



WASHINGTON, D.C. May 30, 2008

TO: NCSJ Leadership and Interested Parties

**FROM: Edward B. Robin, Chairman;
Lesley Israel, NCSJ President;
Mark B. Levin, NCSJ Executive Director**

In Brief: Fighting Anti-Semitism in Ukraine; Board of Governors Meeting

Dear Friend,

Almost every week is an eventful one at NCSJ, and this week was no exception. We organized a meeting for several of our member agencies with Ukrainian Special Envoy on Anti-Semitism Olexander Gorin. Deputy Foreign Minister Gorin detailed his government's efforts to combat popular anti-Semitism in Ukraine. Mr. Gorin has pulled together representatives from the Security Services and the Justice, Education, and Internal Affairs Ministries to coordinate the government's approach. He spoke about strengthening hate crime legislation, expanding educational opportunities and better using the mass media to prevent and combat anti-Semitism.

NCSJ and several of our member agencies have been urging the Ukrainian government to be more proactive in addressing the problem of popular anti-Semitism. It was very gratifying to hear from Mr. Gorin that our combined efforts are beginning to bear fruit. We will continue to work closely with the Ukrainian government to ensure that these good words turn into concrete action.

NCSJ's leadership mission last week to Belarus coincided with the Minsk meeting of the Prime Ministers of the CIS. It was fascinating to watch Vladimir Putin in his new role as Russian Prime Minister mingling with his new colleagues. During this trip he assumed another new position – Minister of the Russian-Belarus Alliance. In the past, this position has been more pro forma than substantive, but Mr. Putin's takes an active approach to governance and it will be interesting to see what he does with these additional responsibilities. It has only been a few weeks since the transition of power in Russia, but one thing is clear – Vladimir Putin remains a dominant (if not *the* dominant) political figure in Russia.

Over the course of the U.S. presidential campaign, I suspect that Russia will become a more important part of the foreign policy debate between the candidates. Issues ranging from Iran and nuclear disarmament to the ongoing regional territorial disputes will focus greater attention on Russia. In this week's update, we have included a story about Sen. McCain's support for closer cooperation with Russia on nuclear disarmament issues. In addition, there are stories highlighting ongoing U.S.-Russia tensions over Georgia and missile defense.

On Tuesday, June 17th, NCSJ's Board of Governors meets in Washington, D.C. ([click here for details](#)) I am pleased to inform you that William Burns, the new Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs and former U.S. Ambassador to Russia, will be the keynote speaker. Under Secretary Burns is one of our country's most accomplished diplomats and will speak about current U.S.-Russia relations as well as our interests in the rest of the former Soviet Union. We will also be presenting Alexander Mashkevich, President of the Euro-Asian Jewish Congress, with the NCSJ Torch of Liberty Award. I hope you can join us for this exciting and important meeting.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Mark B. Levin'. The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Mark B. Levin
Executive Director



Advocates on behalf of Jews in Russia,
Ukraine, the Baltic States & Eurasia

NCSJ WEEKLY NEWS BRIEF
Washington, D.C. May 30, 2008

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#1

Soviet Jewry activists meet in Moldova, Belarus JTA Brief, May 27, 2008

A delegation from the National Conference on Soviet Jewry met with leaders in Moldova and Belarus.

The six-person delegation met with Moldovan President Vladimir Voronin on May 20 and confirmed his support for the United States' position on a 2009 follow-up to the World Conference Against Racism. The United States has said it would not participate if the conference becomes a platform for anti-Semitic and anti-Zionist rhetoric like the 2001 meeting in Durban.

NCSJ executive director Mark Levin told JTA the Moldovan president also stressed strong support for strengthening and rebuilding the Jewish community, which the U.S. State Department estimates at 25,000 members.

In Minsk, a roundtable of Belarusian Jewish community leaders voiced their concerns to the visiting delegation.

Twenty-four Belarusian Jewish leaders said that to maintain continuity in their community, they needed to find a way to build a Jewish school that could enliven a younger generation.

The NCSJ delegation also met with the charges d'affaires of the American Embassy in Minsk, which has been forcibly reduced from a staff of more than 30 to four American diplomats in recent months in a diplomatic tit-for-tat with the Belarusian government.

At the meeting, the delegation discussed the state of the Belarusian Jewish community and recent incidents involving Jewish cemeteries that have drawn international attention.

Jonathan Moore, now the highest ranking U.S. diplomat in Belarus, said that local officials had made an effort to do the right thing with a cemetery in Gomel that was unearthed during the expansion of a soccer stadium.

#2

Help Russia Help Us

By RICHARD LUGAR and SAM NUNN

The New York Times, May 30, 2008

IN a campaign speech this week, John McCain cited the “special responsibility” of the United States and Russia to cooperate to prevent the spread and use of nuclear weapons. There is a remarkable consensus among the presidential candidates about this imperative. But we must not wait until a new administration in 2009 to advance this vital work. An agreement the Bush administration signed with Russia earlier this month is an essential step for this cooperation. That agreement is now before Congress.

The overriding priority of our national security policy must be to prevent the spread of weapons of mass destruction. This task is impossible without the cooperation of Russia. Whether our goal is to lock down nuclear weapons and highly enriched uranium and plutonium, to apply pressure to difficult regimes or to provide other countries with assurances of nuclear-fuel services (both providing and removing the fuel needed for civilian nuclear energy), Russia plays a central role.

The United States already has agreements like the one pending with Russia with 18 countries, including China, and two international organizations. They set the nonproliferation conditions for the transfer — for peaceful, civilian purposes — of nuclear fuel, nuclear reactors and their major components, and certain nuclear technologies.

Having an agreement with Russia would also permit joint work on projects to inhibit the spread of nuclear weapons technology. Under the agreement, the United States and Russia, working together with other nations, can close the major loophole in the world’s nuclear-nonproliferation regime: the ability of a nation, like Iran, to walk up to the threshold of a nuclear bomb by building an enrichment plant for allegedly peaceful energy needs, and then simply renounce its binding obligation under the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty not to build a bomb.

With this agreement, we can better work with Russia to create an international fuel bank and guarantee the availability of nuclear-fuel services on the international market, undercutting countries that falsely claim they want to enrich and reprocess uranium but only for civilian use. Russia’s role is essential.

Additionally, our two countries could develop new types of nuclear power plants that increase the difficulty of diverting nuclear materials for weapons. We could share technologies to improve detection of illicit nuclear materials. We could enhance the safety of reactors built abroad. But we can do these things only if we have this agreement in place.

Although the agreement creates a framework for cooperation, it doesn’t, by itself, authorize any of these projects. Nuclear material that originates from the United States cannot be enriched or reprocessed without our government’s approval.

