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FOR STABILITY IN A FAILING STATE

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INSTITUTIONS, AND THE
FATE OF THE KYRGYZ STATE

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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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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.

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KYRGYZSTAN'S REVOLT: PROSPECTS FOR STABILITY IN A FAILING STATE

Johan Engvall

The upheaval in Kyrgyzstan – the second in five years – raises the question whether Kyrgyzstan has any serious prospects of developing into a stable, sovereign state, let alone one with a pluralistic political system. The opposition that has claimed power faces major challenges, including curbing corruption, breaking the links between the state and organized crime, and creating a political order conducive for social and economic stability. Whether the members of the interim government fit this ticket remains doubtful. In case of continued instability, a scenario in which Kyrgyzstan's sovereignty is effectively reduced cannot be ruled out.

BACKGROUND: For the second time in five years, Kyrgyzstan was thrown into a severe political crisis following a popular revolt. After a progressive start in the beginning of the 1990s, when the international community lauded the bold attempts of first President Askar Akayev to introduce democracy and a market economy, Kyrgyzstan turned increasingly authoritarian in the late 1990s. Growing popular dissatisfaction with the Akayev regime led to the so-called Tulip Revolution in March 2005 that forced Akayev out of the country and brought Kurmanbek Bakiyev to power. The Tulip Revolution raised expectations of renewed democratization in Kyrgyzstan. Yet, in the subsequent five years Kyrgyzstan's downward slide accelerated perilously. The ouster of Bakiyev and the apparent regime change raises the question of the prospects for Kyrgyzstan's long-term stability, and whether a fresh start is likely.

Instead of democracy, Bakiyev consolidated power and control by creating a full-scale kleptocracy based on establishing control over a few major financial flows, and the distribution of top government positions to the president's closest family members. Repressive actions targeting the opposition and journalists

increased dramatically. The methods used by Bakiyev's regime were nevertheless more flexible and innovative than those conventionally associated with authoritarian regimes: rather than mainly relying on the state's coercive apparatus, it employed criminal gangs to intimidate, extort and assassinate troublesome or unwanted figures.

Under Akayev, a side effect of the evolving family rule based on controlling legal economic activities was that involvement in organized crime became the major way to rival the presidential family's hold on the economy. It is generally accepted that organized crime leaders played a significant role in triggering the Tulip Revolution and affecting its aftermath. The Bakiyev regime, simply put, defeated organized crime by taking control over it. Sources in the law enforcement agencies of Kyrgyzstan allege that the lucrative drug trade emanating from Afghanistan has been controlled by law enforcement agencies under the supervision of members of the president's closest relatives. Indeed, under Bakiyev, the Interior Ministry's special department for combating organized crime was dismantled, and the U.S.-sponsored Drug Control Agency abolished. The state racket replaced the criminal racket.

In spite of the foreign military presence on its territory, no external actors made any attempts to bring the country towards greater stability and democracy. Even international human rights organizations were markedly quiet on what was going on in the country – uncharacteristically so given the level of rhetoric they habitually employ toward other Central Asian states such as Uzbekistan.

IMPLICATIONS: The prospects for a fresh start in Kyrgyzstan need to be evaluated from several angles. A key question is whether the new leadership is either capable of, or willing to, fundamentally alter the nature of the Kyrgyz state as it has evolved in the past decade.

With a few notable exceptions, the opposition is plagued by incompetence and internal rivalries. As was the case five years ago, the common denominator is their resentment of Bakiyev, rather than common political ideas. In the past, the inability of the country's elite to articulate common national interests has deconstructed the political system into an arena for struggle between various private interests. As long as Kyrgyz politics continue to be defined by narrow private interests, ruthless competition and limited security, elite behavior will tend to be predatory. Such a system provides few incentives to extract revenues in a manner that would be beneficial for long-term economic development. Since the future is so insecure, focus is directed towards exploiting administrative and economic resources with the purpose of acquiring personal enrichment as quickly as possible.

Observers in Kyrgyzstan suggest that among the members of the provisional government, the distribution of government portfolios and jockeying for positions ahead of the planned presidential election are already taking place.

There is also the question of whether the new leaders, dominated by individuals from the North, will seek to radically alter the composition of regional interests in the government. Bakiyev's tenure in power was characterized by a decisive promotion of southerners in top positions at the expense of the long dominating elite from the North, privileged under Akayev. The consequences of this cadre policy proved seriously destabilizing; applying the same policy in the reverse would be even more so.

The small political elite, which has been recycled since independence, belongs to the same Soviet-trained generation. This may very well be the last chance for the old generation to stabilize the country. If it does not, it risks being replaced by a younger generation of ambitious individuals in their thirties that are waiting in the background, ready to step in. So far, the old generation of politicians has effectively blocked any real influence by the emerging generation on the system level. New people are needed in top governmental positions in order to break the vested interests and mentalities that have led the state to its dilapidated present state, and resulted in the complete loss of popular trust in politicians, eroding the state's public legitimacy.

Corruption is another major issue. In order to understand the endemic weakness and vulnerability of the state, it is necessary to move beyond the formal institutions of the state and focus on the far more important dimensions of networks and money, normally referred to as nepotism and corruption, as the foundations on which the state has been built.

The predominant definition of corruption, the "misuse of public power for personal gains," betrays an understanding of the phenomenon as being analogous to a disease that needs to be



Roza Otunbayeva

cured. However, applying this negative connotation risks failing to capture that corruption in some states is not necessarily best understood as a distortion, but as the essential principle for ordering relations among individuals. In the Kyrgyz state, from the highest echelons of state power to the ordinary “street level” bureaucrat, this is indeed the case. In the absence of sufficient state-paid salaries, meritocratic appointments, strong professional identities and credibly enforced formal rules, corruption is the glue that binds the state together. The state has turned into a marketplace pure and simple.

The major implication of this system is the complete absence of state-provided public goods. Justice and protection supplied by law enforcement agencies are examples of services that are not universal public goods but private goods; access to them requires informal monetary payments. The major question is whether the new leaders have the will or capacity to change this system. Research has demonstrated that corruption tends to be a

“sticky” phenomenon: once it has taken root, even if universally condemned as in Kyrgyzstan, it is hard to get rid of.

Agents at the bottom of the system – “street level” tax officials and policemen – believe that most of their colleagues are corrupt, and it is therefore of little use to be the only one to change behavior. While political leaders may have the resources necessary for launching successful

anti-corruption measures, they are normally the ones that benefit the most from the system and have few incentives to change it. Thus, despite the massive attention that has been paid to combating corruption around the world during the last decade, the success stories are very few. The only post-Soviet state to successfully combat corruption – Georgia – reinforces the importance of a determined and strong leadership. However, it is most questionable whether the interim government could replicate Georgia’s accomplishments.

CONCLUSIONS: Recent events in Kyrgyzstan provide an opportunity to break with the past and follow a path that would never have been an option under Bakiyev. There are significant challenges ahead. The Kyrgyz state has been trapped in a number of negative spirals. In order to break them the new leadership must come up with strong and determined policies, with the real concerns of the public as their point of departure. It is otherwise likely that the new government will



Kurmanbek Bakiyev (Getty Images)

fail too. If anything, the failures of the previous regimes suggest the danger of continuing along the familiar path of the last decade. If the new leaders have learned from the past, the fates of Akayev and Bakiyev should provide deterrence from the worst forms of nepotism and corruption.

The events of April 7 were the second time in five years that a few thousand protesters managed to seize power in Kyrgyzstan. Then as now, the “opposition leaders” rode the wave rather than controlling it. Violent demonstrations appear to have become an accepted method for solving political problems. Needless to say, such practices do not create the conditions necessary for future stability. Indeed, the country runs the risk of becoming trapped into a spiral of permanent instability and a very real risk of state failure.

In this context, there is an external dimension to consider with regard to Kyrgyzstan’s immediate and long-term future. Instability in Kyrgyzstan is not in the interest of the external forces that are closely monitoring current

developments. In this context, the bulk of analysis and reports on the events have dwelled on the geopolitical rivalries linked to the presence of both U.S. and Russian military bases in the country, and the increasingly active role Russia seems to be taking in Kyrgyzstan. Far less is said or written concerning the positions of the neighboring countries

– Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan – neither of whom have ever perceived Kyrgyzstan as a particularly legitimate state. If the interim government fails to stabilize the country and if internal conflict becomes endemic, it cannot be excluded that Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan could take a much more active role in Kyrgyzstan’s domestic politics. Such scenario could turn Kyrgyzstan into a satellite with limited ability to act as a sovereign state in a meaningful sense with regards to its domestic and foreign affairs. Simply put, Kyrgyzstan could evolve into a state similar to, say, Lebanon or Nepal. Thus, the unfolding of events may hold substantial implications for Kyrgyzstan’s future as a viable sovereign state internally as well as in the eyes of external actors.

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REVOLUTION, GOVERNMENT INSTITUTIONS, AND THE FATE OF THE KYRGYZ STATE

Roman Muzalevsky

In 2005, the Kyrgyz “Tulip Revolution” toppled Askar Akaev’s regime and put Kurmanbek Bakiyev in power, opening for what many hoped would become a more just and democratic government, capable of addressing economic and social ills. But five years on, Kyrgyzstan is even further from democracy and a similar fate has befallen President Bakiyev. Events in the country over the recent years have clearly demonstrated the ineffectiveness of government institutions and policies that failed to ensure stable and democratic functioning of the state and, in so doing, threatened its integrity amidst internal pressures and external designs.

