

Central Asia

Caucasus

ANALYST

BIWEEKLY BRIEFING

Wednesday, May 21, 2002

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BIWEEKLY BRIEFING

Wednesday/May 21, 2002

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EDITORIAL PRINCIPLES

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

Analytical article structure:

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

BACKGROUND: 200-300 words of analysis about what has led up to the event or issue and why this issue is critical to the region. Include background information about the views and experiences of the local population.

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

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

Specifications for Field Reports:

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

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

Svante E. Cornell, Editor
 Central Asia-Caucasus Analyst
 Central Asia-Caucasus Institute
 The Johns Hopkins University
 Paul H. Nitze School of Advanced International Studies
 1619 Massachusetts Ave. N.W.
 Washington, D.C. 20036
 Tel. +1-202-663-7712; 1-202-663-7721
 Fax. +1-202-663-7785; 1-253-550-4390

MUFTIS TO THE FRONT IN A RUSSIAN JIHAD: OFFICIAL ISLAM GOES TO WAR

Andrew McGregor

A recent burst of militancy amongst Russia's usually complacent Islamic leadership in response to U.S. action in Iraq has alarmed many observers. But two declarations of jihad against the U.S. may have more to do with an internal struggle for control of Russia's Islamic community. They are nonetheless new irritants in US-Russian relations before President Bush's visit to Moscow, which takes place amid U.S. disappointment with Russia's stand on Iraq, growing tensions over the new U.S.-Georgia relationship, the flight of several unmanned US drones into Russian airspace, and revelations from captured documents that show recent Russian intelligence cooperation with Saddam's regime..

BACKGROUND: On April 3, 2003, the man who claims the leadership of Russia's twenty million Muslims brandished a sword at a rally of 4,000 people in Ufa, Bashkortostan, and declared a jihad against U.S. forces and U.S. President George Bush, 'the Anti-Christ of the world'. The man was Mufti Talgat Tadjuddin, the ethnic Tatar leader of the Spiritual Board of Muslims of Russia and the CIS (TSDUMR). Tadjuddin suggested that the jihad would take the form of a fund to buy weapons and food for the Iraqis. The Mufti emphasized that the declaration of jihad was only the second in modern Russian history, the first having been made against Germany at Stalin's instigation in 1941. On April 15, a huge rally was organized by Duma deputy Ghadzhi Makhachayev in the Daghestan capital of Makhachkala. Numerous politicians and religious figures declared that 8,000 Daghestanis were ready to defend Iraq from an American invasion, a figure confirmed at the time by the Iraqi Embassy, which claimed to have the names and signatures of all 8,000.

Just before the outbreak of the war in Iraq, Tadjuddin visited Baghdad at the head of an interfaith Muslim and Orthodox peace mission. While there, Tadjuddin postured grandly, calling President Bush a 'drunken cowboy' and vowed to remain in Iraq throughout any American invasion. In the end, Tadjuddin returned to Russia with the rest of the mission before bombing began. On his return, Tadjuddin accused the UK of both inventing and supporting 'Wahhabism'. With reference to the Americans, the Mufti announced that 'every inch of land will burn beneath the feet of the warmongers'.

In Daghestan, early enthusiasm translated into the departure of only two Siberian Tatar volunteers for the front and a reversal a month later by Makhachayev, who declared the efforts of the Foreign Ministry on Iraq to be sufficient. Makhachayev is a major player in the often brutal world of Daghestani politics, and participated in the May 1998 Islamist assault on the Daghestan Parliament led by the Khachilayev brothers. On March 26 Makhachayev survived an assassination attempt by an unknown assailant when he answered his cell phone just in time to have it block an otherwise fatal shot to the head. It remains unclear whether

the attempt was related to Makhachayev's political role or his control of the Daghestan oil industry.

IMPLICATIONS: Soviet official Islam was rigidly controlled with a central administration and four geographically based muftiyats. Since perestroika, Russian official Islam has broken into two major muftiyats (led by Tadjuddin and his main rival Ravil Gaynutdin) and dozens of lesser groups, all with overlapping spheres of influence. Nearly all the half-dozen major Islamic leaders in Russia are Tatar, with the exception of the powerful Duma deputy, Abdul-Wahid Niyazov, a half-Tatar convert to Islam. While most are related by marriage into a spiritually powerful Tatar clan, the Muslim leaders spend an inordinate amount of time accusing each other of promoting 'Wahhabism' or various obscure heresies.

In contrast to the silence that met the Daghestani declaration of jihad, there was a furor throughout Russia at Tadjuddin's statements. Movladi Udagov, a leader of Islamic-minded Chechen separatist groups based in Qatar, accused Tadjuddin of being an agent of the FSB (Federal Security Service), and proclaimed the imam to be an apostate, the most serious charge in Islam. Siberian-based Mufti Nafigulla Ashirov initially spoke of 'tens of thousands' of Russian Muslims ready to fight in Iraq, but later said that no Russian Muslim took Tadjuddin's declaration seriously. Despite being a frequent visitor to Iraq himself, Chechnya's Kremlin-appointed governor Akhmad Khadyrov, a former Mufti of Chechnya, called Tadjuddin's declaration 'mindless self-promotion'. Even the chief Mufti of his own power base in Bashkortostan failed to support Tadjuddin.

Tadjuddin's most serious challenger for President Putin's favor is a former protégé, Mufti Ravil Gaynutdin, leader of the Council of Muftis of Russia (SMR). In recent years, Gaynutdin has attempted to make Moscow the capital of Russian Islam, with the financial and political aid of Russian Mayor Yuri Luzhkov. Gaynutdin was scathing in his response to Tadjuddin's jihad, calling the Mufti a 'false prophet', whose call for jihad carried 'neither clerical nor legal nor moral force'. The Russian Justice Ministry warned that any military aid or intervention in Iraq by Russian citizens would be subject to criminal investigation and there were threats from

the Prosecutor-General's office that the TSDUMR could be disbanded for inciting religious hatred.

In their attempts to garner the Kremlin's support, Gainutdin, Tadjuddin and other leading Muftis all proclaimed the legitimacy of the recent referendum on Chechnya's future in the Russian Federation. Tadjuddin made sure to note that his organization was the first to support the referendum, calling it 'a necessary measure against terrorists'. The referendum campaign was accompanied by several gestures from Russian authorities to reach out to the Russian Islamic community at a time when Muslims are alarmed at the growing patronage of Russian Orthodoxy by the Kremlin.

CONCLUSIONS: Lacking popular support, the Daghestan jihad amounted only to a war of words. The demonstrations of anti-American militancy in Ufa and Makhachkala appear to be unrelated. There is little contact between the leaders of the North Caucasus muftiyats and those in the Volga/Urals region. Islamic revival in the latter area is closely tied to Tatar and Bashkir nationalism. Tadjuddin's declaration followed a fractious meeting in late March of all Russia's Islamic leaders,

a failed attempt by the Kremlin to unify official Islam as in Soviet times. Tadjuddin was one of the 'young Imams' who emerged from Central Asian religious schools in the 1980s. These individuals opposed the passive pro-Soviet conduct of the older spiritual leaders and actually succeeded in gaining a number of concessions from the government before religious laws were relaxed in 1990, permitting the modern Russian Islamic revival. By the early 90's, Tadjuddin was himself being challenged by a new generation of 'young Imams' on nearly identical charges, with the addition of schizophrenia. Tadjuddin's jihad may thus be regarded as a desperate attempt to exploit public opinion to outmaneuver his rivals in official structures and the young Tatar radicals. There remains the possibility that the ever-pliant Tadjuddin was encouraged by the Kremlin to adopt a militant pose, a discrete means of communicating Moscow's displeasure with Washington's campaign in Iraq.

AUTHOR'S BIO: Dr. Andrew McGregor is Director of Aberfoyle International Security Analysis, Toronto.

KAZAKHSTAN CLOSES THE DOOR TO CHINA AS SARS PANIC SPREADS

At first, Kazakh authorities seemed to be merely stunned by the news of the rapid spread of a hitherto unknown deadly disease in China. They were too slow to introduce necessary precaution measures to prevent the severe acute respiratory syndrome from popping up in the country, which shares 1700 kilometer long border with China.

Those who first sounded alarm bells alerting the public to the threat of a horrible pneumonia epidemic were journalists. Their eye-witness reports from East Asian countries, unlike official sources, depicted the true scale of the SARS epidemic. Media accounts bordered on direct accusations of officials for criminal neglect. A few days after these articles appeared in the non-government press, the first suspected cases of lethal pneumonia came from Pavlodar and Aktau, which, however, later were proven false. Yet panic did not subside after that.

On May 8, the government publicly announced measures against SARS and, in a traditional manner, assured the population that "the situation is under control". The early precaution measures essentially boiled down to compulsory screening of passengers arriving from China and other South-East Asia countries for the SARS virus. Very soon, it became apparent that these procedures were by far inadequate to cope with the interminable arrivals and departures. As the most decisive step, the government had to close the border until May 20, suspending all air, rail and motorway traffic.

Additionally, all Kazakhstani nationals residing in China were recalled. As of May 16, official sources say, 87 people returned from China. Most of them are high school students studying at the Universities of Shanghai, Beijing and Tsinyang.