Unfortunately, some members of Congress have come out against the agreement on the grounds that it should be blocked until Moscow does more to thwart Iran's building of a nuclear bomb. Russia can and should do more in this arena, but this agreement is the wrong bargaining chip. Rejecting it would, we believe, have exactly the opposite result.

One goal of this agreement is to prevent more countries from following Iran's path to becoming a nuclear power. We should not sacrifice our most promising long-term nonproliferation strategy in the pursuit of short-term leverage that is likely to backfire.

The critics say cooperating with Russia benefits Russia — and therefore we shouldn't act until Russia does more to benefit us. We heard the same argument in 1991 when the Soviet Union was unraveling, and the two of us urged Congress to help Moscow secure and destroy its weapons of mass destruction.

But we weren't acting to help the former Soviet Union. We were working to protect Americans. After spirited debate, members of Congress from both parties realized that cooperation was the only way to keep ourselves safe.

Since then, the Nunn-Lugar Cooperative Threat Reduction program has deactivated thousands of warheads and secured tons of nuclear materials. The world is safer as a result.

We need to summon that same common sense again today. The agreement for peaceful nuclear cooperation has been submitted to Congress, where by law it will take effect unless both houses disapprove. Virtually every nuclear danger America faces will be made more difficult and more dangerous if Congress rejects it.

Richard Lugar, Republican of Indiana, is the ranking member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. Sam Nunn, a former Democratic senator from Georgia, is the co-chairman of the Nuclear Threat Initiative.

#3

McCain Urges New Arms Pact With Moscow

By ELISABETH BUMILLER

The New York Times, May 28, 2008

DENVER — Senator John McCain distanced himself from the Bush administration on Tuesday by vowing to work more closely with Russia on nuclear disarmament and to move toward the elimination of tactical nuclear weapons in Europe.

In what his campaign promoted as a major speech on nuclear security policy, Mr. McCain told a small crowd at the University of Denver that he would pursue a new arms control agreement with the Russians and that he supported a legally binding accord between the two nations to replace verification requirements in the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty, or Start, which expires in 2009.

The Bush administration has refused to accept such binding limits on nuclear weapons, which its critics say has created paranoia in Moscow. Mr. McCain's proposal to eliminate tactical nuclear weapons in Europe sets him apart from President Bush as well.

"Russia and the United States are no longer mortal enemies," Mr. McCain said in a speech that was interrupted at least four times by hecklers opposed to the Iraq war. "As our two countries possess the overwhelming majority of the world's nuclear weapons, we have a special responsibility to reduce their number. I believe we should reduce our nuclear forces to the lowest level we judge necessary, and we should be prepared to enter into a new arms control agreement with Russia reflecting the nuclear reductions I will seek."

In addition, Mr. McCain said, "we should be able to agree with Russia on binding verification measures based on those currently in effect under the Start agreement, to enhance confidence and transparency."

But Mr. McCain's talk of nuclear cooperation with Russia raised questions about how receptive Moscow might be to Mr. McCain if he were elected, when another of the senator's proposals — excluding Russia from the Group of Eight industrialized countries — seems sure to test relations.

Mr. McCain's remarks were his most extensive as a presidential candidate on nuclear policy and were part of his effort to advance his national security credentials compared with those of Senator Barack Obama. Although Mr. McCain touched on the subject in late March in a major foreign policy address in Los Angeles, his speech in Denver served as a marker of where a McCain administration would stand on nuclear proliferation and arms deals with the Russians.

He spoke less expansively about Iran and North Korea, the two other nations whose nuclear programs will present the next president with a tough set of decisions. But he did not signal any substantive departure from the course set by Mr. Bush in dealing with those countries.

Mr. McCain made some nods to the neoconservatives in his party who have advocated a tougher line in foreign policy. But his emphasis on greater engagement with Russia and his apparent willingness to continue the administration's current policy of maintaining contact with North Korea, primarily through multilateral talks, led some analysts to describe his approach as owing more to the so-called foreign policy realists, who tend to be less hawkish and more focused on diplomacy and multilateral institutions.

In his speech, Mr. McCain also departed from Bush administration policy by promising to strengthen the Non-Proliferation Treaty, proposing increased financing for the International Atomic Energy Agency and requiring that undisclosed transfers of sensitive nuclear technology from one country to another be deemed "illicit and subject to interdiction" and by calling for nuclear talks with China.

Tactical nuclear weapons are typically short-range missiles, with a reach of as little as 300 miles, but experts consider them a threat to global security because they are small, more susceptible to theft and the least regulated of weapons covered in nuclear agreements. They represent 30 percent to 40 percent of the American and Russian arsenals.

In an opinion article on Tuesday in *The Wall Street Journal Asia*, Mr. McCain used somewhat tougher language than the administration had been using in describing how to handle North Korea. In comments viewed within the State Department as critical, Mr. McCain, writing with his good friend, Senator Joseph I. Lieberman, independent of Connecticut, said: "American leadership is also needed on North Korea. We must use the leverage available from the U.N. Security Council resolution passed after Pyongyang's 2006 nuclear test to ensure the full and complete declaration, disablement and irreversible dismantlement of its nuclear facilities, in a verifiable manner, which we agreed to with the other members of the six-party talks."

Mr. McCain's aides said the language did not represent a break with the substance of Bush administration policy but reflected Mr. McCain's insistence that the United States be able to verify effectively any agreement in which North Korea promises to abandon its nuclear weapons. Mr. McCain has long supported six-party talks — among the United States, North Korea, South Korea, China, Japan and Russia — intended to reach such a deal.

In his speech in Denver, Mr. McCain, the presumptive Republican nominee, like his Democratic competitors, called for a world free of nuclear weapons, and cited as his model the standard bearer of the Republican Party, President Ronald Reagan.

"A quarter of a century ago, President Ronald Reagan declared, 'Our dream is to see the day when nuclear weapons will be banished from the face of the Earth,' " Mr. McCain said. "That is my dream, too." He added, "It is time for the United States to show the kind of leadership the world expects from us, in the tradition of American presidents who worked to reduce the nuclear threat to mankind."

Nuclear policy experts said it was politically notable that Mr. McCain reached back to what Republicans consider the glory days of Reagan, whose views on the arms race evolved until he ultimately broke with the hardliners in his administration. More recently, the experts noted, a so-called Gang of Four of national security

statesmen have called for a nuclear-free world: former Secretaries of State Henry A. Kissinger and George P. Shultz; former Secretary of Defense William J. Perry; and former Senator Sam Nunn, Democrat of Georgia and the former chairman of the Armed Services Committee.