BACKGROUND: Starting in the northern city of Talas on April 6, the protests then flared up in Naryn and rapidly spread to the capital of Bishkek on April 7. Violent clashes with police and security forces left 175 people killed and 1000 injured. The protests forced President Kurmanbek Bakiyev to flee the capital and seek refuge in the southern region of Jalalabad. The interim government, headed by Roza Otunbayeva, dissolved parliament and undertook a revision of the constitution, promising to hold elections in six months. However, it yet needs to strengthen its internal control and legitimacy internally and externally – something it will likely achieve despite the 16 million Euros left in the treasury and speculations about Bakiyev’s continuing fight for power. The interim government already called on the international community to provide much needed support.

The protests were spurred by high utility prices, increasing authoritarian practices, government crackdown on the media, persecution of opposition leaders, and widespread poverty – conditions that will make it difficult for the president to challenge the new government. Yet

Bakiyev’s unwillingness to resign raises concerns about possible cleavages between the north, controlled by the opposition, and parts of the south, Bakiyev’s home region and original support base during the “Tulip Revolution”. This is in spite of Bakiyev’s own acknowledgement that he lacks leverage over the events on the ground.

In response to the developments in Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan temporarily closed its border and Kazakhstan tightened security measures. Vladimir Putin, Russia’s prime minister, was first to call Otunbayeva and express support for her interim government. Russia also sent a small contingent of troops to protect the families of the military forces at its base in Kant. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, who called Otunbayeva this past Saturday, offered U.S. support for the interim government as well. She sent Robert Blake, Assistant Secretary of state for South and Central Asian Affairs, to Kyrgyzstan.

Meanwhile, some media reports speculate about possible Russian involvement in the unrest. They cite visits by opposition figures to Russia before and after the protests, negative reporting



in the Russian press against Bakiyev's regime, deteriorating relations between Russia and Kyrgyzstan after Bakiyev reneged on the deal to evict the U.S. base from Kyrgyzstan in return for US\$ 2.3 billion in loans and grants from Russia. Putin, however, denied any Russian involvement: "The only thing I can say is that neither Russia, nor your humble servant, nor Russian officials have anything to do with these events."

The U.S. announcement in March to construct a military center in the south of Kyrgyzstan – where it was previously agreed to host a CSTO base – most likely further enraged Russia. On April 1, Russia terminated preferred customs duties for Kyrgyzstan, leading to increased fuel prices. Coupled with high utility prices and endemic poverty, these developments purportedly contributed to the outbreaks of

protests that now also raise speculations about the fate of the U.S. base in Kyrgyzstan.

IMPLICATIONS: It is early to speculate about the likely trajectory of Kyrgyz foreign policy or regional dynamics. As far as relations with the U.S. and Russia are concerned, the effects of the U.S.–Russian geopolitical rivalry on the developments in Kyrgyzstan indicate that a more pro-Russian foreign policy line by the interim government is highly probable. Otunbayeva confirmed to Clinton that the government would abide by its promises on

the transit center, but these commitments appeared expensive to the Kyrgyz and they have deadlines, as well.

Omurbek Tekebaev, an opposition member, stated there was a "high probability" the U.S. lease "would be cut short." Unlike Russia, the U.S. currently does not have open and ardent supporters within the interim government. Nor does it enjoy the same level of support among the Kyrgyz population. This will more likely put Kyrgyz foreign policy back on Russia's tracks, albeit without any immediate threat to the U.S. presence at Manas as the interim government concentrates on consolidation of power.

Regionally, the popular unrest in Kyrgyzstan is unlikely to engulf its authoritarian neighbors. Yet, its echoes will reverberate in Central Asian



Ivan Sekretarev/AP

capitals as a younger generation faces bigger prospects of assuming power in the near future and people are increasingly alienated by authoritarianism.

In Kyrgyzstan, likely internal rivalries within the interim government might well complicate the solidification of the government control and negatively affect regional dynamics. While civil war or small-scale clashes rooted in regionalism, tribalism or ethnic tensions are unlikely given slim popular support for the president, they are not entirely inconceivable.

If the interim government fails to institute order and solidify legitimacy in a quick fashion, especially in the poorly developed South, other regional capitals or organizations might fill the vacuum, with all pertinent implications for the integrity and viability of the Kyrgyz state. The UN, OSCE and CSTO have already agreed to coordinate their activities in Kyrgyzstan, if necessary. Swift resolution of the stalemate between the interim government and de jure President is thus a key in the process.

CONCLUSIONS: The ousted regime was clearly not revolutionary. Abuses of power, disregard for human rights, mishandling of socio-economic conditions and failure to effectively balance geopolitical interests of great powers eventually exposed the inability of the government institutions and the regime in ensuring accountability, just governance, rule of law and decent economic conditions.

Any new leadership that is in place in Kyrgyzstan still has the opportunity, and an obligation, to govern justly and successfully without a strong hand. It must build effective government institutions, improve socio-economic conditions, as well as tackle corruption and nepotism to better manage internal challenges and external geopolitical dynamics. It must further focus on its human resources that can better thrive in a democratic rather than authoritarian environment and ensure accountable domestic and foreign policy. The Kyrgyz people deserve to celebrate freedom and opportunity without having to resort to violence – something the new leadership should recognize and ensure in order to provide for the viability and integrity of the Kyrgyz state.

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MOSCOW'S FINGERPRINTS IN KYRGYZSTAN'S STORM

Stephen Blank

Kyrgyzstan's upheaval was not totally unexpected. Foreign media and observers pointed out mounting disaffection, profound economic crisis, and the possibility that the opposition could actually come to power. Kyrgyz domestic politics had become increasingly authoritarian and nepotistic. Yet Kyrgyzstan also remained at the center of the great power rivalries among Russia, China, its direct neighbors, and the United States. Thus domestic and foreign challenges are interlinked at several points – and that circumstance arguably catalyzed the upheaval – what Eric McGlinchey called the “hijacking” of the Kyrgyz government. Indeed, evidence is now visible that the rebellion or coup was clearly helped along if not actually incited by Moscow.

BACKGROUND: In early 2009 Russia lent Kyrgyzstan US\$ 2.15 Billion to build its Kambarata hydropower station and terminate the lease on the U.S. base at Manas. Of that sum, US\$ 300 million, the first tranche of the loan, was intended explicitly for the power station. However, President Kurmanbek Bakiyev promptly renegotiated the lease with the U.S. at a higher payment and became part of the Northern Distribution Network (NDN), the U.S. logistical supply route to Afghanistan, thereby benefitting handsomely. Bakiyev also spent the first tranche of the Russian loan on projects controlled by his son, Maksim, that were intended to build up Bakiyev's domestic support and re-election.

Kyrgyzstan's combined policies, particularly the new lease with the U.S., enraged the Russian government. Although Moscow supported Kyrgyzstan against Uzbekistan in 2009, it aimed to mitigate the potential antagonisms that might develop between Tashkent and Moscow due to Uzbekistan's renewed gravitation to a pro-American position in Central Asia by opening a base in Osh. This was not where Kyrgyzstan wanted it but where Russia could intervene domestically as Osh has

an airport and runway. This did not meet Kyrgyz needs, since Bakiyev professed to see Afghanistan as the source of the most urgent threats that exist to Kyrgyzstan's borders (a hint that it was really his neighbors that had him most worried) and knew that without an adequate armed force, Kyrgyzstan was vulnerable to those threats.

Kyrgyzstan then sought U.S. and Chinese help. It recently concluded an agreement with Washington for a new training center at Batken where Bishkek wanted the Russian base to be. Likewise, Chinese organizations began negotiating with Kyrgyzstan to give it another US\$ 300 million loan, exactly the amount Russia lent it, for the construction of power stations in Datka-Kemin and Tash-Samat regions.

Moscow reacted with undisguised fury. First of all it put the brakes on its support for Kambarata, citing alleged environmental and risks, an ancient Russian ploy. Then Prime Minister Putin traveled to Kyrgyzstan where he angrily told Prime Minister Daniyar Usenov that the loan was explicitly for the purpose of constructing the hydroelectric facility at Kambarata and conditional on closure of the



(Getty Images)

U.S. base. He also upbraided Usenov for spending Russian money on projects other than what they had been intended for. But Bishkek then leaked these conversations, showing that Putin had also undermined Medvedev with reference to the issue of the U.S. transit center at Manas, thus exposing to the public the rifts within the Russian government. In February 2009, Medvedev had claimed that it was entirely within Kyrgyzstan's discretion to terminate the U.S. lease on the base and that it had nothing to do with a Russian loan to Kyrgyzstan. Putin's remarks shattered that fiction for all to see.

IMPLICATIONS: Russia stopped implementing previous agreements and refused to make any commitments about new accords, e.g. the Kambarata power complex. Indeed, Moscow's priority project, the Customs Union for the CIS that Kyrgyzstan is a logical

candidate to join, was also stalled with Kyrgyzstan insisting on prior agreements on military-technical cooperation, i.e. arms sales, and the issue of foreign debt, before discussing the Customs Union. Moscow also obstructed the possibility of third party cargos, e.g. from China, entering into Kyrgyzstan. Putin further turned on the pressure, clearly aiming at undermining Bakiyev and bringing the opposition to power.