Five students, it was said, have remained in China of their own free will to continue their studies. It is believed that there are still some business people from Kazakhstan in the affected areas of China. But nobody knows the exact number of these people, since not all of them are registered with the Kazakhstani Embassy.

Before the closure of the border the trade was thriving in neighboring areas. Thousands of traders freely traveled daily across the border, using five border crossing points. The markets of Almaty and other Southern cities are awash with dirt-cheap Chinese clothing, toys, household goods and trinkets of all imaginable sorts. Chinese goods are widely believed to be of low quality. A Chinese shoe is never expected to last for more than a month without its sole falling off. The only temptation for residents of South Kazakhstan to buy them is their low price.

Kazakhstan has not yet invented any reliable means of reducing of influx of Chinese goods. The closure of the border has brought only a temporary solace to local manufacturers and food producers. "We welcome the steps of the government. It is high time to seal off the border. That is the only way to block the imports of Chinese rice" says Marat Dadikbay, the executive director of the Kazakh Rice Association.

But there are dissenting voices among business people. They think that the government has overreacted to SARS epidemic in other countries and this is likely to harm business relations. It is yet to be estimated how much businesses in Kazakhstan will lose from the border closure. Some experts

speak of millions of dollars, and that is not the worst forecast.

A few weeks before the border closure, officials of Kazakhstan had encouraging talks with the Secretary General of the World Tourism Organization. There is a real opportunity, with the help from this organization, to revive the declining tourist industry of Kazakhstan. The main tourist attractions are located in the South, near the Chinese border. And that will present a delicate problem, at least for some time. The SARS fear will have negative impacts on maritime trade, too. The administration of the Aktau seaport had to postpone its important exhibition in China scheduled for May.

Meanwhile, some officials in the government openly question the effectiveness of precaution measures taken to ward off the SARS epidemic. They argue that precaution rules are not strictly observed and many traders still use byroads to smuggle in infected goods. It is particularly difficult to control the travel routes of the Chinese workers of the "CNPC-Aktobemunaigaz" joint venture drilling for oil in Aktobe region. Hospitals and research institutions have no adequate equipment to carry out proper laboratory tests or even the needed quantity of protection masks. The best the medical workers can do is to place suspected persons in quarantine and isolation. Kazakhstan was not prepared to see SARS at its doorstep. It is only luck, that has prevented the deadly disease from spreading to Kazakhstan so far.

Marat Yermukanov

DILEMMAS FOR THE FUTURE OF GEORGIA

David Darchiashvili

As a logical outcome of a decade of close relations, Georgia was one of dozens of states that allied with the U.S. in its battle against Saddam Hussein's Iraq. American assistance has been crucial to Georgia's survival since the second half of the 1990s. However, major internal and external dilemmas are presently confronting both Georgia and the U.S. These lie in Georgia's complex relations with Russia, but more deeply also in the democratic development of Georgian statehood.

BACKGROUND: Georgia has become a focus for U.S. policy in Eurasia not only in terms of spreading the ideals of freedom and democracy, but also in terms of geo-economics and geo-strategy. Since 1999, the U.S. role in the formation of Georgia's security architecture has increased qualitatively. America has trained the Georgian military, provided technical assistance to its border guards and customs services, and transferred military helicopters to Georgia. The US\$64 million Train-and-Equip Program for the reformation of the Georgian military aims to create the nucleus of a new Georgian armed forces consisting of more than 2,000 officers and enlisted personnel. In March 2003, the Georgian Parliament ratified a U.S.-Georgian military agreement, with wide ranging privileges granted to U.S. military personnel, leading to speculation that the agreement is a precursor of U.S. military deployment on Georgian soil. Confidential U.S.-Georgian consultations on the usage of Georgian airfields by US air forces are reportedly underway, whose rationale is underscored by the recent Iraq campaign and Turkey's reluctance to engage in it.

Given its internal and external security threats, the friendship of the world's only superpower is crucial to Georgia's survival - at least while its territorial integrity remains uncertain, its budget is in deficit, and the legitimacy of its government remains questionable in the eyes of its own citizens. Yet the process of the formation of Georgia's external security guarantees has not been accomplished yet. The US-Georgian alliance falls short of perfection, and the partners face certain dilemmas.

IMPLICATIONS: Georgia's security dilemmas are both external and internal in nature. As Vladimir Socor puts it, it is questionable "whether international law still applies to Russia-Georgia relations". Russia refuses to withdraw its remaining bases from Georgia in a timeframe acceptable to Georgia, and continues support secessionist entities. It one-sidedly opened a railway connection with Abkhazia, and its granting of Russian citizenship to citizens of South Ossetia and Abkhazia amounts to a de facto annexation. U.S.-Georgian military co-operation has been followed by the rearmament of the Abkhazian and South Ossetian regimes by the Russian military. Russia maintains a monopoly on the supply of energy to Georgia, and Itera, a private Russian company with close ties to the Russian state, has been trying to acquire strategic assets in the country.

Georgia tries to neutralize these threats through closeness with the U.S., but it remains unclear whether the current Georgian government will manage to completely avoid the re-emergence of its erstwhile bandwagoning policy towards Russia, especially if Russia uses carrots and not only sticks. Recent agreements with Russia may have weakened Georgia's position, for example the lifting of the six months limitation on the Russian peacekeepers in Abkhazia. The discussions of a trilateral regime for the Gali region seem to give Russia a stronger position in Abkhazia with Georgian acquiescence but lesser accountability. Moreover, recent developments regarding Russian bases follow the same line. Russia in 2002 made Georgia agree to a formula whereby the bases' status, which should have been vacated in 2001 according to the 1999 OSCE Istanbul agreement, would be finalized "until the end of 2003 if conditions permit". According to one high-ranking OSCE official, the new formula explicitly weakens the Georgian position. The same official expressed concern that it is slightly unclear what Georgia genuinely wants either from Russia or from the international community in this regard.

Georgia's second dilemma is internal and political, and even ideological in nature. The West stipulates certain conditions for countries aspiring to join the club of democratic states. It provides significant aid for, essentially, the implementation of the principles of market economy, democracy, and the rule of law. The Georgian government has been quick to promise reforms and to demand relevant assistance, but the effects of multiyear Western loans and grants is far below expectations. Although the Georgian government declared a belated crusade against corruption in 2000, the Georgian judiciary system is unaware of any single case of the punishment of a high-ranking state figure for bribery.

Parallel to that, both governmental and non-governmental sources report an increase of the organized crime in the country. Corruption and organized crime are known to reach into the highest echelons of the Georgian political elite. As a result, the establishment of genuine democracy and rule of law could become dangerous for the government, or components of it. One might therefore question whether the Georgian government will seek to establish true democracy, which of course would endanger the positions and genuine interests of some individuals and groups. Consequently, one may wonder whether strict democratic conditionality would not lead the Georgian government back to the Russian

embrace, since Russia never demands either democratization or respect for human rights.

This brings the third key dilemma for the future of Georgia, which is faced not by the Georgian government but rather by the U.S.. The U.S. has a choice between either pursuing strict conditionality in Georgia, or close its eyes on the hollowness of Georgian democracy in order not to endanger the stability of Georgian government. This dilemma is difficult to resolve straightforwardly, especially when U.S. foreign policy is undergoing a serious test of international legitimization while desperately needing broad support in its war on terrorism. A senior official of the U.S. administration recently admitted that the U.S. had made the mistake of defining only one political force in the Georgian political spectrum as progressive, and to demonize all others. It later appeared that the progressive camp was rather corrupt. According to the official, the U.S. will not repeat this mistake and its approach to Georgian politicians will be multi-vectoral.

CONCLUSIONS: U.S.-Georgian cooperation has reached a climax. But behind the tactical achievements of the Train-and-Equip Program and the new U.S.-Georgian military agreement, one can trace unsolved strategic dilemmas. If

their solution is indefinitely postponed, the effect of the tactical success risks gradually fading away. During the ratification procedure of the U.S.-Georgian agreement, several Georgian MPs simply left the hall. Most of them are known to be a part of a Russian fifth column, but not all of them. A considerable part of Georgian national forces looks to the U.S. with rising suspicion. Today one can notice three main worldviews in the rather diverse Georgian political spectrum: the Democratic, Nationalistic and Oligarchic views. It is doubtful that either of these can be a sufficient ground for a stable statehood in the near future. The task of making an optimal cocktail out of these ingredients falls on Georgian, but also on U.S. politicians, because the rest of the world is either not interested in this problem, lacks the ability to influence it, or is opposed to the very project of Georgian statehood.

AUTHOR'S BIO: Dr. David Darchiashvili is a visiting Fulbright Fellow at the Central Asia-Caucasus Institute of Johns Hopkins University-SAIS. He normally works at the Caucasian Institute for Peace, Democracy and Development in Tbilisi, Georgia.

KYRGYZ POLICE DISARMED

An unprecedented event took place in southern Kyrgyzstan last Thursday morning. Criminal gang members attacked the regional and city police departments of Jalal-Abad, and beat policemen, took their arms, and fled. The suspects were detained that same day.

As Ministry of Interior officials say, the armed robbery was planned in detail. At 6.05 a.m. a group of young men, aged 20-25, rushed into the Jalal-Abad city police department with guns. Threatening the policemen, they forced them to give up their arms. Taken aback, the policemen did not show strong resistance. Later, they were taken to hospital with serious injuries. At 6.30 a.m., a parallel incident just like this one took place in the Jalal-Abad regional police department.