Mr. Obama and Senator Hillary Rodham Clinton have endorsed the Gang of Four approach.

Mr. Obama called last October for "a world in which there are no nuclear weapons," a fact his campaign underscored on Tuesday. "By embracing many aspects of Barack Obama's nonproliferation agenda today," said a statement from Mr. Obama's spokesman, Bill Burton, "John McCain highlighted Obama's leadership on nuclear weapons throughout this campaign, and his bipartisan work with Richard Lugar in the Senate. No speech by John McCain can change the fact that he has not led on nonproliferation issues when he had the chance in the Senate."

Mr. McCain's advisers said many people had had a hand in the speech, among them Randy Scheunemann, Mr. McCain's chief foreign policy aide; Mr. Kissinger; Mr. Shultz; Robert Kagan, a scholar at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace; former Secretary of the Navy John F. Lehman; R. James Woolsey, a former director of the Central Intelligence Agency; Richard Burt, a former United States chief negotiator to the Start talks; and Rich Williamson, a former deputy United States ambassador to the United Nations.

#4

Beware of the WTO

By Felix Goryunov

The Moscow Times, May 28, 2008

Russia's 15-year flirtation with the World Trade Organization intensified this week as multilateral consultations on accession resumed in Geneva. Although Russian WTO negotiators stumbled over still-unresolved issues -- farm subsidies, export taxes on wood and Gazprom's pricing policies -- they were optimistic about its impending membership. Since Russia's main trading partners, the European Union and the United States, now support Moscow's accession, it seems that there are no serious roadblocks remaining for official entrance -- that is, unless the Kremlin, after weighting all of the risks more thoroughly, decides that Russia is not quite ready to be part of the WTO.

Up until now, Russia's leaders have been blinded by a naive euphoria regarding their self-proclaimed economic miracle. At every opportunity, they claim that Russia has become an island of stability among the global financial turmoil. The Kremlin's top decision-makers are reluctant to face reality.

Although Russia has shown impressive growth based on natural-resources exports, the country is not yet fit for membership in this global trade club. To join it now would be to ignore the symptoms of the country's dominant economic malady, known as the Dutch disease. All the classic symptoms are present -- the windfall revenues from natural-resources exports, consumption-driven growth, huge foreign capital inflows, uncompetitive manufacturing sectors, an appreciating national currency and accelerating inflation. WTO accession would only aggravate these problems, as the overwhelming majority of domestic businesses are not yet able to compete with foreign companies. In addition, the country is crippled by mounting labor shortages, poorly developed infrastructure and inadequate social safety.

Nonetheless, the diarchy of President Dmitry Medvedev and Prime Minister Vladimir Putin feeds public expectations that the economic miracle will continue forever. But WTO membership in the near future will only exacerbate Russia's existing problems. Imports, which already account for about half of the country's consumption spree, and the strong ruble are a huge blow to domestic manufacturers. WTO membership would mean an even higher influx of imported goods.

At a recent foreign investors' conference in Moscow, Marco Franco, head of the European Commission's delegation to Russia, offered a sobering analysis of Russia's economic vulnerability. "If something goes wrong, the Russian growth machine might well grind to a halt, or even reverse," he said.

Igor Yurgens, vice president of Renaissance Capital and head of the Institute of Modern Development, which is Medvedev's think tank, believes that there are still disagreements between the Finance Ministry and the Economic Development Ministry on the road map for economic development. Finance Minister Alexei Kudrin believes that financial stability must not be jeopardized by inflationary growth, while Economic Development Minister Elvira Nabiullina insists on boosting government spending to improve infrastructure and social safety nets while there are still windfall oil revenues. The debate between these two ministries involves a fundamental question of the country's basic economic strategy, and until this is resolved, the issue of WTO membership is premature.

There is no doubt that Russia needs to be more deeply integrated into the global economy, which eventually means membership in the WTO. But this must be accomplished at a time and in a manner that best suits the country's long-term strategic interests.

There is still hope that Russia will take a sober and calculated approach to WTO membership. Before it runs hastily to the WTO, thinking that the organization will provide the magic potion for its economic ills, Moscow should look to Kiev as a test case. It should wait and see whether its neighbor's marriage to the WTO will be a happy one and draw the necessary conclusions.

#5

Russian editor guilty of printing anti-Semitism JTA Brief, May 28, 2008

A Russian newspaper editor received a year-and-a-half suspended sentence for publishing an anti-Semitic article.

Nabigula Dzhavatkhonov published an article in January 2005 called "An Answer to Zionists" in the independent newspaper Mnenie Naroda, or Opinion of the People, distributed in a majority Muslim republic on Russia's southern border, according to the Sova Information-Analytical Center.

The editor was found guilty of inciting ethnic hatred under Russia's hate crimes laws.

The article's author also was found guilty, but the statute of limitations had expired and he will not be sent to prison, according to a report in the Jewish News Agency.

A court in Dagestan, a republic in the turbulent Caucasus region of Russia, found that the article "contained statements intended to stir up enmity and hatred toward the Jewish people."

Socio-psychological experts examined the article, the local prosecutor said, and determined it contained "signs of extremism."

#6

Putin appointment to Belarus post concerns US By DESMOND BUTLER Associated Press, May 28, 2008

The United States is concerned about a new sign of deepening ties between Belarus and Russia at a time of heightened tensions with both countries.

On Tuesday, Russia and Belarus named Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin to the post of prime minister of an alliance of the two neighbors.

Officials and analysts in Washington say it is unclear whether the move is a step toward closer political union or a mere formality. But it comes as U.S.-Belarus relations have been in crisis. Belarus has protested U.S. sanctions aimed at punishment for its heavy-handed treatment of critics and intolerance of dissent. The standoff has led to the brink of cessation of diplomatic relations.

While tensions have also flared periodically between Moscow and Minsk, the announcement could be a sign that Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko is seeking closer ties with Russia in the face of the sanctions, a bad local economy and greater domestic opposition.

Karen Stewart, the U.S. ambassador to Belarus, told The Associated Press on Tuesday that the United States will be watching for signs that that the alliance is deepening.

"We will have to wait and see what materializes," she said.

Stewart has been in Washington since March when she left Minsk under pressure from the Belarusian government. She returned after Belarus withdrew its ambassador to Washington.

She said that the United States would object to any union between the two countries, if their people were not given a say.

"We have no objection to the integration of states as long as it is voluntary, as long as the people have been able to express their will and it is mutually beneficial and does not erect barriers to the wider community of nations," she said.

Belarus immediately downplayed the significance Putin's appointment, announced by the Belarusian and Russian presidential offices.