In advance of Kyrgyzstan's upheaval, Moscow reportedly established contacts with the opposition forces that succeeded Bakiyev in the wake of the April 7 demonstrations in Bishkek and Northern Kyrgyzstan. Although Putin professed surprise at the demonstrations, Russian papers discussed demonstrations in Kyrgyzstan several weeks before the actual demonstrations occurred. Russia also simultaneously employed its economic power

by rescinding a loan to Kyrgyzstan, and revoking the preferred customs duties that Kyrgyzstan had been receiving on Russian diesel and energy imports, thus raising energy tariffs on its products. These moves forced the government to announce major price rises in electricity fees that were the catalyst for the demonstrations that unseated Bakiyev. And just weeks before those demonstrations, the Russian press launched a media offensive denouncing Bakiyev as corrupt and saying that Russia could not work with him as if to signal that the time had come for an uprising.

All these moves suggest a concerted plan to undermine the Bakiyev government and replace it with one more amenable to and openly dependent upon Moscow. Certainly Bakiyev's successor, Roza Otunbayeva, thanked Russia for helping oust Bakiyev, for offering humanitarian aid, and for recognizing the new government before anyone else did. And members of the new government hinted at forthcoming changes in foreign policy while asking for Russian aid and hinting that they could ask as well for Russian peacekeepers. Moscow also sent 150 (if not more) paratroopers to its base at Kant.

CONCLUSIONS: If this assessment is correct, Moscow decided once again to show a CIS state who was boss. It tried this and failed in Ukraine in 2004; but in Kyrgyzstan, it accomplished what it always accused Washington of doing, namely orchestrating a so called color revolution. But this is not a revolution, but rather as McGlinchey termed it, a hijacking. The signs of the new government's dependence on Moscow for economic and military support only further confirm this as do

the hints that it will revise its foreign policy. Ultimately this means increased pressure on Washington and the base at Manas that Russia has long sought to eject from Kyrgyzstan.

While it is unlikely that Kyrgyzstan will soon eject the U.S. from the base—Manas' situation has changed. Although Kyrgyzstan claims it will not oust the U.S. from Manas, as a result of this upheaval American tenure in Manas now truly depends on Moscow, not Bishkek. That probably was one of the points Moscow strove successfully to make by its actions. Indeed, it has for now reasserted its position as Kyrgyzstan's security manager and aspiring security manager for all Central Asia. It will determine how long the U.S. can stay, or so it hopes.

This outcome also testifies to the extent of Russian economic power and possibly intelligence penetration in Kyrgyzstan as well as the willingness to use these instruments to advance Russian interests. If the U.S. wishes to maintain its profile in Central Asia it will have to commit a similar amount of economic attention and resources to the area in its own right, not just as an appendage of its Afghanistan policy. Tajik commentators have already written that this coup should constitute a lesson to their and other Central Asian governments. Undoubtedly these events contain a lesson but it may not be the lesson that these observers think they have learned.

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CHINA: THE SILENT GIANT AND KYRGYZSTAN'S UNREST

Niklas Swanström

Chinese government officials in both Beijing and Xinjiang are greatly concerned about the current developments in Kyrgyzstan, but have largely refrained from commenting on the situation. Trade and regional stability are two of the main reasons behind China's concern. However, possible consequences such as an impact on China's domestic political discourse, and fears of the crisis leading to a more pivotal U.S. role in the region may be even more important. The unpredictable nature of the changes in Kyrgyzstan and the region is in many ways the most threatening development for Beijing.

BACKGROUND: The Chinese leadership, intelligentsia as well as its netizens appear all to be in agreement that the regime of Kurmanbek Bakiyev fell as a result of its failure to sustain the population's livelihood and in preventing the criminalization of the economy and the political system. Chinese observers noted the continued regional divisions in Kyrgyzstan, and the slow economic growth that kept at least a third of the population under the poverty line. Sentiment amongst Chinese officials is that Bakiyev's government brought this upon themselves.

In no way does this mean that the Chinese government, or the regional government in Xinjiang, support these events. On the contrary, the chaos in Kyrgyzstan is painfully similar to earlier abrupt changes of government in the post-Soviet space, to which Chinese officialdom were highly apprehensive. However, non-governmental forces, especially China's netizens, are more or less open in their support of the changes in Kyrgyzstan.

There is a striking difference between media and leaders in China and the West in terms of their perception of Roza Otunbayeva, and the direction in which she may lean. A former Chinese diplomat in Kyrgyzstan, Zhao Mingwen and other officials have depicted

Otunbayeva as a strongly pro-American politician; there have even been rumors of the U.S. being behind the political unrest. The West, on the other hand, mostly views Otunbayeva as leaning toward Moscow, potentially a Russian puppet. The latter view relates mainly to her recent criticism of Bakiyev's failure to "show respect" for Russia and her acknowledgement that Russia "played a role" in the transition. The reality is that Otunbayeva cannot succeed in the short term without the assistance of the Russian FSB. However, many Chinese fear that this will soon shift into a more pro-western position.

This political chaos is especially troublesome for China due to the 858 kilometer (533 mile) long and easily accessible Sino-Kyrgyz border. China has always feared that state failure or radicalization (whether Islamic or pro-American) of neighboring governments could have a negative impact on China. The former scenario, in particular, appears possible if the opposition fails to consolidate its power within a short period of time. Some Chinese government officials have indicated a hope that Russia will, in the short run, assist whatever force comes out on top in the Kyrgyz power struggle to establish security and stability - something China can and will not do - rather

than introducing another large actor into the region, i.e. the United States.

What is already evident is that this political chaos will have a major negative impact on Sino-Kyrgyz trade, the area where China is most dominant. China has been one of Kyrgyzstan's major partners in the region and internationally, and despite the sizable reduction of imports and exports (60.1 and 43.3 percent drops respectively) during the financial crisis, Chinese economic interests still loom large. Chinese Huawei, as one example, dominates the telecom equipment sector with a whopping 80 percent share and the direct investments amount to some US\$80 million from 200 Chinese companies. Continued economic chaos, or a diversion from the Chinese-led trade pattern, would not be devastating for the Chinese economy, but it would most certainly be an annoyance in the face of the business established there.

IMPLICATIONS: China's major concerns are divided into several fields; the perhaps most important is the domestic impact. The obvious concern is whether the unrest will impact the Uyghurs in Xinjiang; potentially more explosive is the impact on the netizens, and over time the population at large, in China. There has been considerable support for the rebels in their fight against social inequality and corruption, and for political democratization. The Chinese government will do its utmost to prevent the spread of such trends to China. There is no doubt that there is a fear of a repetition of the "color revolutions" and that demands for political and economic rights in China loom large in the mind of the Chinese leaders.

Regional instability is a concern for the Chinese government, but the current view is that the rest of the Central Asian states are relatively

stable and the risk of instability spreading into Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan are minor. There is a limited concern that continued political chaos could impact other regional governments negatively and cause further destabilization.

Otunbayeva's reputation in China as a pro-American politician is further cause of concern. Beijing's concern is the possibility of a change in Kyrgyzstan's foreign policy to one that explicitly supports a U.S. presence in the region. Beijing appears to have accepted that the political change in Kyrgyzstan could possibly lead to a larger U.S. influence but argues for a more balanced foreign policy – in essence a policy that does not neglect the Chinese presence in the region. All officials that this author spoke to are clear on one issue: Otunbayeva, if she maintains power, is unlikely to lean in the direction of Beijing. The prevalent sentiment in Beijing is that Moscow can be handled, but that U.S. influence poses more difficulties. This contrasts greatly to the view in Moscow that assumes that the U.S. can be handled in Central Asia, but that China is a more pressing problem.

Even if China were to miscalculate Otunbayeva's pro-western inclinations, there is little concern over Russian attempts to minimize the Chinese influence in Kyrgyzstan, though Beijing is well aware of these intentions. Beijing has long followed the relative and absolute decline of Russia in all sectors, at a time of its own economic rise; therefore, it does not view Russia as a long-term threat, but as a short-term necessity. Chinese officials have acknowledged that Russia was quick in supporting the new government, maybe even too quick, if not involved in the events. This view is attributed to the fact that Russia was well informed about developments and shifted sides early and opportunistically (before the



(Xinhua New Agency)

riots started) to increase its own influence and decrease the possible U.S. influence. Chinese officials conclude that this will not help the Russians over time, as the U.S. will gradually increase its influence, unless China improves its own strategy. Overall, there appears to be a rather pessimistic and potentially exaggerated view in Beijing of the U.S. future role in Central Asia.

In the economic field, apart from the obvious concern over the impact on trade, there is a concern of how the new government will position itself in relation to the prior Chinese economic and political aid to outgoing President Kurmanbek Bakiyev. If the new government refuses to acknowledge prior contracts and engagements, there is a risk that Chinese business would be excluded or short-handed, something that would be devastating for the trade between China and Kyrgyzstan. Sources in Beijing do not, at this time, rule out the possibility of sweetening the current dealings with the new government to further improve conditions for bilateral trade – with a view not to reap economic benefits, but more

importantly to maintain economic and political clout.