The criminals captured altogether 35 weapons, including 21 Kalashnikov guns, 9 Makarov and 3 Stechkin pistols, one Dragunov sniper rifle, and a machine gun. They left in a police car parked on the regional police department's yard. On a highway, the offenders hijacked a Volga car and made their way towards the southern Aksy district.

Police chased the gang members until they rammed the Volga in a gorge near Kyzyl-Jar village, and ran it into a flock of sheep. The suspects surrounded by police started shooting from inside their car, but finally gave up after being warned that they would otherwise be killed.

The other group of attackers in a Zhiguli car also fled towards the Aksy district. Chased by police, they got out of control and ran into a river. The suspects had to leave the car and to run into the

mountains. At night, the gorge where they hid was blocked by two armored troop carriers and an assault detachment. Three men were detained.

The Ministry of Interior leadership connects the incident neither with religious extremist organizations like Uzbekistan Islamic Movement or Hizb-ut-Tahrir, nor with the violent Aksy events of a year ago. As Joldoshbek Buzurmankulov, Internal Affairs Ministry press-service director, informed on a press conference on Friday, those who attacked the Jalal-Abad police departments belonged to southern criminal structures and had planned to organize mass disorders in south of the country by arming local people. "One of the assault purposes was to free the other members of the gang, particularly, the criminal authority called Krasavchik, from an isolator cell in the city police department," IAM official said, "But thanks to the guard, who barricaded the door to the cell, the offenders could not get in."

Asked why law enforcement representatives were overrun so easily, Buzurmankulov said, "Police departments are always open to people, unlike military units. Besides, the leader of the attackers, Adyl Karimov, had worked in that very city police department earlier, and knew the person who let him in." Adyl Karimov is the only one of the attackers who is still free and armed.

The Jalal-Abad regional public prosecutor has instituted legal proceedings on the incident. The investigating group includes the most skilled investigators of the district. All schools in the

region are temporarily closed, and hospitals are under intensified guard.

The Jalal-Abad event prompted Uzbek president Islam Karimov to sign a special document called "Measures of providing security on the territory of the Republic of Uzbekistan bordering with Jalal-Abad region of the Kyrgyz Republic", on May 15. A special operative group in the Uzbek Internal Affairs Ministry was formed, which has already arrived in the boundary zone. Frontier guards and customs officials have been ordered to intensify control in checkpoints. In districts bordering with Kyrgyzstan, a strict passport regime has been proclaimed. These measures are directed to prevent the penetration of armed criminal formations into Uzbekistan.

The attack on two Kyrgyz police departments is obviously sensational. There have been cases when small district departments were attacked, for instance during a market revolt in 1967, and during the Osh events in 1990. Last year in March, in Aksy, a crowd held a village police department under siege. But regional police departments have never been assaulted.

Kyrgyz police has redoubled its vigilance. Some sources from MOI predict dismissals of law enforcement officials for serious omissions in their job. Specialists say that this may not be the best way to solve the problem, since the law enforcement system of the country, as a whole, needs to be reformed.

Aziz Soltobaev

NATO MOVES EAST

Stephen Blank

In spite of the well-known divisions within the Transatlantic alliance, NATO is evolving and trying to move with the requirements of the times. Nowhere is this more evident than in its impending takeover of the ISAF (International Security Assistance Force), the peace enforcement operation in Kabul and across Afghanistan. This move is timely since by all accounts the situation in Afghanistan has not stabilized. Al-Qaeda groups and the Taliban have reorganized and are mounting an increasing number of attacks, while there is evidence to suggest that they are receiving assistance from opposition forces to President Musharraf in Pakistan. Under the circumstances, a NATO takeover of the operation is not just timely but also clearly warranted.

BACKGROUND: NATO's difficulties are well known and are part of the larger set of issues plaguing the Transatlantic relationship among the allies. Nevertheless, it has consistently evolved since the 1990s into an organization whose main functions are crisis management, collective security, and peace and stability operations. This transformation is abundantly clear in NATO enlargement, the ongoing operations in the former Yugoslavia, and the military reforms taking place at varying speeds within the members' armed forces. It is also very clear that NATO's geographical scope is expanding as well.

All the members of the CIS are members of the Partnership for Peace and the Euro-Atlantic Political Committee (EAPC). Joint exercises with NATO members and their armed forces are a regular occurrence and even before 2003, other NATO members like France, Germany, Turkey, and England were participating in the war against terrorists either in Central Asia or in Afghanistan itself. Turkey, for example, led the ISAF operation before handing it off to Germany and Holland, the current leaders. Likewise, NATO has also functioned as a kind of security magnet for Georgia and Azerbaijan who have both indicated their desire to join NATO at some point and to obtain protection from threats to their territories and their energy platforms and pipelines. Therefore the groundwork has been laid for the expansion of NATO's missions to include the peace and stability operation inside Afghanistan.

Nevertheless this move must be seen as signifying a dramatic and even qualitative change in NATO. For all the divisions within the alliance, there is no dissent to speak of regarding the necessity of fighting terrorism and stabilizing Afghanistan. As Iraq shows, its used to be and still is the case that "out of area-operations" in the Middle East were the most contentious issues that divided the allies from each other. This was true in 1956 in the Suez operation which triggered a major crisis in the alliance, as it is about the current Iraqi operation. However, at the Prague summit last year the allies agreed to a declaration and communiqué that essentially accepted the principle of out of area operations and pointed the way to the new

operation inside Afghanistan. While the serious differences over Iraq are real; they are not disputes over NATO conducting missions in areas that hitherto were regarded as off limits to the alliance as such if not to individual members. Not surprisingly, the acceptance of NATO's role in Afghanistan has also led the United States to seek to cajole its allies into establishing a similar NATO peace and stability operation in Iraq. As of this writing that issue has not yet been resolved. But the effort to obtain allied support for such an operation shows how NATO's role as provider of collective security and as leader of peace and stability operations is growing in the wake of the transformation of international relations.

IMPLICATIONS: There are two other potential outcomes of this move into Afghanistan. First, there is no doubt that the Russian government and military, in the wake of Iraq and rising unhappiness about the American and Western presence in Central Asia, have substantially intensified their pressure upon Central Asian regimes to subordinate their armed forces to a Russian-led collective security treaty organization that is supposed to act as a counterbalance to NATO in the area and where Moscow would represent local governments while also effectively abridging their sovereign capabilities with regard to defense. NATO's growing readiness to entertain the idea of being a security provider to the region and not just to Afghanistan suggests that not only the local regimes will resist Moscow's efforts to subordinate them, but that NATO's leading members and the organization as a whole will do so as well. Second, beyond the fact that NATO is becoming a factor in the provision of security throughout the Muslim world and might conceivably be called upon to do so in the event of conflict in the CIS, is the fact that Russia's ties to NATO are apparently improving. But if a true strategic partnership with NATO is to be forged, one condition will surely be that Russia stop trying to block NATO's missions, and even more importantly, curtail its efforts to undermine stability in Central Asia such as the launching of coups and support for insurgents. These actions are inherently destabilizing and have immense potential for blowing back threats not only upon Russia

but also upon NATO members as we have all too tragically seen.

CONCLUSIONS: NATO's move into hitherto inaccessible and closed areas both represents and portends major changes in the structure of security institutions and in their responsibilities. The Islamic world as a whole as well as the CIS will no longer be in principle off limits to Western security organizations and are irrevocably part of their security agenda. By displaying its readiness to participate in new missions like peace and stability operations and to do so in new areas, NATO has dramatically multiplied the number of effective contributors to security in areas that desperately need it. In this respect NATO also contributes to a possible trend to multilateralize security in Afghanistan and Central Asia, and to help prevent any single foreign player from

becoming the sole regional security manager, a task beyond any state in today's world. Such multilateralization is the only answer in the long run to the questions of how foreign states must deal with threats to their interests in and around Central Asia. This multilateralization both strengthens local regimes in the knowledge that they will not be left alone to face grave threats and that they will not be left to the mercies of foreign big brothers either. Therefore those of us who are concerned for Central Asia's and the Middle East's security must welcome and encourage this trend.

AUTHOR'S BIO: Professor Stephen Blank, Strategic Studies Institute, US Army War College, Carlisle Barracks, PA 17013. The views expressed here do not necessarily represent those of the U.S. Army, Defense Department, or the U.S. Government.

IFC TO ALLOCATE ADDITIONAL MEANS FOR BTC PIPELINE

The World Bank's International Financial Corporation is planning to approve the allocation of credits for the engineering design of the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) oil pipeline in October - November of this year. As executive vice-president of the IFC Peter Woicke declared while visiting Baku, the credit will be of US\$150 million.

The engineering design of Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil pipeline of 1740km with a capacity of 50 million tons of hydrocarbons per year is estimated to cost US\$ 2,9 - 3 billion to build. But these figures are not final as, in the opinion of experts, the cost of the Main Export Pipeline (MEP) could reach far over 3 billion dollars. According to the suggested scheme of financing, 30% will stem from own resources of the participants of the consortium entering a sponsor's group, and 70% will be financed internationally. The IFC and the European Bank of Reconstruction

and Development (EBRD) have declared granting a total of 600 million dollars. However the direct participation of the IFC and the EBRD will be of 150 million dollars. The remainder will be financed by means of syndicated crediting in which they are going to involve foreign investment banks.