The post _ officially called the chairman of the union's Council of Ministers _ has been held by the Russian prime minister since 2000. The position was created in December 1999, along with the post of chairman of the Supreme State Council, which has been held since its creation by Lukashenko.

Russia and Belarus signed an agreement in 1996 that envisaged close political, economic and military ties, but efforts to achieve a full merger have foundered. Structures of the alliance serve coordination purposes and have vague responsibilities.

Lukashenko angrily rejected a Kremlin proposal in 2002 to incorporate his nation into Russia, and negotiations on strengthening the union have stalled. He has also sparred with Putin over Russian energy exports. Last year, he denounced Russia as a "huge monster" when Russia more than doubled the price of natural gas and imposed a customs duty that made oil more expensive.

The new appointment follows Putin's transition from president to prime minister earlier this month and the inauguration of his hand-picked successor Dmitry Medvedev as the new president. Kremlin observers are watching for signs that Putin is trying to consolidate power in the new post.

Before the transition, some observers had speculated that Putin might become the president of a new unified state of Russia and Belarus after he stepped down earlier this month after eight years as Russian president. That speculation ended when Putin made clear he intended to become prime minister.

Many say that Russian politics are particularly hard to read at the moment, because the lines of authority between Putin and Medvedev are unclear. Lukashenko's decision making is even more murky.

"As Alice in Wonderland would say, 'It's getting curiously and curiously,'" said Leon Aron, director of Russian studies at the American Enterprise Institute.

Aron said Lukashenko may be warming to Russia under the pressure of a bad economy, combined with rising commodity prices and well-aimed U.S. sanctions. Russia has recently provided loans to Belarus, ostensibly to help it handle rising Russian energy prices.

"I think it is in his interest in staying in power to do pretty much whatever Putin wants," he said.

Russia and Ukraine Lock Horns Over Naval Base

By MICHAEL SCHWIRTZ

The New York Times, May 24, 2008

They have bickered over NATO expansion, energy prices and how to commemorate a 1930s mass famine. Now, Russia and Ukraine are locked in a new dispute over a naval base in the Ukrainian city of Sevastopol.

The base lies in Crimea, a verdant, mountainous peninsula that was part of the Russian Empire and later Soviet Russia until Khrushchev gave it to Ukraine in 1954. After the breakup of the Soviet Union, Ukraine kept control of the region, but signed a lease allowing Russia to base its Black Sea Fleet in Sevastopol until 2017.

This month, however, Moscow's mayor, Yuri M. Luzhkov, called for Russia to assume ownership of Sevastopol. In remarks delivered from the naval base on the 225th anniversary of the Black Sea Fleet's inception, the mayor said that Khrushchev had never intended to give Sevastopol to Ukraine and urged a review of the current arrangement.

Many Russians, and some of Crimea's ethnic Russian majority, would like to see Russia regain control of the region, particularly Sevastopol, a strategic port city that they consider integral to Russia's national security.

The statements rankled the government in Kiev, which, in response, banned Mr. Luzhkov from entering Ukraine, saying his comments threatened Ukraine's national interests.

Moscow, already annoyed by Kiev's Western-leaning policies and particularly angered by its drive to join NATO, vowed to retaliate.

"Regarding the Ukrainian decision to ban Moscow's mayor, Yuri Luzhkov, from entering the territory of Ukraine, the Russian Foreign Ministry informs that Russia has been forced to take adequate measures against those Ukrainian politicians who, with their actions and words, do harm to the Russian Federation," the ministry said in a statement on Thursday.

Ukraine's deputy justice minister appears to be the first official to suffer retribution. After the minister, Evhen V. Kornichuk, suggested this month that Vladimir V. Putin, Russia's newly appointed prime minister, be banned from Ukraine as well, Moscow has made it clear that Mr. Kornichuk will not be welcome in Russia.

"Considering what Evhen Kornichuk said in his public address, we assume that he will not be planning to visit the Russian Federation," Andrei Nesterenko, a Foreign Ministry spokesman, said on Thursday.

A spokeswoman for the Foreign Ministry could not confirm Friday whether Mr. Kornichuk had been officially banned nor whether more entry restrictions would follow.

#8

Russia and China Attack U.S. Missile Shield Plan

By EDWARD WONG and ALAN COWELL

The New York Times, May 24, 2008

President Dmitri A. Medvedev of Russia and President Hu Jintao of China met on Friday to conclude a deal on nuclear cooperation and together condemn American proposals for a missile shield in Europe. Both countries called the plan a setback to international trust that was likely to upset the balance of power.

Mr. Medvedev's choice of China for an early diplomatic foray as president seemed to signal a desire to continue Moscow's assertive foreign policy — particularly toward the United States — that was a hallmark of his predecessor, Vladimir V. Putin, during his eight years in office.

Mr. Medvedev was inaugurated as Russia's president this month, but Mr. Putin retained significant powers as prime minister.

The announcements came as the neighbors, who challenged the United States — and each other — during the cold war, grapple with newer tensions over an array of military and economic issues, including their rivalry over the energy resources of Central Asia.

Mr. Medvedev arrived in China after a visit to Kazakhstan, which is seen as an important part of Moscow's regional energy ambitions.

His visit here is the first by a state leader since the May 12 earthquake that has resulted in the deaths of nearly 56,000 people in southwest China, the nation's greatest natural disaster in more than three decades. Russia is among the handful of countries to have sent both aid supplies and rescue teams.

In recent months, both countries have condemned America's plan for a missile shield. Russia in particular has long sought allies to act as a bulwark against what Moscow depicts as American global hegemony.

In a statement signed by Mr. Medvedev and Mr. Hu, the leaders took issue once more with plans for a missile defense system "in certain regions of the world," saying such measures "do not support strategic balance and stability, and harm international efforts to control arms and the nonproliferation process."

"It harms the strengthening of trust between states and regional stability," the statement said.

The White House's reaction to the statement was muted. A spokesman for the National Security Council, Gordon D. Johndroe, noted that on Thursday Mr. Medvedev made remarks indicating that he remained open to negotiations. A new round of talks involving American and Russian technical experts is expected to begin next month.

"We're having discussions with the Russians in good faith about the sites in the Czech Republic and Poland," Mr. Johndroe said. "So we'll see."

The Russian-Chinese statement did not specifically identify the United States, which has angered Russia with plans to deploy elements of a missile defense system in the Czech Republic and Poland. Washington says the shield is to protect against potential attacks by rogue states like Iran and North Korea.

For their part, Moscow and Beijing have not always supported Washington's efforts to characterize Iran as a sponsor of terrorism and a potential nuclear threat, particularly to Israel. Iran says its nuclear development program is for peaceful, civilian purposes.