Unlike Moscow, the Chinese government is reluctant to act prematurely by embracing a specific political force. On the one hand, China has still not ruled out Bakiyev as part of a grand compromise – not because he is liked, but because he is a known quantity. On the other, Beijing wants to avoid being accused both in Kyrgyzstan and internationally of meddling on other states' internal conflicts.

CONCLUSIONS: Beijing could be forced to take a more interventionist approach in case of the introduction of the U.S., and to some extent the EU, in developments to a degree that both China and Russia would feel inappropriate. Should developments indicate a growing Western influence in Kyrgyzstan, however unlikely that may seem, Beijing appears ready to react. This is particularly true when looking at China's military and political clout, but China intends to focus on consolidating its economic influence.

On the positive side, Chinese leaders feel that ongoing cooperation within the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and growing economic cooperation is a bulwark against losing too much of its leverage in the region, as long as China and Russia continue to cooperate. That said, it is clear that China's potential to wield considerable influence in Kyrgyzstan has taken a beating, and will take months to recuperate.

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FIELD REPORTS

MASS PROTESTS AND GOVERNMENT SHIFT IN BISHKEK

Joldosh Osmonov

Bloody clashes between opposition protesters and law enforcement bodies took place in Bishkek on April 7, 2010. Mass riots of thousands of people led to the resignation of the Prime Minister, the dissolution of parliament and the establishment of a new interim government. While the opposition is slowly consolidating its power, the ousted President Bakiyev refuses to resign.

The planned arrests of most of Kyrgyzstan's opposition leaders throughout the country on the night before the protests ignited disorganized and spontaneous riots of thousands of people in Bishkek, leading to bloody clashes between the protesters and the police. As the crowd attempted to seize the main government building, police opened fire on the protesters. According to the latest reports, 82 people were killed and more than 1500 were wounded.

The mass riots and seizure of governmental buildings started in the Talas region as a result of the arrest of opposition leader Bolot Sherniyazov on April 6, after he had arrived in the city of Talas to prepare for the following day's opposition protests in the region. With no indication from the police that the opposition leader would be released, protesters seized the regional administration building and police headquarters. Deputy Prime Minister Akylbek Japarov and Minister of Interior Moldomusa Kongantiev, who had arrived to repress the riots, were taken as hostages and severely beaten.

After seizing the White House and other state offices in Bishkek, the opposition leaders who were eventually released during the riots formed the Interim People's Government, headed by the leader of the opposition minority in Kyrgyz Parliament,

Roza Otunbayeva. The new provisional government, consisting of 14 members, issued a decree "On the transition of power to the Interim Government and Constitution implementation order". According to the decree, the powers of the President, the Kyrgyz Government and Parliament were transferred to the Interim Government.

On April 8, the new government made initial statements about their plans, indicating that switching from a presidential to a parliamentary system of government will be a priority. Deputy head of government Omurbek Tekebaev, who is responsible for drafting a new version of the Constitution, states that the President's powers will be significantly limited, saying "he will no longer appoint high officials and be in charge of state spending".

Additionally, members of the new government promised to repeal the previous price increases for electricity and other utilities, and to nationalize the energy and communication companies that were recently sold by the previous government. These price increases for public utilities and the privatization of strategic state-owned companies were the main reasons for protests throughout the country over the last few weeks that led to the uprising on April 7.

Meanwhile, the situation in the country remains uneasy. The riots were followed by large-scale looting in Bishkek. Most of the stores, along with state and business offices, were destroyed. In response to the looting, the new provisional government organized police and army patrols in the city during the first nights following the bloody events. In response to the government's inability to

control the situation, ordinary Bishkek residents mobilized themselves into special volunteer security groups that were helping police to protect the city from looting. According to Alexander Voinov, one of the organizers of these groups, more than 2,000 volunteers were patrolling the city during the nights of April 8 and 9.

In the meantime, President Bakiyev, who is currently in his hometown in Jalalabad oblast, refuses to resign. In an interview to the Russian Radio Service "Ekho Moskv," Bakiyev accused the opposition forces of organizing acts of murder, calling the April 7 events an "armed seizure of power and a well-planned operation by the opposition and external forces". He denied accusations by the interim government that he ordered the police to open fire on protesters. In his latest interview to Al-Jazeera News Agency, the deposed Kyrgyz President appealed to the UN to send peacekeeping forces and demanded that they invite an independent international commission to

investigate the bloody events. If he is found guilty as a result of the investigation, he promises to step down.

Bakiyev has also stated that he is willing to negotiate with the provisional government, which claims there will be no negotiations with Bakiyev. "He has to resign. Criminal cases will be brought against President Bakiyev, his relatives and allies," the acting head of the National Security State Committee Keneshbek Duyshebaev said in a press conference. "We have enough evidence proving that the order to open fire at the protesters was given by the President's younger brother Zhanysh Bakiyev and Prime Minister Daniyar Usenov," he concluded. However, the members of the interim government noted the complications of putting President Bakiyev on trial. "Bakiyev is guaranteed immunity by the Constitution and it will be hard to bring him to trial," deputy head of the Interim Government Omurbek Tekebaev said.

DISCORD OVER UZBEKISTAN-TAJIKISTAN RAILWAY TRANSPORT

Suhrob Majidov

On March 22, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Tajikistan presented a note of protest to the Ambassador of Uzbekistan in Dushanbe due to interruptions of railway cargos headed for Tajikistan across the Uzbek border. Tajikistan's Prime Minister Akil Akilov then complained to the international community about the situation on the Tajik-Uzbek border during his visit to the UN headquarters in New-York, stating that "Tashkent impedes the transit of goods to Tajikistan intentionally". Finally, the president of Tajikistan appealed to the UN Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon during the latter's official visit to Tajikistan, requesting help to resolve the conflict between the two countries.

According to Dushanbe, Uzbekistan started to interrupt railway transport to Tajikistan over two months ago, on February 2. Tajikistan claims that Tashkent's hidden goal is to impede the delivery of materials needed for the construction of the Rogun hydropower station. It should be recalled that Uzbek authorities have demanded that Tajikistan stop the construction of what is to become the largest hydro-power station in Tajikistan, until evaluation by independent experts has guaranteed that it will not damage the ecological balance in Central Asia region.

Andrei Tropin, a representative of the state company "Tajik Railroads", claims that "the blockade [sic] of Tajikistan started more than two months ago with the stopping of railcars with

cement for the Rogun hydropower station". According to him, currently about 2,000 railcars headed for Tajikistan are stopped not only on the border but along the whole railroad of Uzbekistan. The blocked cargos include not only equipment and machinery for the construction of Rogun, but also materials for an aluminum plant, fuel, wheat and other provisions and goods. Tajik authorities estimate losses in the range of several millions of dollars due to Uzbekistan's blocking of railroad traffic.

Representatives of Tajikistan's business community made a joint statement to the international community, expressing their discontent with the situation and asked for help to resolve it. In the statement, entrepreneurs say that they face serious difficulties in their businesses and bear significant losses due to the deliberate blockade of cargo passing through the territory of Uzbekistan to Tajikistan. Businessmen claim that the Uzbek authorities impede the transit of different types of cargo, including raw materials for enterprises of all kinds, fuels and inputs for the agricultural sector, medicine and food.

The statement signed by the chairmen of different business associations of Tajikistan, e.g. the association of banks, the association of farmers, the association of manufacturers and entrepreneurs, says that "Uzbekistan intentionally impedes the transit of fuels, fertilizers and other agricultural input going to Tajikistan in the run-up to the sowing season in Tajikistan, while about 70 percent of the population depends on agriculture for their livelihood". The entrepreneurs think the most outrageous aspect is the impediment of deliveries of medical goods that "directly threatens the health and lives of the people of Tajikistan". Finally, Tajik

entrepreneurs believe that the current situation will negatively impact Tajikistan's investment climate and business development since due to the delay in the delivery of goods; the entrepreneurs are not able to meet their commitments to investors and creditors.

In response, Uzbek officials state that the delay in cargo transit is caused by certain technical problems. A communiqué made by the Embassy of Uzbekistan in Dushanbe expresses the opinion of the Government of Uzbekistan that "there is no need to look for any policy-induced constraints". The document says that "all the problems are of a technical nature and are caused by a significant increase in cargo traffic through Uzbekistan due to its fulfillment of obligations to provide transit for nonmilitary and humanitarian goods to Afghanistan".

UN Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon, who visited Dushanbe last week, called on Uzbekistan not to impede the transit of cargo to Tajikistan. In response to the appeal, Uzbekistan resumed traffic to Tajikistan. However, Tajik authorities continue to claim that the problem has not yet been resolved and that about 2,000 railcars are still blocked in Uzbekistan.

Experts describe the situation as another round in the 'freezing of relations' between the neighboring countries, and that the discord over the construction of the Rogun station is likely to further escalate the conflict between Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. Economic warfare is just another step in the escalation of the situation, while the conflict continues evolving with small cross-border incidents and constant mutual recriminations.

GEORGIAN OPPOSITION HOPES FOR A “KYRGYZ SCENARIO”?