At the same time, according to the head of Azerbaijani National Bank Avaz Alekperov, it is not excluded to use a part of currency reserves in case of need to finance the construction of BTC. However these investments should be of a temporary character and with a condition of return of the means. In interview to TREND news agency, the first deputy director of the State Oil Company of Azerbaijan (SOCAR) Ilham Aliyev declared that the delay the international financial institutions (IFI) in opening credit lines for the engineering design of BTC will not

affect the terms of its realization. SOCAR has already saved up means that should be allocated for construction of the export pipeline. There is already over US\$ 40 million in a SOCAR special bank account, which will be allocated for financing Azerbaijan's share. This will according to Ilham Aliyev be enough for the period until donor institutes actually begin financing. The budget of the State oil fund for last year included payments on BTC construction in the amount of US\$ 50 million, and this year, 115 million dollars are being provided for this purpose.

The Baku representative of the IFC stated that "We would wish that the best experience available in this field be used in Azerbaijan's oil-and-gas projects, as these are unusual projects". He also emphasized the necessity of cooperation between businessmen and the public, as well as additional efforts on the part of investors that incomes of these projects would be spent expediently, benefiting to the population. "We support British Petroleum (BP) in its aspiration to cooperate with the local companies, and the creation by the company and its partners of a business center for training businessmen to the international principles of work.

Simultaneously the group of international NGOs opposing BTC has become more active. Even in the summer of last year, sixty-four European NGOs acted against the project's financing by IFIs. 70% of funds that donors plan to allocate for this project is money from taxpayers. Protesters have addressed the leadership of the European Bank of Investment (EIB), the EBRD, the Export-import bank of the U.S. (ExImBank), the American corporation of private investments and the Japanese Bank for International Cooperation.

The annual session of the EBRD board of directors recently took place in Tashkent, with the participation of representatives of NGOs opposing the BTC pipeline. The same representatives of NGOs from the U.S., Great Britain, Czech republic, Slovakia and Georgia, paid a visit to Baku in the middle of May. Immediately after their arrival to Azerbaijan, the delegation went to Ganja to carry out monitoring on the Azerbaijan site of the pipeline. Meanwhile, according to the Baku newspaper Ekho, the details of the last letter sent by NGOs opposing BTC to the governments of European countries has been made public, in which they ask to introduce an immediate moratorium on the construction of an oil pipeline. According to the letter, "the pipeline not only breaches international legal principles, but also threatens human rights". Therefore these NGOs demand a moratorium on the financing of the project and to suspend its construction.

According to IFC executive vice-president Woicke, the environmental standards involved are the highest available. "Therefore, I think that as soon as the IFC will approve the credit for the project, other financial institutions will do the same thing. We have no questions concerning the construction on the Azerbaijani and Turkish sites of BTC. But we have some questions concerning environmental problems as BTC goes via the Borjomi national park in Georgia. We are sure that risks of possible spills of oil around Borjomi can be reduced", declared Woicke.

Gulnara Ismailova

KARZAI'S VISIT TO PAKISTAN: THE ROAD AHEAD

Rizwan Zeb

Afghanistan's President Hamid Karzai visited Pakistan on April 22-23. His trip to Islamabad came amid growing suspicion in Afghanistan that Islamabad is supporting remnants of the former Taliban regime, and soon after a border clash between Pakistan and Afghan forces. The atmosphere during his visit remained positive and he declared that Pakistan and Afghanistan only have a bright future in front of them. The trip also highlighted trade relations, where some improvements have been done but where considerable amounts of work need to be done in order to realize the full potential of the Pakistan-Afghanistan relations.

BACKGROUND: On April 17, Afghan and Pakistani militia clashed briefly near the border town of Ghulam Khan, south of Khost, where the demarcation of border remains contested. According to Afghan reports, Pakistani militia crossed nearly three miles into Afghanistan and were driven back by Afghan forces, while according to Pakistani reports, U.S. and Afghan forces crossed just under one mile into Pakistan to meet with local tribal leaders too seek their support in return for humanitarian and development aid.

Four days later, Afghanistan's president Hamid Karzai arrived in Islamabad for a two-day official visit to Pakistan. He held talks with President Pervez Musharraf. Later, it was claimed that he handed over a list of Taliban leaders, whom he wanted to be arrested. When asked by a journalist, the Afghan President said that there was talk "of some people in general terms", adding that "we are going to come up with a more specific list of names". President Karzai also denied that there is any dispute between Afghanistan and Pakistan. He played down the recent border clash and said that things like that are bound to occur between people at all times. He claimed not even to have raised the issue with Pakistani Prime Minister Mir Zafarullah Khan Jamali. Both sides also discussed extending cooperation in the fight against terrorism. He also admitted that his country was not yet settled after the U.S.-led war against the Taliban regime, and requires Pakistani cooperation for reconstruction and pacification efforts. Pakistan and Afghanistan only have a bright future in front of them, Karzai added.

He assured the government of Pakistan that the rapidly increasing Indo-Afghan relations will have no negative bearing whatsoever on Pakistan. He also told Pakistani reporters that a defense ministry level Pakistan-Afghan dialogue has been established.

IMPLICATIONS: This visit will most likely have significant implications on Pakistani-Afghan relations in the days ahead. It seemed that President Karzai wanted to portray a better picture of Kabul-Islamabad relations throughout the trip though his alleged demand to arrest specific individuals left a sour taste. Many independent sources have on a number of occasions reported that these figures are active in Afghanistan. Accordingly, Mullah Biradar is heading a Taliban guerrilla outfit in Afghanistan, while Akhtar

Mohammad Usmani, Mullah Dadullah and Mullah Abdul Razzaq are active in Southern Kandahar, Zobal, Bidmand and Nimroz. This in fact is not the first time that the Afghan authorities claimed that remnants of Taliban leadership is hiding in Pakistan. Afghan Foreign Minister Abdullah Abdullah has frequently blamed Pakistan of harboring wanted Taliban elements.

Both countries agreed for a mechanism for regular consultations in Islamabad and Kabul alternatively, which will provide a forum for both countries to exchange views on bilateral and regional issues. Pakistan, for its part, has expressed concerns over Indian consulates in cities along the Pakistan border, and of Indian military assistance to the Afghan authorities for establishing its national army. Pakistani authorities' concern over "Indian activism" along the "terrain close to Pakistan's backyard", prompted Karzai to declare that "Afghanistan will not allow its territory to be used by one friend of ours against a brother of ours, that has to be understood very, very clearly."

Karzai also announced that Afghan Defense Minister General Mohammad Qasim Fahim would be coming to Pakistan at a future date as part of an emerging security dialogue between the two countries. Fahim is known for his pro-Indian and anti-Pakistani views. This announcement amounts to a clear indication of a growing realization in Afghan power circles of the need to have close ties with Pakistan. On the trade and commerce front, a number of issues were discussed: Pakistan offered Afghanistan the establishment of free industrial zones near the Torkham and Chaman border areas. Pakistani Finance Minister Shaukat Aziz also identified many other areas of cooperation such as food, construction, pharmaceutical industry, communication and social infrastructure. Aziz also outlined the potential role of the Gwadar Sea port currently under construction, through a network of roads from Gwadar to Chaman, to serve as main transit port for Afghanistan. Recently a delegation of the National Bank of Pakistan visited Kabul for setting up of financial services. Islamabad also offered participation in establishing sugar, cement and fertilizer plants in Afghanistan.

The visiting Afghan delegation was also told that timely construction of the Spin Boldak-Qandahar and Torkham-

Jalalabad roads would further increase economic cooperation between the two countries and enhance trade relations. The current transit has increased from Rs 5.5 billion (\$96 million) during last eight months to Rs 8.8 billion (\$154 million). Exports between the two countries have increased substantially to \$270 million.

Yet there are issues that remain. As several analysts have noted, Afghanistan has bought into the Indian-Iranian-Russian plans to construct trade routes to bypass Pakistan and especially its eastern port of Karachi. Iran and India are planning to construct new rail and road links that will link Western Afghanistan with Iranian ports on the Arabian Sea. Pakistan, on the other hand, has placed restrictions on Afghan transit trade and raised rather than lowered transportation costs for Afghan exports through Pakistan. This issue is currently a major obstacle to better trade ties. As the Lahore-based Daily Times recently noted, Pakistan is potentially set to benefit more than any other country from the reconstruction of Afghanistan. This is especially true in the Southern areas where other countries are unlikely to be

able or willing to make inroads for some time. Pakistani companies have already achieved lucrative contracts in Afghanistan. This in turn gives Pakistan a stake to prevent Taliban elements from going into Afghanistan to disrupt the Karzai government. Another outstanding issue is the nearly 1,000 Pakistani prisoners remaining in Afghan jails. President Karzai has promised that they would be released soon.

CONCLUSION: Although the Afghan President insists that Pakistan and Afghanistan have a good future ahead, a lot remains to be done. The foremost thing is the establishment of trust and confidence between the two countries, because despite the encouraging tone of the Afghan President, elements in the Afghan government may be reading a different script; this may be true in parts of Pakistani society as well. This trip should be seen as a good start towards better relations between the two but what lies ahead is yet to seen.