The joint statement also took issue with America's attitude toward the promotion of human rights, insisting that "every state has a right to encourage and protect them based on its own specific features and characters."

The statement reflected an argument among Washington's critics that the United States uses the human rights issue as a means of exerting pressure. It said governments should "oppose politicizing the issue and using double standards" and should not use "human rights to interfere with other countries' affairs."

In late March, as China was coming under growing international criticism for a harsh crackdown on pro-Tibetan protests, President Bush called Mr. Hu to urge restraint and to advise the Chinese government to meet with the Dalai Lama's representatives, according to the White House. He also asked Mr. Hu to allow diplomats and foreign journalists into Tibetan areas.

As a signal of the warming ties between China and Russia, the two countries signed a \$1 billion agreement for Russia to build a nuclear fuel enrichment plant in China and supply uranium. Sergei V. Kiriyaenko, the director of Rosatom, Russia's state nuclear corporation, described the deal as "a good addition to our presence in China."

Xinhua, the Chinese state news agency, reported on Friday that trade between the countries rose to \$48.17 billion last year from \$10.67 billion in 2000.

#9

**Sarkozy Saves Special Dinner Spot for Putin
The Moscow Times, May 30, 2008**

The attention paid both in Paris and at home to the beginning of Prime Minister Vladimir Putin's visit to France on Thursday was just the latest indication of Putin's place in the political pecking order.

Putin's visit to France comes as the country is gearing up to assume the European Union's rotating presidency on July 1, a position it wants to use to improve strained ties between the EU and Russia.

On his arrival, Putin reiterated past statements that he counted France among Russia's key partners.

"Our ties do not allow for a lack of expression or acute contradictions," he said in televised remarks after meeting with French Prime Minister Francois Fillion at Matignon Palace, his official residence.

Putin then headed for a working dinner with President Nicolas Sarkozy at the Elysee Palace late Thursday evening, a rare honor from the French head of state for visiting head of government.

Sarkozy, who is on a first-name basis with Putin and addresses him in the familiar "tu" form, greeted him at his car as it pulled up to the palace.

The dinner might provide an opportunity for Sarkozy to firm up his personal ties with Putin ahead of talks on a new partnership agreement at an EU-Russia summit in the Siberian town of Khanty-Mansiisk in late June. Fillion said he wanted a deal by the end of France's six-month term.

Putin stressed the importance of reaching an agreement at a joint news conference with Fillion after their meeting.

"In a month, France will head this authoritative union, and we agreed that we together will see that the talks over the new fundamental agreement between Russia and the European Union start as soon as possible," Putin said, Interfax reported.

President Dmitry Medvedev, Putin's hand-picked successor, is to host the summit, but it was Putin who made the trip to Paris.

"Our French politicians understood that the main power remained with Putin and that personal ties are important," said Francoise Dauce, a political analyst specializing in Russian politics at the Universite Blaise-Pascal at Clermont-Ferrand, adding that the dinner between the key French and Russian decision makers at the Elysee Palace was telling.

"Fillion is very weak, while Sarkozy is strong and wants to control everything," Dauce said. "You have the opposite."

Putin was his usual self in answering questions about Russia's record on human rights and basic freedoms at the news conference.

"Problems with human rights exist in every country. Let's take, for instance, the state of affairs at France's prisons and penitentiaries. Is everything alright there?" Putin asked.

"We are developing our country, developing a democratic system and civil society, supporting the press," Putin said.

As of late Thursday, it remained unclear what kind of treats might be on the menu for Putin's dinner with Sarkozy, who has proposed that UNESCO place French cuisine on its World Heritage list.

"That's their surprise," Putin's spokesman Dmitry Peskov said from France. Sarkozy's spokespeople declined to comment.

Sarkozy and Putin will address a wide range of economic and foreign-policy issues, Peskov said, adding, however, that no agreements would be signed. He said the leaders had no plans to explore the Paris nightlife.

During his January visit to Sofia, Bulgarian President Georgi Parvanov took Putin to one of his favorite piano bars after the official events were over.

A smiling Putin was shown on the Russian television being greeted on his arrival by Michele Alliot-Marie, minister of the interior, overseas France and local authorities, who as former defense minister had close contacts with Russia.

As president, the only countries Putin visited more than France were Ukraine, Kazakhstan, Belarus and Germany. He made seven visits to France, and his Friday schedule was to begin with a meeting with the man who usually played his host.

Former President Jacques Chirac, who was recently awarded a Russian state prize, was the first person on Putin's Friday agenda, Peskov said. Putin was also to meet with French writer and politician Maurice Druon, whom he also visited at his country home in 2003, visit a museum of the Cossack Life-Guard regiment and meet with French media.

Putin first met Sarkozy for the first time at the Group of Eight summit at Heiligendamm, Germany, in June 2007. During his election campaign, Sarkozy had been very open in his criticism of Putin's policies but appears to have had a change of heart since being elected.

During his first trip to Russia as president, Sarkozy said at a Kremlin meeting that he wanted France to be Russia's "privileged" partner.

Putin is being accompanied on the trip by a group of government officials and business leaders, including Industry and Trade Minister Viktor Khristenko, AvtoVAZ chief Boris Alyoshin and Vneshekonombank chairman Vladimir Dmitriyev.

The trip is his first outside the CIS as prime minister. Putin traveled to Belarus last week.

His visit to France this time caused nothing short of "tumult" as the French Foreign Ministry had a hard time deciding what formalities and protocol should accompany the visit of the highly influential prime minister, an unidentified high-ranking diplomat said, Kommersant reported Thursday.

"Everybody understands he's not just a prime minister," the diplomat said.

Severin Naudet, Fillion's spokesman, declined to comment on the report, saying: "I don't see what you are getting at."

#10

Kremlin And Kiev To Meet Reuters, May 30, 2008

President Dmitry Medvedev agreed with his Ukrainian President Viktor Yushchenko on Thursday to hold their first meeting in early June and urged him to stand by earlier deals with Moscow.

The Kremlin press office said in a statement that Medvedev, sworn in earlier this month, telephoned Yushchenko to "give an assessment of a number of steps undertaken by the Ukrainian side affecting Russian interests."

"[Yushchenko's] attention was drawn to the need to stick to the principles of partnership in Russian-Ukrainian relations, not to allow unilateral decisions and steps which violate earlier obligations and agreements," it said.

The statement did not specify which of the many irritants in ties between the two states Medvedev meant.

Earlier this year Ukraine and Georgia won a promise from NATO that they could eventually join, though without a firm timetable.

Russia considers Georgian and Ukrainian accession to NATO as a threat to its own security.