Maka Gurgenzidze

Many in Georgia are concerned over the new wave of public discontent and violent crackdown on protesters in Kyrgyzstan last week. Shortly after the bloody events in Kyrgyzstan, Zurab Noghaideli, former Georgian prime minister and leader of the pro-Russian Movement for Fair Georgia, proclaimed that the “Bishkek scenario” would take place in Tbilisi if the government dares to falsify the results of the Tbilisi municipal elections scheduled for May 30.



Zurab Noghaideli

A public opinion poll carried out by the reputable International Republican Institute (IRI) in Georgia in March, revealed that Noghaideli’s pro-Russian alliance, the National Council, enjoys a mere 3 percent of approval among the population. The poll

also disclosed that about 46 percent of Tbilisi inhabitants support the ruling party’s mayoral candidate Gigi Ugulava. He is followed by the opposition leader Irakli Alasania at 11 percent.

This opinion poll demonstrates that it is highly unlikely that the National Council’s candidates will perform well in the municipal elections. Thus, Noghaideli’s increasingly seditious tone when stating that “every method will be used to destroy and uproot this government,” gives rise to suspicions that Noghaideli and his allies may seek to destabilize the situation as their chances of coming to power are very slim.

When President Saakashvili officially accused Russia of interfering in Kyrgyzstan’s internal affairs and linked the Kyrgyz revolution with Russian “geopolitical games,” this stirred concern among many in Tbilisi that the municipal elections could stir developments resembling the Kyrgyz scenario.

Earlier this year, President Bakiyev intensified Kyrgyzstan’s ties with the U.S., pledging that his country would assume the role of a supply center for NATO operations in Afghanistan and would support further military installations at Manas airport outside Bishkek. In response, Moscow imposed new duties for Kyrgyz energy imports, which exacerbated social problems and supposedly accelerated the insurgency.

Similarly, Russia in 2006 introduced a food embargo and increased gas prices for Georgia in retaliation for Tbilisi’s pro-western orientation. Nevertheless, the Georgian government managed to find alternative markets and energy sources, thus preventing massive social unrest.

Another notable difference lies in the character of the protests erupting in Kyrgyzstan. The revolt in Kyrgyzstan was sparked by poor people in remote regions such as Talas and Naryn whereas, in the

Georgian case, radical forces willing to overthrow Saakashvili represent the former political and business elite and are concentrated in the capital. During the 2009 demonstrations, they failed to convince Georgians that they would be able to eradicate high level corruption, re-establish territorial integrity and conduct more effective liberal reforms.

Further, the protesters in Kyrgyzstan succeeded in seizing police stations and weapons, demonstrating that the Bakiyev government failed to deal with internal destabilization. In contrast, Georgia's Interior Ministry prevented a military coup in 2003 (organized by pro-Russian powers and led by former national security chief of the Shevardnadze regime Igor Giorgadze), as well as armed provocations in Spring 2009, when the ministry disseminated video footage of members of different opposition parties buying firearms just before the beginning of the months-long opposition protest rallies downtown Tbilisi.

Though the internal political situation in Georgia is not as fragile as it is in Kyrgyzstan, Georgia's international environment is worsening as the May municipal elections draw closer. Georgia has lost several strategic partners since the 2008 August war.

Former Ukrainian president Viktor Yushchenko, a likeminded politician and close friend of Saakashvili, lost his political power after the recent presidential elections and was replaced by the Russia-leaning Viktor Yanukovich.

The tragic death of Polish President Lech Kaczynski last Saturday shook Georgia and its government. A well-known opponent to Russian imperialism and a forthcoming supporter of Georgia's sovereignty, Kaczynski was a close friend and strategic partner of Saakashvili. A continued loss of strategic allies in the region would arguably reduce Georgia's capacity to resist "Noghadeli's outside support".

Though the internal distribution of political forces and the effectiveness of state institutions are quite different in the cases of Georgia and Kyrgyzstan, both are strategically important for Russia. While regime change in Kyrgyzstan could provide Russia with a larger say regarding NATO operations in Afghanistan, regime change in Georgia would suspend NATO enlargement to the east. Thus, a comparison between the potential post-election scenarios in Georgia and the events in Kyrgyzstan are not entirely far-fetched. The Russian ambition to reestablish its sphere of influence in Kyrgyzstan applies equally to Georgia, which at present has fewer internationally advocates than in a long time.

UZBEKISTAN'S ECOLOGICAL MOVEMENT DEMONSTRATES AGAINST TAJIK ALUMINUM COMPANY

Erkin Akhmadov

In the last days of March, activists of the Ecological Movement of Uzbekistan held several demonstrations against the "Tajik Aluminum Company" (TALCO). The activists appealed to international organizations to take measures and stop the environmental pollution in their area caused by the aluminum plant. Many analysts consider the demonstrations as a part of the Uzbek authorities' reaction to Tajikistan's plans to finish the construction of the Rogun hydropower station.

In this light, experts in Tajikistan think that the issues between two states should be resolved by political-diplomatic means rather than taking to the streets.

The TALCO was established in 1975. It is located 60 kilometers to the west from Tajikistan's capital Dushanbe, close to the border with Uzbekistan. The productive capacity of TALCO is 530,000 tons of raw aluminum per year. This plant provides up to

60 percent of Tajikistan's export. In 2009 TALCO produced more than 360,000 tons of high-quality raw aluminum and had an income of about US\$ 6 million.

The Ecological Movement's protest campaign commenced on March 25 near Termez State University, located in Surkhandaryo province in the south of Uzbekistan. About 1,600 students of local technical schools and higher educational institutions were active in the demonstrations. On March 28, a demonstration took place at the railway station of the city of Termez. The demonstrators aimed to address the passengers of a train on the route Moscow-Dushanbe, that is, Tajiks heading home from Russia. The main message communicated by the protesters were that "as a result of the industrial pollution of the atmosphere, water, soil and vegetation, people in the area suffer from increased levels of blood circulation and digestion diseases, and respiratory problems". On March 31, students, deputies of the Parliament of Uzbekistan, members of the Ecological Movement and people living near the areas bordering Tajikistan held a meeting in Termez city.

In response to the demonstrations in Uzbekistan, the head of the press-service of TALCO, Sayokhat Kadyrova reported that the company plans to conduct an international ecological evaluation this summer to assess the effects the plant will have on environment after its modernization. TALCO representatives are confident that the results of the evaluation will confirm that the plant abides by all international standards. Furthermore, it was reported that the plant undergoes such inspections every year, and that leading international ecological companies are usually hired for this. It was also noted that the plant is currently undergoing modernization, for which it has over the last four years spent about US\$ 196 million.

As some local sources report, TALCO annually produces about 300-400 tons of fluoric hydrogen, and its content in air, soil, livestock and agricultural

produce exceeds international norms by several times. In addition, the plant's system of water consumption disposes of all the industrial drains to the river Karatog, which flows into the basin of the Surkhandaryo river, the source of drinking water in many regions of the province. Besides the increased level of fluoric elements in plants, trees, and soil in the areas near the plant, there is also a high level of endocrine and immune system diseases, along with blood, stomach, respiratory, intestine diseases, osteodystrophy, and mineral and vitamin dysfunctions.

Even though the harms done to Uzbeks residing in the area near the Tajik plant are obvious, in light of the tense relations between the two states, some experts have a different explanation to the causes of the demonstrations. Ajdar Kurtov, the chief editor of "Problems of National Strategy", a publication of the Russian Institute of Strategic Research, thinks that the interrupted operation of such an important source of income would become a serious economic problem for Tajikistan.

Analyst Arkadiy Dubnov interprets the actions of the Uzbek EcoMovement as a message to Tajik authorities that Uzbekistan can influence the most important income sources of Tajikistan just as Tajikistan seeks to control the hydro-energy system of Uzbekistan. The head of Tajikistan's "Ecological club" movement, Alikhon Latifi, does not view the demonstrations in Uzbekistan as a public protest, but believes the efforts are initiated by state authorities.

In spite of the variety of explanations given by different experts about the protests in Uzbekistan, it is highly unlikely that they will have any serious consequences for TALCO. The information campaign against TALCO has been ongoing for more than three years already. Therefore, some experts see these demonstrations as little more than a way for a newly formed Ecological Movement of Uzbekistan to show results of their work.