AUTHOR'S BIO: Rizwan Zeb is a Islamabad based security Analyst. He is currently working on a book on Pakistan-Central Asia Relations.

AZERBAIJANI PARLIAMENTARY MAJORITY BLOCKS ADOPTION OF UNIFIED ELECTION CODE

The beginning of May brought new initiatives to the issue of the Unified Election Code, a document long awaited by political parties in Azerbaijan and the international community. The Council of Europe's Venice Commission, a body responsible for election procedures, has suggested to the Parliament of Azerbaijan to include all major political parties in the election commissions. The suggestion was effectively shelved by the Parliamentary majority.

The adoption of a Unified Election Code is one of the obligations accepted by the Government of Azerbaijan when accorded membership in the Council of Europe in 2001. The document is set to unite all separate laws on elections and eradicate gaps and contradictions between them, thus paving the way for more fair and free elections in the country. Initially, the Council of Europe requested that the code was passed at least six months prior to the upcoming Presidential elections, which is set to take place in October.

Yet, the month of April has passed, and lawmakers have been unable to agree on the composition of the election commissions. The author of the draft, Mr. Shahin Aliyev of the President's Office suggested the following formula: 18 members, six of which represent the parliamentary majority, six independent deputies and six representing the parliamentary minority. Opposition parties in the country have objected to this formula, because it practically leaves the major opposition parties Musavat, Azerbaijan Democratic Party and Azerbaijan National Independence Party out of the election commissions, since they were not represented in Parliament in the 2000 elections. This formula also gives the majority of votes in the

election commissions to the ruling party, as the so-called "independent deputies" have always voted in favor of the authorities.

"We want an election commission that is free of any party's monopoly", said Ali Kerimli, chairman of the opposition Popular Front Party during the debates in Parliament. The international community has also been concerned about the issue of election commissions. For these purposes, Council of Europe experts have suggested that the election commissions are formed by both the parties that are represented in parliament and those who gathered at least one percent of votes in the last parliamentary elections. At the same time, the ruling party would have fewer representatives in the election commissions, thus essentially losing control over the decision-making process. The suggestion was aggressively rejected by deputies representing the Parliamentary majority.

"It is our country. Why do we have to listen outsiders on our domestic issues?" rhetorically asked Siyavush Novruzov of the ruling New Azerbaijan Party. Others urged to ignore the international organizations and criticized the activity of the OSCE and Council of Europe representatives in Baku. Double standards, a pro-oppositional stance, and ignorance of the local political situation were the major accusations toward the international institutions.

The deputy speaker Ziyafet Askerov went on even further to practically explain the negative points of Council of Europe's suggestions. "Some of our small towns do not have branches of opposition parties. So, how are we supposed to form election

commissions there? Do we have to artificially create opposition parties there? We don't have them, so what shall we do then?" After two day debates, the suggestion was shelved indefinitely and the adoption of the election code still remains in the air.

Meanwhile, the opposition parties have expressed their general satisfaction with the Council of Europe's formula for the composition of the election commissions. "While we also have some reservations about it, we think that this formula can be a basis for further work", said a statement from the Opposition Coordination Center.

The deadlock on the issue of the election code puts the political parties in a difficult situation. The absence of a legislative basis does not allow parties and the Central Election Commission to plan pre-election activities and creates more questions on the legitimacy of the upcoming elections.

Presidential elections in October will be both a challenge and an excellent opportunity for the Government of Azerbaijan to show its commitment to democratic values and principles. In light of mass violations of electoral procedures during the Presidential elections in Armenia, free and fair elections in Azerbaijan can also help the government to boost its image in the West and gain some points in negotiation process with its arch-rival. However, the uncertainty over the election code still makes this process a distant dream.

Fariz Ismailzade

NEWS BITES

UZBEK AIR CANCELS FLIGHTS TO CHINA, SOUTHEAST ASIA

9 May

Uzbek Airlines has cancelled its flights to China, Malaysia, and Thailand in order to prevent the spread of severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) to Uzbekistan, uza.uz reported on 9 May. In addition, Uzbek health authorities have recommended that planes serving any region where SARS has appeared be equipped with surgical gloves, masks, and disinfectants and that a place where possible victims of the disease can be isolated on board be established. The Health Ministry has reportedly begun organizing seminars on coping with SARS for airport personnel, as well as for oblast health workers. According to health authorities, Uzbek citizens are being warned not to visit Southeast Asia and strictly to observe rules of hygiene. So far there have been no cases of SARS registered in Uzbekistan. (uza.uz)

TAJIK ECONOMIST SAYS LABOR MIGRATION AFFECTING BIRTHRATE

11 May

Hojimahmad Umarov, an economist at Tajikistan's Economic Research Institute, said on 11 May that the high annual rate of migration of able-bodied young people out of Tajikistan in search of work is affecting the country's birthrate. Umarov was quoted as saying that about one-third of the approximately 800,000 labor migrants who leave the country each year start families in the place where they find work, even if they already have families in Tajikistan. The result, said Umarov, is a shortage of marriageable young men and a growing number of children without fathers at home. Other sources have warned that many women in Tajik villages are being left without any means of support for themselves and their children. Umarov said that while the Tajik birthrate was 40 per 1,000 in 1985, it is now considerably lower because of labor migration, the ravages of the 1992-97 civil war, and the general poverty of the population. Senior Tajik officials, including President Imomali Rakhmonov, have said job creation must be a top priority for the country. (ITAR-TASS)

IRAN STEPS UP NET CENSORSHIP

12 May

Iran has tightened controls on the internet, ordering thousands of political and pornographic websites to be blocked. The Iranian press said a list of 15,000 sites had been drawn up by the government and sent to internet service providers. Ministers were quoted as saying that they wanted to "block access to immoral sites as well as political sites which rudely make fun of religious and political figures in the country." The web has become an important outlet as an alternative method of communication in Iran, which maintains a close eye on the media. 'Immoral' web
Over the past three years, Iran's conservative judiciary has banned about 80 newspapers and magazines. In response,

several pro-reform publications had turned to the internet to get around strict press laws. Estimates suggest there are about two million Iranians with access to the internet. The hardliners who control Iran's state TV and radio and many newspapers accuse the new sites of spreading "lies" and exceeding socially accepted norms. According to reports in the Iranian media, service providers could face court action unless they block access to 15,000 sites deemed immoral. Several of the banned sites have close links to reformists such as the Iranian political bulletin Emrooz website. Access to sites of radio stations that broadcast in Farsi are also reported to have been blocked. The new restrictions on the net reflect growing concerns in Iran about the web. Last month the authorities detained Sina Motallebi, a journalist behind a prominent web log, www.rooznegar.com. Reporters Without Borders has issued a statement deploring Mr Motallebi's detention and other attacks on journalists. (BBC)

KAZAKHSTAN TO SELL MOST OF 50% IN KAZAKHTELECOM IN 2004

12 May

Kazakhstan plans to sell most of its 50% stake in domestic and international operator OAO Kazakhtelecom in 2004, a Finance Ministry official said Monday. The government intends to fully deregulate its telecom market by 2005. Kazakhtelecom currently has monopoly rights for long-distance and international calls. The official estimated the privatization could lead to a 30% fall in tariffs and add \$100 million to the value of the market. In 2002, the Kazakh telecom market was worth \$570 million. Kazakhstan's government wants it to grow to \$700 million by 2005, with the bulk of the added value going to new operators. (Dow Jones)

NEW TALKS START ON DIVIDING CASPIAN SEA BUT SPLITS STILL EVIDENT

12 May

A new round of talks began between the five Caspian Sea countries seeking to divide up the resource-rich sea but a north-south split remained as Russia, Kazakhstan and Azerbaijan were close to signing a trilateral agreement, Kazakhstan's deputy foreign minister said. The three northern countries "have agreed the text of an agreement and there should be no obstacles to signing it," Kairat Abuseitov told journalists after the talks opened in Kazakhstan's second city Almaty. The five-way negotiations, which are set to continue until Wednesday, are aimed at solving an impasse which, since the break-up of the Soviet Union, has hampered efforts to exploit the major oil and gas reserves beneath the Caspian. Iran still wants a 20-percent share rather than the 13-percent it would get if the sea were divided in proportion to the length of each country's coast, as the northern three have proposed, said Mehti Safari, Iran's special representative for the Caspian Sea. Yet Safari said Iran was being flexible, adding that bilateral agreements of the type already signed by Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan and Russia "are a way to multilateral consensus." The likely three-way accord between

Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan and Russia comes after each of the three signed bi-lateral agreements with each other. Turkmenistan and Iran reached their own preliminary bilateral agreement in March which foresees the start of work to delineate their common border, Turkmenistan's official media reported. Russia's Deputy Foreign Minister Viktor Kalyuzhny warned that bilateral agreements should not be an end in themselves. "We're ready for two-way, three-way and four-way agreements on the way to signing a full Caspian Sea convention," Kalyuzhny said. Kalyuzhny questioned Kazakh plans to build up a navy aimed at ensuring the security of Kazakh oil and gas installations, saying that the Caspian should be a "demilitarised sea of peace and stability." The delineation row came perilously close to boiling over into armed conflict in 1991 when an Iranian warship trained its guns on an Azeri vessel prospecting for oil in disputed waters. (AFP)

