February

Several hundred residents of the village of Nardaran on the outskirts of Baku gathered on 3 February to protest the conduct of the official investigation into the 24 January standoff between police and villagers in which two police officers and one villager were killed. The villagers demanded a meeting with Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev, asking why he does not consider it necessary to visit Nardaran when his father and predecessor Heidar Aliyev traveled to Nakhichevan to meet there with the population of Nehram to discuss the social problems they faced. (zerkalo.az)

KYRGYZ PRESIDENT REBUKES BRITISH MINING COMPANY IN OPEN LETTER

6 February

President Bakiev has responded with a public rebuke to a British mining company after a private letter from British Prime Minister Tony Blair urging Kyrgyz authorities to resolve a licensing dispute, "The Times" reported on 3 February. Oxus Gold was stripped of its license to develop the Jerooy mine in Kyrgyzstan in 2004. Blair had written privately to Bakiev to urge a resolution of the matter, noting that Oxus raised \$60 million for Jerooy and warning that the loss of its license presents "a real danger of damage to Kyrgyzstan's reputation in the international financial markets," "The Independent" reported. Bakiev responded publicly, saying, "Based on Oxus's irresponsible and unlawful behavior, we have no confidence that they and their subsidiary will meet their contractually mandated obligations to our government," "The Times" reported. Oxus shares fell 17 percent in London on 3 February on news of Bakiev's letter, "The Independent" reported. (RFE/RL)

SOUTH OSSETIA COMMITTED TO BECOMING PART OF RUSSIA - KOKOITY

7 February

South Ossetia is committed to becoming part of Russia, said Eduard Kokoity, president of the self-proclaimed republic. "We will seek to restore historical justice - union with North Ossetia and accession to Russia," Kokoity told a news conference at the Interfax Central Office in Moscow on Tuesday. Commenting on Georgia's intention to join NATO, he said that "this is a right of our neighboring state, but accession will be without South Ossetia and Abkhazia. We have nothing to do with Georgia." "Many people often compare South Ossetia and Abkhazia to Kosovo. I want to remind everyone that South Ossetia and Abkhazia have more

political and legal reasons for recognition than Kosovo," he said. (Interfax)

TWELVE KILLED IN BLAST AT FEDERAL BASE IN CHECHNYA

8 February

Twelve servicemen were killed in a blast that destroyed barracks at the base of the Vostok special task battalion in the Chechen village of Kurchaloi, a spokesman for Chechnya's Emergency Situations Department told Interfax. The cause of the explosion has not been established yet, but initial reports said a leakage of household gas may have caused the blast. No gas cylinders have been discovered, however. Explosives have not been found, either. The Military Prosecutor's Office of the combined federal troops has launched a probe into the disaster under charges of violating fire safety regulations and negligence. Spokesman for the Military Prosecutor's Office Mikhail Renskov said two theories are being considered: a household gas explosion and detonation of an explosive device. Prosecutors, and forensic medical and bomb-disposal experts are working at the scene. The barracks have been destroyed. Twelve servicemen were killed and 20 suffered injuries and were hospitalized, Renskov said. (Interfax)

IMMIGRATION FROM KYRGYZSTAN TO RUSSIA ON THE RISE - AMBASSADOR

8 February

More members of Kyrgyzstan's Russian-speaking community are willing to immigrate to Russia, Russian Ambassador to Kyrgyzstan Yevgeny Shmagin told journalists on Wednesday. "There was a decline in immigrant rates since 2000. But the number of people

willing to move to Russia as permanent residence has risen following the events of March 2005," Shmagin said. "Nearly 25,000 Kyrgyz citizens immigrated to Russia in 2005. The number of potential immigrants is still much higher than it was before March 2005," he said. "If this trend persists, more than half of Kyrgyzstan's Russian-speaking population will leave the country within the next ten years," the ambassador said. "Immigration applications are being submitted not only by ethnic Russians, but also people of over 20 ethnicities, including people of Kyrgyz and Tajik origin," he said. "The people who want to move to Russia mainly name economic reasons. But 2005 also added security concerns to the list," Shmagin said. (Interfax)

FOUR DIE IN AFGHAN CARTOON RIOT

8 February

Four people have been killed and up to 20 injured in a violent protest in Afghanistan over cartoons satirising the Muslim Prophet Muhammad. Police shot into a crowd of rioters in the town of Qalat as they tried to march on a nearby US military base. It brings to 10 the number of people killed in Afghan protests over the cartoons in recent days. The incident happened as a French magazine became the latest publication to carry the controversial caricatures. The magazine, Charlie Hebdo, won the backing of a French court on Tuesday, after several Islamic organisations had complained that publication would amount to an insult to their religion. (BBC)



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