NEWS DIGEST

KARZAI LASHES OUT AT WEST OVER AFGHAN ELECTIONS

1 April

President Hamid Karzai accused the West on Thursday of trying to ruin Afghanistan's elections, intensifying a showdown with parliament over whether foreigners will oversee a parliamentary vote this year. Karzai's international reputation took a beating after a U.N.-backed fraud watchdog threw out a third of the votes cast for him in last year's presidential election. He is now wrangling with parliament and the United Nations over fraud protection measures for a parliamentary vote due in September. "Foreigners will make excuses, they do not want us to have a parliamentary election," a defiant Karzai told a gathering of election officials. "They want parliament to be weakened and battered, and for me to be an ineffective president and for parliament to be ineffective." "You have gone through the kind of elections during which you were not only threatened with terror, you also faced massive interference from foreigners," Karzai told the officials. "Some embassies also tried to bribe the members of the commission." In Washington, State Department spokesman P.J. Crowley rejected Karzai's accusations the West wanted to see the Afghan parliament weakened and for him to be ineffective. "We do not accept that judgment," Crowley said. What was important, said Crowley, was that Karzai be seen by his own people as governing effectively and that he take "measurable" steps against corruption. "Karzai has to step forward," Crowley told reporters. Karzai singled out Peter Galbraith, the American former deputy of the U.N. mission in Kabul, sacked after accusing his boss of turning a blind eye to fraud, and French General Philippe Morillon, head of an EU vote monitoring mission. "There was fraud in the presidential and provincial election, with no doubt there was massive fraud. This wasn't fraud by Afghans but the fraud of foreigners, the fraud of Galbraith, of Morillon and the votes of the Afghan nation were in the control of an embassy," Karzai

said. He accused Galbraith of telling an election official he would be "digging himself an early grave" if Karzai was declared first round winner and said Morillon had tried to block the announcement of results to force Karzai to accept a political alliance. Galbraith told Reuters in a telephone interview that Karzai's accusations were "ludicrous." (Reuters) "It's preposterous of him to accuse me of fraud," said Galbraith, who also denied telling election officials anything except to follow published guidelines. (Reuters)

BIG BUSINESS MUST INVEST IN NORTH CAUCASUS – MEDVEDEV

1 April

Big business must assist socioeconomic normalization in the North Caucasus, President Dmitry Medvedev said at the Thursday conference in Makhachkala. "Everyone who cares about the future of this country and has money must do that," he said. "Not all of the investments must go to Moscow and foreign countries. They [big business] must pay their dues here." Heads of North Caucasian republics are attending the conference. (Interfax)

ANTI-TERRORISM INTELLIGENCE EXCHANGES TO INTENSIFY IN SCO

2 April

The Shanghai Cooperation Organization's Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure will meet regularly to exchange intelligence and organize exercises in Russia. "Representatives of authoritative agencies from the Shanghai Cooperation Organization will hold regular meetings to broaden cooperation in fighting terrorism, separatism and extremism, and to exchange intelligence. Also, a group will be set up to coordinate the fight against a major international terrorist organization," the Agency's chair, Vice Chairman of the Kazakh National Security Committee Zhanat Dzharasov said after the 16th meeting of the Agency's Council. The Council made the decision to hold a joint anti-terror drill in

Russia this year, as well as a separate stage in the Peace Mission 2010 anti-terror drill in Kazakhstan. SCO General Secretary Muratbek Imanaliyev attended the Agency meeting during which the new director of the Agency's Executive Committee Dzhenibek Dzhumanbekov assumed his duties in a ceremony. Uzbek Deputy Foreign Minister said during the ceremony that a joint declaration will be signed during UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon's visit to Uzbekistan on April 4 and 5, which will pay special attention to the fight against terrorism. (Interfax)

NATO SAYS GERMAN TROOPS KILL FIVE AFGHAN SOLDIERS

4 April

NATO says German troops based in northern Afghanistan have mistakenly killed at least five Afghan soldiers. The alliance said in a statement today that the incident occurred when a unit of German soldiers was approached by two unmarked vehicles which failed to stop in Konduz Province. Earlier, Konduz Governor Mohammad Omar said that six Afghan soldiers were killed in the incident, which happened near Char Dara district. The shooting came just hours after the Germans lost three of their own soldiers in a gunfight with insurgents. (RFE/RL)

KARZAI RALLIES TRIBES, DISTANCES SELF FROM THE WEST

4 April

President Hamid Karzai, under fire for anti-Western remarks, distanced himself from his foreign backers in a speech on Sunday, telling tribal elders Afghans need to see their leaders are not "puppets." Speaking in front of some 1,500 elders at a "shura" or traditional council meeting in the southern city of Kandahar, Karzai said he would block an upcoming major NATO offensive in the Stanley McChrystal, who flew down to Kandahar with Karzai, sat on the stage behind the Afghan president but did not speak. "Afghanistan will be fixed when its people trust their president is independent ... when the people trust the government is independent and not a puppet," Karzai said, adding that government officials should not let "foreigners" meddle in their work. "The other day, I told Mr. (Barack) Obama: 'I can't fix this nation through war,'" he said. "It has been eight years that this situation is going on, we want peace and security... I'm engaged with all my force to bring peace in this country." U.S. President Obama

met Karzai in Kabul last week during a brief nighttime visit to Afghanistan, his first in the nearly 15 months since he took office. The visit was overshadowed days later when Karzai delivered a verbal attack on the West. The White House demanded an explanation after Karzai accused foreigners of perpetrating election fraud, bribing officials and trying to weaken him and his government. Once the darling of the West, Karzai has fallen out with Western leaders in recent years, especially after a fraud-marred presidential election last August which saw him return to power. The strained relations could complicate a counter-insurgency military strategy, which calls for NATO troops to emphasize their support for Karzai's government more than ever. NATO forces are planning on launching the biggest operation of the 8-year-old war in and around Kandahar, southern Afghanistan's biggest city, birthplace of the Taliban and home town of Karzai and his powerful family. Washington calls the offensive -- due to begin in earnest when thousands of additional U.S. troops arrive at the end of May or early June -- the main focus of its "surge" strategy to turn the momentum against the insurgency this year. In his speech, Karzai promised to consult tribes before the operation and block it if they do not support it. "These days the foreigners speak of an operation in Kandahar. I know you are worried. Are you worried?" Karzai asked. "Yes we are!" some shouted back. "Well, if you are worried, then there won't be an operation, if you are not happy," Karzai replied. U.S. Major General William Mayville, in charge of operations for NATO troops, played down those comments, saying the president was "on board" for the operation and was only trying to win support for it from the community. "It doesn't really matter what we think. It matters what the 1,300 or so folks in that room think. (Karzai) acknowledged he's the commander in chief, that's helpful," said Mayville. "You've got to have the community really wanting in, otherwise things are stalled. (Karzai's) convinced, he's on board. We would not have had this shura if he wasn't convinced this is the right stuff," Mayville told reporters. (Reuters)

AZERI TERRORIST EXTRADITED FROM PAKISTAN

5 April

Pakistan has extradited a leader of the Forest Brothers armed criminal group to Azerbaijan, suspected of committing a terror attack at a mosque in Baku. "Samir Mekhdiyev has been arrested in

Pakistan and extradited to Azerbaijan," the Azerbaijani National Security Ministry reported on Monday. Mekhdiyev was on a wanted list on suspicion of committing a terrorist attack at the Abu-Bakr mosque in Baku on August 17, 2008, it said. The suspect illegally crossed into Iran, Turkey and Georgia after the terror attack, and remained in Pakistan until he was arrested. A group of Azri citizens are being tried in Baku on suspicion of forming a radical religious group with links to an international terrorist ring, and committing a string of terror attacks, including one at the Abu Bakr mosque, earlier reports said. The 31-member group was led by Azer Misirkhanov, also known as Abdullah. The group was planning to stage a series of terror attacks in Azerbaijan in order to provoke panic ahead of the 2008 presidential election. They also planned to blow up the Baku-Novorossiisk oil pipeline, according to investigators. The group helped Mekhdiyev escape abroad. Three suicide belts, five kilos of explosives, four grenade launchers, nine assault rifles, one gun and a large amount of ammunition and explosives were seized when the suspects were being detained. (Interfax)

BAKU WON'T OUST ARMENIANS FROM KARABAKH UPON CONFLICT SETTLEMENT - DIPLOMAT

5 April

Baku has called the claims, that the return of Karabakh to Azerbaijan would drive Armenians out of that territory, by Armenian President Serzh Sargsyan unfounded. "Mr. Sargsyan must be a poorly informed man, as he claims that Azerbaijan could drive away its own residents on nationality principles," Azerbaijani Foreign Ministry spokesman Elkhon Polukhov told Interfax. About 30,000 Armenians live in Azerbaijan, he said. "They enjoy all rights and are not subjected to discrimination based on nationality," he said. "Thus, claims that Azerbaijan, which has a 30,000-strong Armenian community on its unoccupied lands, may oust Armenians from Karabakh are unfounded. Azerbaijan lives by these rules now. Why should it change the policy for citizens in Karabakh?" Polukhov asked. He also called unfounded the opinion of Sargsyan that Karabakh must have right to call themselves independent as in the case of the republics of the former Yugoslavia. "Mr. Sargsyan must remember that the former Yugoslavia, the same as the former Soviet Union, disintegrated for historic reasons, and Armenia became independent in the same way. It is politically and legally wrong

to compare Azerbaijan and Yugoslavia," he said. As for the self-determination rights of Karabakh declared by Sargsyan, the position of Azerbaijan has always been clear, he said. "Armenian and Azerbaijani communities of Karabakh have self-determination rights within the territorial integrity of Azerbaijan. They are free to use these rights," he said. (Interfax)

TERRORIST ATTACKS IN INGUSHETIA, DAGESTAN, MOSCOW MAY BE CONNECTED - SOURCE

5 April

The explosions Monday morning in Karabulak may be a link in a chain of terrorist attacks that took place in Moscow and Dagestan earlier, a well-informed source in law enforcement told Interfax. "Undoubtedly we are studying the possible connection between the explosions in Karabulak, Ingushetia, on Monday and the previous terrorist attacks in Moscow and Dagestan," he said. "The forces trying to undermine stability may be one and the same," he felt. However, there are also serious differences between the recent attacks. The source said that the explosions in the Moscow metro were aimed against civilians while in Kizlyar and Karabulak they were aimed against law enforcement. "Final conclusions can be drawn only after closely studying all circumstances of the latest terrorist attacks," the source told Interfax. (Interfax)