DOZENS KILLED IN CHECHNYA CAR-BOMB ATTACK

12 May

At least 30, and possibly as many as 40, people died on 12 May when a KamAZ truck loaded with explosives drove into the local administration building in the Nadterechnyi Raion in northern Chechnya. Chechen administration head Akhmed-hadji Kadyrov immediately blamed the blast on fighters loyal to Chechen President Aslan Maskhadov. Some 80 people died in a similar car-bomb attack on the government building in Grozny in December. In Moscow, President Putin said on 12 May that such attacks will not halt the process of establishing a peaceful political settlement in Chechnya. Putin instructed government officials to speed up the drafting of the planned power-sharing treaty between Russia and Chechnya. (ITAR-TASS)

PRESIDENT TERMS GEORGIAN PARLIAMENT BRAWL 'A DISGRACE'

12 May

In his regular Monday radio interview, President Shevardnadze on 12 May deplored as "a disgrace" the fistfight in parliament on 5 May between deputy speaker Vaktang Rcheulishvili and a group of opposition deputies whom he had implied are homosexuals. Shevardnadze noted with regret that such incidents have become commonplace. The Georgian Prosecutor-General's Office has launched an investigation into the fracas. (Caucasus Press)

ABKHAZ LEADERSHIP SIGNALS WILLINGNESS TO RESUME TALKS

12 May

Abkhaz presidential adviser Astamur Tania and Prime Minister Raul Khadjimba said in Sukhum on 5 and 9 May, respectively, that Abkhazia is ready to resume talks with Georgia within the UN-sponsored Coordinating Council. Abkhazia suspended its participation in such talks last year to protest the deployment of Georgian troops in the divided Kodori Gorge. Khadjimba also said on 9 May that he sees no need to create additional working groups to address problems related to the conflict, as recently suggested by the "Friends of the UN Secretary-General" group of states that seek to expedite a solution to the Abkhaz conflict. Speaking in Tbilisi on 9 May, Georgian Deputy Foreign Minister David Aptsiauri expressed concern that recent diplomatic

initiatives have focused on the resumption of economic cooperation between Abkhazia and Georgia rather than on promoting a political solution to the conflict on the basis of the UN-drafted "Basic Principles for the Distribution of Competencies Between Tbilisi and Sukhumi." (RFE/RL)

EXCHANGE AND MARKET BLASTS REPORTEDLY TRACED TO IMU

12 May

Kyrgyz Deputy Interior Minister Rasulberdi Raimberdiev told a news conference in Osh on 12 May that the same people carried out both the bombing of an Osh currency-exchange office on 8 May and of Bishkek's Dordoy market on 27 December. One exchange-office employee was killed in the Osh attack. According to Raimberdiev, investigators looking into the two incidents have found evidence that the two men who were detained in connection with the blasts are members of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), which was responsible for armed incursions into southern Kyrgyzstan in 1999 and 2000 and has been internationally designated a terrorist organization because of its ties to the former Taliban rulers of Afghanistan. Interfax reported that an unidentified source in Kyrgyzstan's law enforcement agencies said the two suspects might also have been involved in the killings of 19 Chinese citizens near the Torugart Pass border crossing in March. In addition to the two alleged IMU members, police in Osh reportedly arrested six members of the banned extremist movement Hizb ut-Tahrir on 12 May. (akipress.org)

MOSCOW ALLEGES LINKS BETWEEN SAUDI, CHECHEN BOMBINGS

13 May

During his meeting with NATO Secretary-General Robertson on 13 May, President Putin said there is a connection between the 12 May terrorist explosions in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, which left at least 29 people dead and about 200 injured, and a car-bomb attack the same day in Znamenskoe in northern Chechnya, which left more than 50 people dead. Putin said that both acts have identical fingerprints and the consequences of the two attacks are comparable.

He added that the Chechnya explosion was an effort by forces both within and outside of the republic to block the road to a peaceful settlement to the conflict there. The Federal Security Service (FSB) has issued a statement saying that the suicide attacks in Saudi Arabia and Chechnya "are links in the chain of international terrorism and have common roots and logic." (ITAR-TASS)

NUMBER OF HIGHER-EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS HALVED IN KAZAKHSTAN

13 May

Kazakhstan's Education Ministry has halved the number of institutions of higher education in the country over the last two years, ministry official Maksat Kalimoldaev announced on 13 May. Two years ago there were about 350 such institutions, and now there are 170, of which 32 are state institutions, according to Kalimoldaev. He added that the reduction is the result of ministry inspections, which found that many of the institutions did not meet official standards. He was quoted as saying that almost all higher-education institutions are calling themselves

"universities," even if they are not conducting basic research and lack the facilities to do so. The ongoing inspections can result in the downgrading of an institution's status or, in extreme cases, in its closure. The objective of the ministry's inspection is to ensure that universities provide a genuinely elite education, the official noted. The report did not indicate how many of the institutions that failed to meet the ministry's standards were state-owned and how many were private. (Kazinform)

THREE CASPIAN STATES AGREE TO DIVVY UP RESOURCE-RICH SEA

14 May

Russia, Kazakhstan and Azerbaijan agreed Wednesday to divide up the northern and central parts of the resource-rich Caspian Sea among themselves after failing to reach an accord with their southern neighbors Iran and Turkmenistan. "We've drawn closer and closer to each other," Kazakh Deputy Foreign Minister Kairat Abuseitov said at a signing ceremony in Kazakhstan's second city Almaty. Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan and Russia calculated their shares in proportion to the length of the five Caspian countries' coastlines, giving Azerbaijan 18 percent, Russia 19 percent and Kazakhstan 27 percent, Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Viktor Kalyuzhny said. Mehti Safari, Iran's special representative for the Caspian Sea, stood by his country's demand that each of the five countries get a 20-percent share. Safari, whose country has sided with Turkmenistan in the issue, also criticized the three-way deal, which Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan and Russia signed after concluding a series of bilateral accords between themselves. "On the basis of our experts' assessments, including historical data, the Iranian share should be 20 percent," Safari said at the close of the five-way talks, adding that "some agreements can make matters more complicated." Iran and its isolated ex-Soviet neighbour Turkmenistan earlier concluded their own agreement signaling the start of work to delineate their mutual Caspian Sea border. The three-day negotiation round among the five Caspian states was aimed at solving an impasse created by the break-up of the Soviet Union which has hindered the Western investment and expertise needed to exploit the sea's vast untapped oil and gas reserves. (AFP)

OPPOSITION LEADER PARDONED IN KAZAKHSTAN

14 May

Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbaev has pardoned Mukhtar Ablyazov, a leader of the opposition Democratic Choice of Kazakhstan (DVK) movement and former energy, industry, and trade minister. Ablyazov was sentenced in July to six years' imprisonment on charges of abuse of office and financial mismanagement. He requested a presidential pardon in April. The Kazakh opposition insists the charges against Ablyazov were politically motivated, pointing out that they were made not long after he took part in the founding of DVK. Opposition leaders have repeatedly demanded his release, along with that of former Pavlodar Oblast Governor Ghalymzhan Zhaqiyanov, also a DVK founder who was convicted on similar charges. Zhaqiyanov has refused to ask for a presidential pardon. (RFE/RL)

KYRGYZSTAN CLOSES BORDER WITH CHINA

14 May

The Kyrgyz government has ordered the closure of the Kyrgyz-Chinese border as of 12 May as a measure to prevent the spread of severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS). The Health Ministry recommended the closure last week. According to the Kyrgyz government order, which affects the Torugart and Irkeshtam crossing points, Kyrgyz citizens returning from China and Chinese citizens returning home from Kyrgyzstan will be allowed to cross for the next 10 days. Akipress.org reported that the Kyrgyz State Tourism Committee is stopping tourist trips to China. Regular air and road communication with China is supposed to cease completely by 15 May, although trucks carrying export goods and Kyrgyz citizens returning from China will be able to cross after that date. (akipress.org)

KAZAKHSTAN CRIMINALIZES HUMAN TRAFFICKING

15 May

The Mazhilis on 15 May approved additions to the country's Criminal Code that specify punishments for trafficking in human beings for purposes of sexual or other forms of exploitation. Deputy Justice Minister Irak Elekeev told journalists the adoption of the legislation added a legally defined crime to the Criminal Code --namely, the exportation of people from Kazakhstan or human trafficking. He said the action was necessary because existing laws do not cover the trafficking of people from other countries via Kazakhstan for purposes of sexual or other forms of exploitation. Elekeev said the additions approved by the Mazhilis impose sentences of up to four years' imprisonment for human trafficking. The authorities intend to use the legislation to stop transnational groups that recruit people for sexual purposes. There is already some legislation on the books in Kazakhstan dealing with illegal migration, deprivation of freedom, the abduction and sale of human beings, and recruitment for purposes of prostitution. Human trafficking has become a growing problem in Central Asia in recent years, and international organizations have encouraged the countries of the region to take more active measures to combat it. (Interfax-Kazakhstan)