Moscow is also at odds with Kiev over the future of its military base in the Ukrainian Black Sea port of Sevastopol. Kiev wants the Russian Navy to leave after a lease agreement expires in 2017, while Moscow is seeking to extend the deal.

Periodic clashes over gas prices and transit tariffs are also a major problem in relations as Ukraine receives most of its gas from Russia and hosts the biggest transit pipeline to Europe.

The Kremlin statement said Medvedev and Yushchenko agreed to discuss relations during a meeting in Russia's second city of St Petersburg, on the sidelines of an economic forum on June 6-8.

#11

Moscow Choral synagogue celebrates Israel's 60s anniversary Interfax-Religion, May 26, 2008

Israeli President Shimon Peres has thanked Russian Jews for their contribution to the establishment and the development of the Israeli State.

"We remember that Russian Jews were on the outset of the Israeli State and made a colossal contribution to the development of our country. We value their contribution," he said in a video address shown at the Moscow Choral synagogue last Sunday when the believers were celebrating the 60th anniversary of the Israeli State.

"The relationship between the Jewish state and the Russian [Soviet] Jewish community started in this synagogue," he said. "Nowadays the relationship between strong Israel and the strong community is reciprocally important."

"I want you to know how important your support is for the Israeli State," he said.

"One should always remember that the establishment of the Israeli State was mankind's compensation for permitting the Holocaust," President of the Russian and European Jewish Congresses Vyacheslav Kantor said.

He stressed that the former Soviet Union played a leading part in the establishment of the Israeli State. Back in November 1947 five countries of the Soviet bloc ensured the necessary two-thirds of votes at the United Nations.

"Russia has always been close to Israel. It is particularly close now, as every fourth citizen of Israel speaks Russian," he said.

#12

Hate crimes charges dropped in Russia JTA Brief, May 26, 2008

Prosecutors in a Russian town near Moscow dropped hate crimes charges against youths who attacked a Jewish school.

Police in Bryansk last December arrested one college student and three teenagers in connection with five separate attacks on a Jewish school during late October and throughout November.

The youths, who are members of a neo-Nazi gang, shattered all but one of the windows of the Ohr Avner Jewish school and also shouted anti-Semitic threats to students of the school.

Though investigators said the attacks were motivated by ethnic hatred, prosecutors ruled May 21 that the youths will only face charges of vandalism and hooliganism in a local court.

#13

Georgia: Opposition To Boycott Parliament RFE/RL, May 24, 2008

Georgia's main opposition bloc has said it will boycott parliament to protest against elections won by President Mikheil Saakashvili's party.

Levan Gachechiladze, the leader of Georgia's United Opposition, said on May 23 that his bloc refused to enter parliament and called for protests on May 26, which is Georgia's Independence Day.

According to the Central Election Commission, Saakashvili's United National Movement won the May 21 elections with nearly 60 percent of the vote. The United Opposition bloc finished a distant second, with nearly 18 percent. The Christian Democratic Movement and the Labor Party also gained seats in the parliament.

The opposition has accused the authorities of gross electoral violations, including voting with forged identification and police intimidation.

Davit Gamkrelidze, one of the United Opposition leaders and the chairman of the New Rightists party, said the parliament he is boycotting would be a product of terror.

"I have no right to enter a parliament that is the product of illegality, terror, and an illicit government. I cannot become a member of a parliament that is illegitimate, unlawful, and which is a product of Soviet-style elections," Gamkrelidze said

RFE/RL's Georgian Service Director David Kakabadze said the boycott could widen, with a "high probability" that the Labor Party will join. The Christian Democratic Movement, however, has said it will not take part.

Reports Of Violations

Election monitors have said the vote was marred by violations, but was an improvement over January's presidential vote.

A report from the International Election Monitoring Mission stated that "there were numerous allegations of intimidation, some of which could be verified."

Joao Sores, the head of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly delegation, said the elections were not perfect, but substantial improvements had been made since January.

The U.S. State Department also said the elections were an improvement over the January vote.

Those elections, which were won by Saakashvili, were preceded by weeks of opposition protests. Saakashvili's government was accused of using heavy-handed tactics, after police used force to break up an opposition demonstration.

Presidential Test

This week's parliamentary elections were seen by many as a test of Saakashvili's democratic credentials. After criticism of his government last year, the Georgian president pledged to run a more open government and work more closely with the opposition.

Analysts say that Saakashvili may now be able to push ahead with his reform agenda. If the opposition continues its boycott, Saakashvili's party will have virtually all the seats in parliament.

The chairman of the Central Election Commission, Levan Tarkhishvili, told RFE/RL's Georgian Service that seats won by the United Opposition would not be redistributed to other parties. And on May 24, the commission said parliament will start working if two-thirds of all deputies participate. In the single-mandate vote, Saakashvili's party won 120 out of 150 seats, over the two-thirds mark.

NATO has said that the success of the polls would play a key part in the alliance deciding in December whether Georgia will be given a Membership Action Plan toward eventual membership.

#14

Georgia's election - Misha's test The Economist, May 22, 2008

IF THE Russians wanted to help Georgia justify its putative NATO membership, strengthen its economy and capture international attention, they have achieved their goal admirably. A parliamentary election in a small Caucasus country of 4.5m people would not usually attract interest. But Russia's sabre-rattling turned the poll on May 21st into a huge international event.

Russia has had a rancorous relationship with Georgia ever since the Soviet Union broke up. In recent years it has imposed a blockade, deported Georgians from Moscow and openly backed the breakaway enclaves of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, handing out Russian passports to their inhabitants. But after Kosovo's declaration of independence in February and the NATO decision in April to hold out the prospect of Georgian membership next year, the Russians chose to up the stakes.

Last month President Vladimir Putin instructed the government he now heads as prime minister to establish official links with Abkhazia and South Ossetia. The Russians then accused the Georgians of preparing to invade Abkhazia, and moved in paratroops and artillery, claiming they were part of a peacekeeping operation. Georgia interpreted Russia's actions as a provocative attempt at annexation.

It would be hard to find a more impulsive leader than Mikheil Saakashvili, but to general surprise the Georgian president has shown restraint. "We felt the best response is to stay calm, to conduct parliamentary elections and promote reforms and show that we are a democracy. We cannot let Russia set our agenda," he harrumphed on May 21st. Minutes later, the local media broadcast footage of Georgians in Abkhazia coming under fire as they tried to reach a polling station.

Early on May 22nd it emerged that Mr Saakashvili's ruling party had won around 60% of the vote. This election was a test of Georgia's democratic credentials after violent clashes with opposition protesters last November. David Gamkrelidze, leader of the opposition block that took around 15% of the vote, has duly accused the government of bribery and intimidation. But he promised in advance that he would not recognise the result unless his block won a majority of seats. The election was imperfect (some voter lists were missing), but it seemed fairer than the presidential vote that returned Mr Saakashvili to power in January. Tbilisi is calmer, and the appetite for street protests has diminished.