U.S. CONSULATE IN PESHAVAR ATTACKED, TALIBAN CLAIM RESPONSIBILITY

6 April

At least seven people were killed on April 5 and several injured when Taliban militants launched an attack on the U.S. Consulate in Peshawar, Pakistan. Ambulances rushed to and from the area near the U.S. Consulate in Peshawar after militants armed with guns, some wearing suicide bomber vests, tried to attack the consulate building. One of the suicide bombers reportedly blew himself up close to the gate of the consulate, but Pakistani police said none of the militants succeeded in entering the heavily fortified complex. Witnesses reported hearing three large explosions followed by gun and rocket fire in the area around the consulate. There were unconfirmed reports that the consulate building was damaged, but there were no reports that any U.S. citizens or local employees at the consulate were killed or injured. The Taliban claimed responsibility

for the attack. Azam Tariq, who claimed to be a spokesman for the Pakistani Taliban, said the attacks were "revenge for drone attacks." The United States is widely believed to be responsible for unmanned drone attacks that have killed scores of Taliban militants, including some of the group's leaders, in Pakistan's tribal region along the Afghan border. A number of civilians have also been killed in those attacks. Washington does not comment on the use of drones in Pakistan. The Taliban spokesman warned that more attacks would follow. "Americans are our enemies," Tariq said, vowing "we will target any place where there are Americans." (RFE/RL)

NATO AIRSTRIKE KILLS FOUR AFGHAN CIVILIANS

6 April

A NATO air strike in southern Afghanistan mistakenly killed four civilians, including two women and a child, while targeting suspected militants in a compound, the military said Tuesday. "Insurgents were using the compound as a firing position when combined forces, unaware of the possible presence of civilians, directed air assets against it," the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) said. "Later, once they were able to enter the compound, combined forces found four dead civilians - two women, an elderly man and a child - inside," a statement read. "Four males, suspected insurgents, were also found dead inside the compound." Asked by AFP if the civilians were killed by the coalition air strike an ISAF spokesman said: "yes sir". (AFP)

KARZAI REMARKS RATCHET UP TENSIONS WITH WASHINGTON

6 April

Remarks by Afghan President Hamid Karzai continue to cause tensions with the United States. The U.S. State Department has reacted to comments Karzai is alleged to have made to Afghan lawmakers, threatening to join the Taliban insurgency if he continued to receive pressure from Western backers to overhaul his government. "I'm going to take a cautious approach here. I can't explain what he said about the Taliban. He is the elected leader of Afghanistan, we are working closely with him and his government, [and] ultimately, as I said last week, this is not about the relationship between President Karzai and the United States. This is about the relationship between President Karzai, his government, and his

people. Ultimately, he has to demonstrate leadership and effectiveness to his people," said State Department spokesman P.J. Crowley. Meanwhile, Karzai has refused to back down from comments he made last week alleging foreigners had bribed and threatened election workers to carry out fraud in last year's presidential election. In an interview with BBC television, Karzai said what he had said about the election "was all true," and suggested the United States was behind the fraud. On April 2, Karzai phoned U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton to ease tensions sparked by the comments. But White House spokesman Robert Gibbs said that since that phone call "it obviously didn't get any better." Gibbs also expressed frustration "on behalf of the American people" over Karzai's remarks, and invoked the sacrifice made by families who send loved ones off to Afghanistan to fight. (RFE/RL)

BAN URGES RESTRAINT IN CENTRAL ASIAN WATER DISPUTE

6 April

UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has urged restraint in a growing dispute between Uzbekistan and Tajikistan over the building of a massive Tajik hydroelectric dam. Ban, who is in Tajikistan as part of a tour of Central Asia, told reporters he is "deeply concerned" over the dispute over the Rogun dam project. Uzbekistan fears the dam will reduce the flow of vital water to its cotton-growing areas. Ban said all parties concerned should refrain from unilateral action until the World Bank's international assessment team has finished its technical assessment of Rogun later this year. He said all resources should be used "fairly and harmoniously," respecting the interests of neighbouring countries. He described this as a collective responsibility for all of the leaders of Central Asia. In Dushanbe, Ban has held talks with Tajik President Emomali Rahmon on topics including Afghanistan, human rights, and climate change. (RFE/RL)

KYRGYZ RIGHTS ACTIVISTS REPORT DETENTIONS OF OPPOSITION LEADERS

6 April

Kyrgyz human rights activists have claimed that opposition leader Omurbek Tekebayev has been detained in Bishkek. "Everything happened before our very eyes. A group of submachine-gunners detained him and took him in an unknown direction," a local rights activist told Interfax. She said she was at an office of a human rights

organization, around which armed men have been deployed. Kyrgyz opposition said earlier that two leaders of the opposition Social-Democratic Party had been detained in Bishkek because of unrest in the regional center of Talas. "We were at the party office when NSS [National Security Service] officers came in. They are escorting us to their office as witnesses to the events in Talas," parliamentarian Isa Omurkulov, a party leader, told Interfax. Omurkulov said another Social-Democratic Party leader Emil Kaptagayev had been detained as well. Interfax could not immediately obtain comments from law enforcement agencies regarding the reported detention of Tekebayev, Kaptagayev, and Omurkulov. (Interfax)

ASTANA TALKS AFGHAN SECURITY WITH PETRAEUS

6 April

Stability in Central Asia is dependent on the success of the international mission in Afghanistan, the Kazakh foreign minister said in Astana. Kazakh Foreign Minister Kanat Saudabayev met this week with U.S. Army Gen. David Petraeus, the commander of U.S. Central Command, in Astana to discuss regional developments and the international mission in Afghanistan. Saudabayev said success in Afghanistan would have a ripple effect throughout the Central Asian community, the Kazakh Foreign Ministry noted. "There is no way to ensure stability and sustainable development in Central Asia without the stabilization of Afghanistan," he said. Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbayev said Afghanistan was a priority during his country's tenure at the head of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, adding it would be one of the key issues on the agenda of the OSCE meeting in Astana planned for later this year. Kazakhstan in January agreed to let NATO forces use its territory to ferry supplies to international forces operating in Afghanistan. Petraeus, for his part, thanked Astana for its "excellent contribution" to the mission in Afghanistan. Astana reminded the visiting general that it was a keen supporter of international forces operating in Afghanistan. (UPI)

OUSTED KYRGYZ LEADER PARTLY BLAMES "FORCES ABROAD" FOR REVOLT

8 April

Kyrgyzstan's toppled president, Kurmanbek Bakiyev, in a radio program on Thursday, claimed that the revolt on Tuesday and Wednesday that

claimed scores of lives and forced him to flee the capital Bishkek had partially been the work of "forces abroad" and that he is determined to remain in office. "I won't name the specific country, but it's practically impossible to carry out such a well-coordinated operation without the involvement of forces abroad," Bakiyev told Moscow's Ekho Moskvyy radio. Asked in what way he planned to regain control of Kyrgyzstan, Bakiyev said, "Time will show." "I was elected for my second term quite recently - it hasn't even been nine months yet. Is it possible that the people have changed their opinion as much as that over such a period? By no means," he said. "What started two days ago was an armed seizure. Frankly speaking, neither the president nor any of the structures was prepared for it. Such competent, such skillful deployment of forces suggests very serious thoughts," the ousted leader said. He denied reports that he has left his country. "I am in the south of Kyrgyzstan," he said. According to the Fergana.ru website, Bakiyev is in the village of Markai 10 to 15 kilometers from the southern Kyrgyz city of Dzhahalal-Abad. (Interfax)

KYRGYZ INTERIOR MINISTER ALLOWS LOOTERS TO BE SHOT

8 April

The interior minister in Kyrgyzstan's interim government said he had given permission on Thursday to fire at looters in the capital Bishkek. "Today I have permitted weapons to be used against looters," Bolot Sherniyazov told state television. "I appeal to people of the capital to join people's militias and rise to the defense of the property of the city, companies and people," he said. "This evening road patrols will be taking part in patrolling the city jointly with medics. Members of a people's militia will be wearing white bands as their distinguishing marks," Sherniyazov said. (Interfax)

ASTANA LAUDS NUCLEAR ENERGY EFFORTS

9 April

The decision by Kazakhstan to dismantle its nuclear weapons program serves as a model for the road to peaceful nuclear energy, leaders in Astana said. Kazakhstan in 1991 dismantled the nuclear weapons program it inherited following independence after the collapse of the Soviet Union. The country supplies around 20 percent of the world's natural uranium supply. Astana said it dedicated a substantial portion of that resource to develop peaceful nuclear energy technology. Kazakh