KAZAKH OPPOSITION LEADER PARDONED BY NAZARBAEV OPTS OUT OF POLITICS

15 May

Mukhtar Ablyazov, a former energy minister and a founder of the opposition Democratic Choice of Kazakhstan (DVK) coalition who was jailed in 2002 on charges of abuse of office and who was pardoned this week by President Nursultan Nazarbaev, announced on 14 May that he is leaving politics and going into business, RFE/RL's Kazakh Service. Ablyazov said he has withdrawn from DVK because he no longer shares its positions, and he insisted that his release from prison was not connected to his decision to leave the coalition. Ablyazov also sought to smooth over a dispute between his lawyer and the opposition newspaper "SolDat" over publication of what were alleged to be chapters of a book he wrote, saying that he did not blame the newspaper for anything and that he might publish something in future. (RFE/RL)

RUSSIA WANTS IRAN TO SIGN NUCLEAR PACT

15 May

Russia on Thursday gave the strongest signal yet that it shares U.S. concerns over Iran's burgeoning nuclear program and called for tighter international controls to make sure Tehran isn't developing atomic weapons. Deputy Foreign Minister Georgy Mamedov said Russia would like Iran to sign an agreement with the U.N. nuclear watchdog, the International Atomic Energy Agency, introducing a close watch over all its nuclear facilities to make sure they aren't used as a cover for a nuclear weapons program. "Along with the United States, we are calling on Iran to sign the protocol," Mamedov told reporters. The statement came amid Moscow's efforts to restore friendly ties with the United States following a bitter rift over the war in Iraq. Since 1995, when Russia signed a deal with Iran to build a nuclear reactor in the southern port city of Bushehr, Moscow has shrugged off U.S. concerns that the US\$800 million deal could help Tehran build an atomic bomb. "Our conscience is crystal clear," Mamedov said, denying that Russia's nuclear cooperation with Iran had anything to do with weapons. In turn, he accused unidentified western firms of helping Tehran acquire nuclear weapons know-how. "There is a legend that all problems stem from Russia's peaceful nuclear cooperation with Iran, used as a cover for transferring nuclear weapons technology, and we categorically deny that," Mamedov said. "We are trying to attract U.S. attention to the fact that some concerns about Iran's nuclear weapons program are related to the illegal activities of several western companies." He refused to provide any details, saying U.S. and Russian intelligence and nuclear experts were closely looking at the issue, exchanging information and sharing assessments. The IAEA is to submit a report in June on Iran's nuclear weapons program and Washington expects the agency to declare that Iran has violated the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty by secretly developing a uranium enrichment plant in Natanz in southern Iran. "We are going to assist the IAEA in clearing up the situation in Iran," Mamedov said. "Russia is even more concerned over nuclear proliferation than the United States. These weapons can be used in acute regional conflicts alongside the Russian border, particularly in the south." (AP)

PUTIN PUSHES AMNESTY FOR CHECHEN REBELS **15 May**

Russian President Vladimir Putin asked lawmakers to offer amnesty to Chechen rebels who lay down their arms, pushing ahead with efforts to bring normalcy to the war-ravaged republic despite recent suicide attacks. The announcement came a day after a woman with explosives strapped to her waist blew herself up in the midst of thousands in the village of Iliskhan-Yurt in southeastern Chechnya during a Muslim festival killing herself and at least 15 others in an apparent attempt on the life of Chechnya's Moscow-backed chief administrator. Earlier this week, suicide bombers detonated a truck filled with explosives at the edge of a Chechen government compound, killing 59. In a letter accompanying the bill, Putin said the amnesty offer was "an act of humanism ... aimed first of all at creating additional conditions for the establishment of peaceful life in the Chechen Republic," the Kremlin press service said. He said it would apply to those rebels who had laid down their weapons over the decade ending on Aug. 1 this year, but would not cover foreigners or Russian citizens who were guilty of murder, kidnapping, rape or other especially serious crimes. Chechen administrator Akhmad

Kadyrov was not hurt in Wednesday's attack, but two of his bodyguards were injured, said Maj. General Ruslan Avtayev, head of the Ministry of Emergency Situations in Chechnya. The ITAR-Tass news agency reported that five of Kadyrov's bodyguards were killed in the attack in Iliskhan-Yurt, a village about 15 miles southeast of the capital, Grozny. In all, 16 people were killed, including two who died in a hospital overnight, Avtayev said. The attack wounded 143 people, of whom 43 were in grave condition, he said. (AP)

KYRGYZ GOVERNMENT SIGNS AGREEMENT WITH GAZPROM

16 May

The Kyrgyz government on 16 May signed an agreement with the Russian natural-gas giant Gazprom on cooperation in exploring and developing Kyrgyz oil and gas fields, repairing and building new gas pipelines, and transporting gas to Kyrgyzstan, Gazprom CEO Aleksei Miller said. Miller said Gazprom's presence in Kyrgyzstan will ensure reliable gas supplies for the next two years. Kyrgyzstan has had serious problems for several years with gas supplies from Uzbekistan, which has regularly shut off its deliveries because of payments arrears. Kyrgyz Prime Minister Nikolai Tanaev hailed Gazprom's entry into the Kyrgyz market as providing leverage that will help stabilize Uzbek and Turkmen gas deliveries to his country. Kyrgyzgas Director Avtandil Sydykov was quoted as saying that the agreement will not exclude Gazprom from participation in the planned privatization of Kyrgyzgas. (Interfax)

WORLD BANK TO OFFER \$171M TO KYRGYZSTAN

16 May

The World Bank will offer \$171 million in aid to Kyrgyzstan over the next four years, the bank said Friday, mainly aimed at helping the government's program to reduce widespread poverty in this Central Asian nation. "Despite a relatively strong economic performance and pro-poor growth, with poorer people increasing their incomes faster than average, huge challenges remain for the country," the World Bank said in a statement. "Investment has been limited, and infrastructure and social service systems have been slowly deteriorating since independence." Most of the money will be offered to this former Soviet republic as grants, the bank said. The new assistance strategy "reflects a maturing of the World Bank's relations with the Kyrgyz Republic, with a stronger upfront effort on helping the government to design its own development actions, and then providing funding and technical support to make these activities happen," Dennis de Tray, World Bank country director for the Kyrgyz Republic, said in the statement. At a news conference Friday, Deputy Prime Minister Joomart Otorbayev noted that Kyrgyzstan's external debt is nearly \$1.5 billion — or 95 percent of the country's annual gross domestic product. He said Kyrgyzstan aims to gradually borrow less money so annual credits are around 2-3 percent of the GDP (news - web sites) instead of the current 8 percent of GDP. (AP)

JUSTICE OFFICIAL SAYS DRUGS BECOMING SECURITY THREAT IN KAZAKHSTAN

16 May

Deputy Justice Minister Murat Raev told the Kazakh Senate on 15 May that drugs are becoming a threat to the country's

national security, RFE/RL's Kazakh Service reported. He appeared before the Senate to ask for revisions in the country's Administrative-Procedural Code that would clearly set out the responsibilities of school administrators and teachers in an effort to prevent drug dealing and use among students. Raev said 40 percent of the drug users in

Kazakhstan are students at secondary schools and institutions of higher education. Over the previous 10 days, law enforcement officials confiscated more than 47 kilograms of marijuana from students at discos, nightclubs, and on campuses throughout the country, according to Raev. Earlier in the week, Kazakh law enforcement bodies launched their annual campaign to eradicate illegal opium-poppy crops and wild cannabis. Increases in the number of drug addicts in Kazakhstan are attributed largely to the flow of illegal drugs from Afghanistan. (RFE/RL)

TURKMEN AIRLINES CUTS FLIGHTS TO MOSCOW AND TASHKENT

16 May

Turkmenistan's national airline has suspended its Tuesday and Thursday flights to Moscow and its weekly flight to Tashkent. Turkmen Air previously flew from Ashgabat to Moscow on a daily basis. No Russian airline serves the Turkmen capital. The reason given for reducing the number of flights to Moscow was the number of unsold tickets. It should be noted that although available evidence indicates that many people with Russian passports want to leave

Turkmenistan, the new requirement that holders of dual Turkmen-Russian citizenship as well as Turkmen citizens obtain exit visas in order to depart has sharply reduced the number of airline customers. The authorities can take a month to process a request for an exit visa and are allowed to refuse a request without explanation, making advance purchase of an air ticket a risky business. (RFE/RL)

AFGHAN CONSULATE OPENS IN TAJIK PROVINCE

16 May

An Afghan consulate was formally opened on 14 May in Khorog, the capital of Tajikistan's Gorno-Badakhshan Autonomous Oblast (GBAO). An agreement on opening the consulate was signed late last year, and the consulate has been functioning since early February. Speaking at the opening ceremony, Afghanistan's Ambassador to Tajikistan Muhammed Dovud Panjsheri noted the "invaluable" contribution made by Tajikistan's President Imomali Rakhmonov to establishing "peace and accord" in Afghanistan, as well as the help provided by the GBAO in improving the humanitarian situation in Afghanistan. (Asia Plus-Blitz)

ADJAR LEADER AGAIN REFUSES TO TRANSFER TAXES TO GEORGIAN CENTRAL BUDGET

17 May

Aslan Abashidze informed Georgian Minister of State Avtandil Djorbenadze during talks in Batumi on 17 May that Adjara will no longer transfer taxes to the Georgian central budget but will spend its tax revenues on local needs. Abashidze said that in the past his republic has regularly transferred the required sums to Tbilisi, but received back far less in subsidies than the sum to which it was entitled. He claimed Tbilisi owes his autonomous

republic 130 million laris (\$61.4 million). Djorbenadze for his part claimed that Adjara owes 30 million laris in taxes. The dispute between Abashidze and the central Georgian government over taxes has been going on for years. Djorbenadze's prediction after talks on the issue last September that a solution to the problem was within reach proved to be premature. (Caucasus Press)