What the election did not do was to create a genuine opposition to Mr Saakashvili. The opposition parties ran a negative campaign aimed entirely at him rather than talking of such matters as an unemployment rate still close to 20%. But the bigger reason for Mr Saakashvili's win is that, after four years of liberal reforms, the results are coming through. A country that once had frequent blackouts now exports electricity. The economy is booming, albeit not to everybody's benefit. To grow faster, Georgia now needs stronger property rights and the rule of law.

But Georgia's future will depend as much on Russia as on its own efforts. And the problem with deciphering Russia's intentions is that it is unclear who is in charge. Mr Saakashvili says slyly that when he has tried to call Dmitry Medvedev, the new Russian president, he has been put through to Mr Putin. He adds that a senior security-service general is shaping Russia's policy towards Georgia.

The Georgians think the only way to defuse the situation is to launch an international peace process—an idea Russia vehemently rejects even before it is formally proposed. In truth the Russians long since stopped being peacekeepers and took sides in the conflict, which is as much about NATO, America and Europe as about Abkhazia. Sergei Lavrov, Russia's foreign minister, told his French counterpart that the decision to avoid military conflict had to be made in Tbilisi and in the countries that want to drag Georgia into NATO. The outcome of this clash will determine not only the future of Georgia, but also what kind of Russia the West will be dealing with in years to come.

#15

Abkhazia: Rumors Of Peace Amid Drums Of War

By Brian Whitmore

RFE/RL, May 23, 2008

With tensions simmering between Georgia and Russia over Abkhazia, a new effort is under way to jump-start peace talks in the separatist region.

Earlier this month, Mathew Bryza, the U.S. deputy assistant secretary of state for European and Eurasian affairs, visited the Abkhaz capital Sukhumi. Bryza's Abkhaz visit was followed by one by Irakli Alasania, Georgia's ambassador to the United Nations.

Bryza said his efforts at shuttle diplomacy are aimed at building on a peace plan proposed earlier this month by Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili that offers Abkhazia broad autonomy but not independence.

"What I was doing was trying to convince the leadership in both Sukhumi and Tbilisi that there is not only an urgent need but a real possibility to rejuvenate a real peace process," Bryza told RFE/RL in a May 21 interview.

Bryza added that the peace process, which is taking place under UN auspices, has been "bogged down" because of a lack of direct talks between the Abkhaz and Georgians.

"And to put it mildly, we had the impression that our Russian colleagues and friends were not enthusiastic about those sorts of direct talks," Bryza said. "So what I was trying to do was to offer our thoughts in the U.S. government about what a new rejuvenated peace process that complements the UN effort could look like."

Verbal Fusillade

Bryza's visit followed weeks of military and diplomatic tension between Georgia and Russia over the pro-Moscow separatist region. Russia deployed paratroopers and moved heavy artillery into Abkhazia under the auspices of a CIS-sanctioned peacekeeping mission. Georgian aerial drones, meanwhile, stepped up their reconnaissance missions over the territory.

Since coming to power in 2004, Saakashvili has vowed to bring Abkhazia, which achieved de facto independence following a vicious war in the early 1990s, back under Tbilisi's control. His efforts have been fiercely resisted by Abkhaz authorities and their patrons in Moscow.

But Saakashvili, who is trying to secure a NATO Membership Action Plan (MAP) for Georgia, has recently appeared willing to seek a negotiated settlement to the conflict. In April, he offered Abkhazia broad autonomy in exchange for recognizing Tbilisi's rule.

Under the plan, the post of Georgian vice president would be created and given to an Abkhaz official who would have veto power over legislation affecting the region. Abkhazia would also be given control over an

unspecified number of government ministries and a free economic zone would be established in Gali and Ochamchire, two districts left devastated by the war.

Abkhaz officials rejected the proposal. Russia then established closer legal ties with Sukhumi, unilaterally lifted trade sanctions that the CIS imposed following the 1992-94 war, and beefed up its peacekeeping forces in the region.

In a televised address to the people of Abkhazia on April 29, Saakashvili sharply criticized Russia for fanning the flames of conflict.

"The more we speak about peace, the more this [third] force speaks about war," Saakashvili said. "We're speaking about demilitarization, but this force is speaking, on your behalf, about intensive militarization. We're speaking about free economic zones, but this force is speaking about new military bases and new checkpoints. We're speaking about developing economic ties and opportunities, but this force -- again, on your behalf -- is speaking about increasing the military contingent."

Arguing that Moscow is not an impartial arbiter of the conflict, Georgia has been pushing for the CIS peacekeeping contingent in Abkhazia to be reconfigured to include non-Russian, CIS troops.

'Internationalizing' The Problem

On May 15, Georgia persuaded the UN General Assembly to adopt a resolution upholding the rights of hundreds of thousands of Georgian refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) -- uprooted by the war -- to return to Abkhazia.

Speaking to RFE/RL's Georgian Service after the resolution was passed, Alasania -- who is the Georgian official most trusted by the Abkhaz -- said the resolution was "not a one-sided document" in that it protects not only Georgian IDPs and refugees, but the Abkhaz people as well.

"This is a [very] big step toward resolving the conflict in the right way," Alasania said. "But I can also say very frankly that these documents enable us to stand firm on the foreign political front. A real progress with the process is up to the dialogue between Georgian and Abkhaz [peoples]. This is the main thing, if we want to really resolve this issue."

At a press conference in Yekaterinburg the next day, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov slammed Tbilisi for what he called "internationalizing" the Abkhazia conflict.

"The purpose of internationalizing these problems, in my opinion, is clearly propaganda, which was also the purpose of Tbilisi's recent steps in proposing a resolution on refugees and displaced persons from Abkhazia at the UN General Assembly," Lavrov said.

Lavrov continued this line of argument in remarks to reporters on May 21, blaming Georgia and its allies in the West for exacerbating tensions in Abkhazia and South Ossetia -- another pro-Moscow separatist region in Georgia.

"It is not in Moscow that one should be looking for ways to prevent a military scenario in Georgia, or in Abkhazia, or in South Ossetia, but in Tbilisi and in those capitals that are trying to drag Georgia into NATO," Lavrov said.

Is NATO The Target?

In his interview with RFE/RL, Bryza said that despite the bluster, he believes there are officials in Russia who are interested in resolving that Abkhazia conflict. But others in Moscow seek to keep the conflict simmering as a way to scuttle Tbilisi's efforts to join NATO.