President Nursultan Nazarbayev said he welcomed a decision by U.S. President Barack Obama to host more than 40 heads of state at a nuclear security summit starting Monday in Washington. "I am coming to share with President Obama and other heads of state the bold plan Kazakhstan implemented to reduce and prevent the threat of nuclear terrorism through nuclear disarmament, non-proliferation and peaceful civilian power use," he said in a statement. "It has worked well for Kazakhstan and it can work for the rest of the world." His statement added that Kazakhstan has offered to host an international nuclear fuel bank that would let countries purchase fuel for civilian nuclear energy reactors. The bank, which could operate under the International Atomic Energy Agency, would potentially keep nuclear material out of the hands of rogue actors. (UPI)

KARZAI TO MILITANTS: RENOUNCE VIOLENCE

11 April

Afghan President Hamid Karzai has called on Taliban fighters in the northern province of Kunduz to renounce violence. Karzai made his appeal at a meeting today with hundreds of elders in the provincial capital, Kunduz, where he traveled along with the commander of U.S. and NATO troops in Afghanistan, U.S. General Stanley McChrystal. Kunduz's provincial governor, Mohammad Omar, warned at the gathering of deteriorating security in the province unless a joint Afghan and NATO operation was conducted. In a sign of the volatility of the northern region, plans for Karzai to address German troops in Kunduz today were called off at the last minute. Residents and German forces said rockets had fallen near the German base there. In the coming months, thousands of U.S. troops are expected to be deployed to the region, where some 4,500 German-led soldiers are already stationed. (RFE/RL)

ANKARA IN RENEWED TALKS WITH ARMENIA

12 April

Turkish officials are to meet in Washington with an Armenian delegation in an effort to repair bilateral relations. Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan is to meet his Armenian counterpart Serzh Sargsyan on the sidelines of a nuclear conference in Washington. Erdogan, prior to his departure to Washington, dispatched Feridun Sinirlioglu, an undersecretary at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, to

Armenia to discuss bilateral ties, the official Anadolu news agency reports Monday. Turkish relations with Armenia were complicated by claims of genocide during the Ottoman Empire. Recent ties were strained further over issues regarding the region of Nagorno-Karabakh, an area of dispute between Azerbaijan and Armenia. Turkey reacted angrily to a series of measures passed in Sweden and the United States that described the killing of Armenians in World War I as genocide. The Turkish envoy to Washington was recalled briefly when a measure narrowly passed March 4 in the U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Foreign Affairs. Leaders from Turkey and Armenia met in October, however, to sign protocols aimed at restoring bilateral ties following years of acrimony. The protocols outline a series of provisions, ranging from a bilateral denunciation of terrorism to stating a "willingness to chart a new pattern and course for their relations on the basis of common interests, goodwill and in pursuit of peace, mutual understanding and harmony." (UPI)

AZERBAIJAN WEIGHS GAS TRANSIT OPTIONS

13 April

Liquefied and compressed natural gas are possible avenues for gas transit diversification to Europe from Azerbaijan, executives said Tuesday in Bucharest. Delegates from Azerbaijan, Georgia and Romania met in Bucharest to sign a memorandum of cooperation in the gas sector. The construction of gas processing and transit centers for Azeri gas on the Black Sea coast was discussed at the Bucharest meeting. A project outlined in the measure calls for the construction of LNG terminals in Georgia and Romania, the Trend news agency reports. Additional measures could accommodate compressed natural gas. The facilities could process as much as 700 billion cubic feet of gas. Rovnag Abdullayev, the head of the State Oil Co. of Azerbaijan Republic, said preparations of feasibility studies from the Bucharest meeting could help Azerbaijan determine the best way to export gas from Black Sea ports. "We have several options, including the export of LNG and CNG," he said. "The variety of these options will allow us to choose the right path." (UPI)

UZBEKISTAN TO HOLD INVESTMENT CONFERENCE IN TOKYO

13 April

The Uzbekistan government will hold an investment conference in Tokyo on April 22 to offer new industrial opportunities to Japanese companies. At the conference, senior Uzbek officials will make presentations on the economic and industrial potential of Uzbekistan and development opportunities in the free industrial economic zone or FIEZ, an area with special conditions for foreign investment set up by the Uzbek government in Navoi, west of Tashkent, according to organizers. (Japan Today)

BAN TALKS ABOUT DEMOCRACY MESSAGE IN CENTRAL ASIA

12 April

UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon has said he repeated a "simple and direct" message to Central Asian leaders on the importance of respect for human rights during a recent tour of the region. Ban also discussed the current power struggle in Kyrgyzstan and the management of natural resources throughout the region. In all five countries, Ban said, he told leaders that the protection of human rights is a "bedrock principle" of the United Nations. Ban told officials that democracy could only exist with a robust civil society rooted in the rule of law, respect for human rights, and freedom of expression. "I urged the leaders in the region to comply fully with international human rights laws and many treaties to which they are signatories," Ban said on April 12. "I also urged them to fully implement all the recommendations made by the UN Human Rights Council under the universal periodic review." Two Central Asian states, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, are regarded as among the world's worst human rights offenders by the U.S.-based group Freedom House. Rights groups have urged Ban to condemn the human rights violations in both countries. Ban visited Kyrgyzstan just two days before violence that killed at least 80 people led the country's president, Kurmanbek Bakiyev, to flee the capital and political opponents declared an interim government. Ban said he has been following the situation "very closely" and that his special envoy, Jan Kubis, is in Bishkek until April 15. "He has been meeting with all parties, working closely with the envoys of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe...and others to maintain and restore constitutional order while respecting the

wishes of the Kyrgyz people," Ban said of Kubis's visit. Ban's spokesman, Martin Nesirky, confirmed that the UN under secretary-general for political affairs, B. Lynn Pascoe, had met with Kyrgyz opposition leader Roza Otunbaeva while Ban was visiting Kyrgyzstan last week. The details of that meeting were not disclosed, but Nesirky said that Ban could sense the political tension during his visit. In his discussions with Central Asian leaders, Ban said he also focused on an issue of "crucial importance" for all five Central Asian states: the management of the natural resources, chiefly water and energy. "Every year tensions are rising. Visiting the Aral Sea in Uzbekistan, I saw a graveyard of ships moored in the sand [that] was once a deep seabed," Ban said. "Resolving these tensions harmoniously through dialogue and negotiation is a collective responsibility not only of the region's leaders but the international community." Aside from the Aral Sea disaster, a simmering water-rights dispute between Tajikistan and Uzbekistan is near the boiling point. Tajikistan has announced its intention to complete a dam and hydroelectric power plant at Rogun that Uzbekistan vehemently opposes. Tashkent is concerned that completion of the Rogun Dam will severely constrict flows downstream that Uzbekistan uses to irrigate crops of one of its most lucrative exports, cotton. Dushanbe dismisses those concerns as unfounded. More than 60 percent of Central Asia's water resources originate in Tajikistan, and water distribution and management are a frequent point of friction among the Central Asian states. (RFE/RL)

EU ENERGY CHIEF ARRIVES IN AZERBAIJAN

14 April

EU Energy Commissioner Gunther Oettinger arrived Wednesday in Azerbaijan to discuss natural gas corridors for the European Union. Oettinger arrived Wednesday in Baku for meetings on the so-called Southern Corridor of gas transit networks for Europe, the Azerbaijan Business Center reports. "Azerbaijan and the EU have developed a strong relationship on energy issues over time," he said. "Progress on the Southern Corridor will be high on the agenda." Europe aims to diversify its energy sector through the Southern Corridor projects, which include the Nabucco pipeline through Turkey, the White Stream project from Georgia and the so-called Interconnector between Greece, Turkey and Italy. European partners are struggling to secure commitments from supplier nations for

their diversification ambitions. Energy-rich Azerbaijan is seen as a promising candidate to help meet that effort. Oettinger has meetings scheduled Wednesday with Azeri President Ilham Aliyev and representatives from the State Oil Co. of the Azerbaijan Republic. (UPI)

TURKEY LOSING MONEY ON BTC PIPELINE

15 April

Corporate disputes and capacity issues with the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil pipeline cost Turkey more than \$200 million since 2007, energy officials said. BTC stretches some 1,100 miles from Azerbaijan to Turkish ports on the Black Sea. It is the second-longest oil pipeline in the world after the Druzhba pipeline in Russia. Turkey, however, has lost more than \$200 million in the past three years because of

disputes between Turkish pipeline operator BOTAS International Ltd. and BTC Co., the international consortium managing the pipeline, Turkish daily newspaper Today's Zaman reports. A move by BTC to expand work in natural gas, BOTAS complains, costs the Turkish company "millions" of dollars, the report said citing anonymous energy officials. BOTAS said it wants to be compensated for any loss from the pipeline, adding it wouldn't turn a profit until 2012 unless all issues were resolved. Meanwhile, BTC hasn't operated at full capacity since at least 2007, costing Turkey around \$165 million in potential oil-transit revenue. Oil was pumped first through BTC in 2005. The pipeline was shut down briefly in 2008 because of a conflict between Russian and Georgia over breakaway republics. (UPI)



New Book:

The Guns of August 2008

Edited By Svante E. Cornell and S. Frederick Starr

M.E. Sharpe, New York, June 2009,
290pp

This book is designed to present the facts about the events of August 2008 along with comprehensive coverage of the background to those events. It brings together a wealth of expertise on the South Caucasus and Russian foreign policy, with contributions by Russian, Georgian, European, and American experts on the region.