TAJIKISTAN SEEKING FUNDS FOR LAND-MINE REMOVAL PROJECT

18 May

Tajik Border Committee head Nuralisho Nazarov told Interfax on 18 May that Tajikistan has developed a program for the removal of land mines left over from the country's 1992-97 civil war and those laid by the Uzbek military on the border between the two countries to stop incursions by Muslim militants. He added, however, that the country does not have the \$13 million needed to implement the program. Nazarov noted that 70 Tajik citizens have stepped on land mines in the last three years and that 50 of them were killed. Uzbek land mines accounted for 23 deaths and 21 serious injuries. The Tajik Defense Ministry press office has said that between 1994 and January 2003, more than 10,000 land mines were destroyed, but the ministry believes there are still about 15,000 live mines in the country. The report also said that 2,500 square kilometers of the country were believed to be mined, of which only 180 square kilometers have been cleared to date. Six hundred kilometers of roadways were mined, of which 50 kilometers have been cleared. The OSCE intends to provide Tajikistan with 200,000 euros (\$232,000) for marking minefields, and the United States, Japan, and Norway have indicated their willingness to help remove land mines in Tajikistan. (Interfax)

AZERBAIJANI OPPOSITION PLANS NEW PROTESTS

19 May

Opposition Musavat Party Chairman Isa Gambar, who is also chairman of the Democratic Congress that unites 10 opposition parties, expressed support on 19 May for plans by the Opposition Coordinating Council (MKM), a rival political alignment of nine political parties, to hold further demonstrations to demand that the presidential elections due in October are free and fair. Some 25,000 people attended a demonstration in Baku on 18 May convened by the MKM. The MKM plans to hold further demonstrations in the provinces on 25 May. (Turan)

KAZAKHSTAN TAKES LARGER ROLE IN RUNNING BAIKONUR SPACE CENTER

19 May

Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbaev met with the head of the Ministry of Transport's Aerospace Committee, Almas Kosunov, on 19 May to discuss the country's enhanced role running the Baikonur space complex. The two men also discussed the general development of Kazakhstan's aerospace industry. Kosunov reported that two Kazakhs who have been selected to take part in space missions, Aidyn Aimbetov and Mukhtar Aimakhanov, will be sent to the Russian cosmonaut-training center outside of Moscow in July for two years of training. This year Kazakhstan will take on a significant role in funding modernization programs at Baikonur. The reports quoted

Nazarbaev as saying that ensuring environmental security should be a priority in the modernization projects.

According to eyewitness reports, a large part of western Kazakhstan is littered with debris left behind by the Soviet space program, and much of it is harmful to the environment. Some Kazakh politicians have demanded that Russia clean up the mess as a condition for its continued use of Baikonur. (Interfax-Kazakhstan)

KYRGYZ HUNGER STRIKERS DEMAND MEETING WITH PRESIDENT

19 May

Eighteen hunger strikers are demanding a meeting with President Akaev to discuss the issue of punishment for the persons responsible for the deaths of their relatives who were shot by police during the March 2002 demonstration in Aksy Raion. The women were detained by police on 15 May when they tried to obtain a meeting with Akaev. They are demanding a written guarantee from the government that the president will receive them and that they will not be detained again. They are staging their hunger strike in the Bishkek apartment of opposition parliamentarian Azimbek Beknazarov, whose arrest in January 2002 the Aksy demonstrators were protesting. One striker was quoted as saying that if Akaev cannot ensure that those responsible for the Aksy deaths are punished, he should resign. (akipress.org)

TAJIKISTAN PLANS RESETTLEMENT OF MOUNTAIN INHABITANTS

19 May

The Tajik government has approved a plan for the voluntary resettlement of inhabitants of mountain regions to the plains. The objective of the plan, which is to be implemented in 2003-07, is to provide jobs for the mountain dwellers and reduce poverty, according to the presidential press service. The Finance Ministry has been instructed to provide subsidized loans to families who want to resettle. Loan recipients will have to repay only 50 percent of the amount borrowed. In the 1930s, Moscow ordered the resettlement of Tajik mountain people to the plains to boost cotton production. Many of those migrants subsequently returned to the mountains. (Asia Plus-Blitz)

CHECHEN FOREIGN MINISTER CALLS ON MOSCOW TO BEGIN PEACE TALKS

19 May

In a statement released on 16 May and posted on chechenpress.com, Ilyas Akhmadov said the Chechen bombings on 12 and 14 May show the need for Russia to begin talks with "the legitimate Chechen government of democratically elected President Aslan Maskhadov. "Chechnya needs peace, and it needs it now," Akhmadov said. He said that Russia's "policy of genocide" in Chechnya impels individual Chechens to resort to terrorist acts. He stressed that the government he represents "categorically and unconditionally" rejects such actions, adding that "a just peace is ultimately the only way to prevent this deeply alarming trend." (RFE/RL)

KAZAKH PARLIAMENT VOTES CONFIDENCE IN GOVERNMENT

19 May

The Kazakh parliament approved a vote of confidence on 19 May in the government of Kazakh Prime Minister Imanghaliy Tasmaghambetov. The vote had been scheduled for 16 May, but was postponed. Fifty-five deputies of the Mazhilis (lower house) voted against the government and 18 for it, while three senators voted against the government and 34 voted for it, according to the report. A two-thirds vote against the government would have been required in order for the vote to be considered an expression of no confidence. Tasmaghambetov had called for the vote of confidence because of his dissatisfaction with amendments that the Mazhilis attached to a government-drafted Land Code. He has said that if the confidence vote went in favor of his government, the code would be considered adopted as written, without a further vote and without any of the amendments approved by the Mazhilis. This is the first time a law has been adopted without having been approved by the Senate. (khabar.kz)

RUSSIAN AUTHORITIES REPORTEDLY ISSUE WARRANT FOR ARREST OF TOP TURKMEN OPPOSITION MEMBER

19 May

Turkmen Prosecutor-General Kurbanbibi Atadjanova has said that Moscow Oblast's Zarai Raion court has issued an arrest warrant for the former head of Turkmenistan's Central Bank, Khudaiberdy Orazov. Orazov fled to Russia in early 2002 and joined the Turkmen opposition in exile. The Turkmen authorities subsequently accused him of embezzling \$72 million during his tenure at the Central Bank. According to Atadjanova, the Russian arrest warrant charges Orazov with falsifying documents to obtain a Russian passport. She also alleged that he joined with fellow Turkmen opposition members in a plot to kill Turkmen President Saparmurat Niyazov, overthrow the country's constitutional order, and take power themselves. Niyazov has used the purported 25 November assassination attempt against him to destroy the opposition in exile. (turkmenistan.ru)

REBELS TARGET AID WORKERS IN AFGHANISTAN

20 May

Aid workers in Afghanistan say rebels are increasingly targeting them in an effort to undermine the U.S.-backed government and undermine post-war reconstruction. In the last month alone, seven Afghan mine-clearers have been shot and one killed in four separate ambushes in the south of the country. In March, an International Red Cross water engineer from El Salvador was murdered in southern Kandahar province. And in April, assailants threw grenades at a U.N. children's agency compound in the east. The United Nations has responded by suspending travel on some roads and restricting U.N. vehicle movements to daylight hours. On Thursday, they announced staff would only travel in six of the most volatile southern provinces if they were given armed escorts by the government. "There's clearly a sense that it's getting much more risky," said Paul Barker, country director for the U.S. aid group, CARE. Many aid agencies in the south are moving around in beat-up, unmarked cars or taxis and some foreigners working in the region are donning traditional Afghan dress. Barker said CARE had been taking such measures for years. "Now we're just trying to lower our profile yet more and blend in as much as possible. We're restricting expatriate

travel much more than we used to," The United States says it has been shifting its own focus from combat to reconstruction operations with so-called "Provincial Reconstruction Teams, or PRTs, each comprised of 60-100 soldiers. American officials say the idea is to increase aid and security simultaneously, but aid workers say PRTs are having the opposite effect. "What they are doing is creating confusion in the minds of the people and actually increasing our insecurity," Robillard said. "What you have is people in and out of uniform distributing aid, but the ones in uniform are also engaged in hunting al-Qaida and Taliban and killing them. Not everyone makes the distinction." (AP)

**RADICAL CHECHEN WARLORD CLAIMS
RESPONSIBILITY FOR RECENT BOMBINGS**

20 May

In a statement posted on 19 May on kavkazcenter.com, field commander Shamil Basaev claimed responsibility for the 12 May car-bomb attack in Znamenskoe in northern Chechnya and the suicide bombing two days later in Gudermes Raion. Deputy Prosecutor-General Fridinskii declined to comment on Basaev's claim, noting that no evidence is yet available to substantiate it. In February, Basaev likewise claimed responsibility for a car-bomb attack that seriously damaged the Chechen government building in Grozny. Meanwhile, in a written statement to Reuters, Chechen President Aslan Maskhadov denied responsibility for last week's bombings, saying he is convinced the perpetrators were acting on orders from Russia's special forces with the explicit aim of discrediting the Chechen resistance forces he commands. (RFE/RL)