"I know there are reasonable people, people I deal with all the time in the Russian Foreign Ministry for example, who do seem to want to get to a peace settlement that allows Russia to achieve one of its longest-standing goals, which is stability along its southern border, especially in the volatile North Caucasus," Bryza said. "But you never know what other people in the political system want to do. We certainly know there are people in Moscow who have tried to use a simmering conflict in Abkhazia -- and South Ossetia -- to try to block Georgia's NATO aspirations. I don't know who is carrying the day these days."

Bryza allowed that the sides in the conflict are "a long way from an agreement." He added, however, that "the process is under way" and there is a "certain degree of receptivity, not only in Tbilisi and Sukhumi, but also in some quarters of Moscow." He also said that military tension -- after a period of sharp escalation -- has decreased noticeably in recent weeks.

"We have to be sober in analyzing the situation in Abkhazia and it is quite tense politically and militarily," Bryza said. "But the military alert level has gone down substantially in the last couple of weeks and that is good news. I think that as the parties have begun to explore a new and credible initiative to pursue peace agreement and a political settlement, the militaries of all parties have begun to reduce their alert levels, so that's good."

#16

U.N. Blames Russia for Downed Drone

By C. J. CHIVERS

The New York Times, May 27, 2008

A United Nations investigation has concluded that a remotely piloted Georgian reconnaissance aircraft that was destroyed last month was struck by an air-to-air missile fired from a Russian fighter jet.

The report suggested that Russia's actions called into question its role as a credible peacekeeper in Georgia's territorial disputes, and it presented the Kremlin with a diplomatic embarrassment over its policy in the southern Caucasus and its previous statements about its military activities there.

Moreover, the report detailed a degree of military recklessness not previously reported, noting that the fighter jet's "interception took place very close to, or even inside an international airway," while civilian aircraft were flying.

Russia's military again denied a role in the episode. It has previously claimed that all of its military pilots were off duty the day the drone was downed, and even said that an American F/A-18 had shot it down.

But it offered no specific evidence to rebut the finely nuanced account and analysis of the flight paths of the drone and the intercepting aircraft, which were prepared by a fact-finding team of military aviation experts and released Monday.

Georgia's foreign minister seized on the report as verification that Russia was not neutral, and said the findings would be used to try to remove Russian troops from any peacekeeping role on Georgian soil.

The reconnaissance drone operated by Georgia, an Israeli-made Hermes 450, was shot down on April 20, but not before transmitting a highly unusual video recording of its own destruction in the sky over Abkhazia, a separatist region in western Georgia that receives Russian support.

The recording shows a twin-tailed fighter jet bank into view, approach the drone and release a missile that rushes toward the lens, leaving a dense trail of white smoke. The video ends in a blur as the missile nears the lens and explodes.

As part of its earlier denials, Russia had declared the Georgian video a fake. The investigators concluded otherwise.

By examining the available evidence and interviewing eyewitnesses and participants, and by correlating the radar records, the drone's video and maps of the ground, the fact-finding team "concluded that the video was authentic."

The team also concluded that the attacking plane was either a Russian MIG-29 or Su-27, and that it had fired an AA-11 Archer heat-seeking missile, which was detonated near the drone by its internal proximity fuse.

The report suggested that the fighter pilot had flown within range of the drone's cameras in order to avoid using longer-range weapons because of the fighter's proximity to an airway used by civilian aviation.

Russia has served as a regional peacekeeper since Georgian and Abkhaz forces entered an uneasy cease-fire in the 1990s, after Abkhazia achieved de facto independence in a brief war. The Russian military has at least 2,500 soldiers in Abkhazia under a mandate approved by the Commonwealth of Independent States.

The United Nations report said the attack was "fundamentally inconsistent" with Russia's role as a peacekeeper and "undercuts the cease-fire and separation of forces regime." It also raised "possible considerations under international law" without specifying them.

The report criticized the Georgian government, too, saying that the use of drones over Abkhazia violated the separation of forces agreement and that "this kind of military intelligence-gathering is bound to be interpreted by the Abkhaz side as a precursor to a military operation, particularly in a period of tense relations between the two sides."

It noted as well that the United Nations had notified Georgia on April 7 that the drones violated the cease-fire agreement.

Officials in Abkhazia had claimed that the Abkhaz military had downed the drone with one of its L-39 jets, a dated aircraft with a single tail fin. The L-39 is typically used for training and bears little resemblance to the jet on the video.

The report made clear that the United Nations did not accept the Abkhaz answer, and noted that Abkhazia had refused to cooperate with investigators.

Sergei M. Shamba, Abkhazia's foreign minister, said he disagreed with the conclusion that Russia had downed the drone. "It does not have any significance to us," he said of the report, speaking by telephone. "Let them think whatever they want."

But he welcomed the criticism of Georgia's use of reconnaissance drones. "We know from this report that Georgia violated the agreements and that the United Nations more than once appealed to Georgia to stop these flights," he said.

Eka Tkeshelashvili, Georgia's foreign minister, said the United Nations report had established a point that Georgia had long tried to make: that Russia is not a neutral party in the dispute between Georgia and Abkhazia, and should not continue to be allowed to play a peacekeeping role.

"The need for changing the peacekeeping format is clear," she said by telephone. "Russia has established itself as a participant in the conflict."

The report was released as opposition groups marched Monday in Georgia's capital, Tbilisi, to protest results showing that the party of President Mikheil Saakashvili had won major victories in last week's parliamentary elections, The Associated Press reported. Opposition supporters contend that the elections were rigged.

#17
Central Asia: Medvedev Visit Underscores Kazakh Victory Over Uzbekistan For Regional Dominance
By Bruce Pannier
RFE/RL, May 22, 2008

While the media focuses on new Russian President Dmitry Medvedev's visit to Kazakhstan, there is another important aspect to his trip.

Medvedev's choice of Kazakhstan as the destination for his first official visit as Russian president is an unpleasant reminder to many Uzbeks about the changing fortunes of Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan.

Nearly eight years ago, another new Russian president, Vladimir Putin, went to Uzbekistan on his first official visit abroad after being inaugurated.

Medvedev's visit to Astana is the latest proof that Kazakhstan is leaving Uzbekistan behind in the battle to be the leading power in Central Asia, a role that Uzbek President Islam Karimov and Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbaev have been vying for since their countries gained independence in 1991.

"Kazakhstan is the dominant state politically and economically in Central Asia and I predict that it will continue to be so for some time to come," says John MacLeod, senior editor at the London-based Institute for War and Peace Reporting. "Certainly as long as Nazarbaev is in charge and the economic outlook is as good as it is now."

There are now only two heads of state in the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) who have been in power since the first day of the organization that rose from the ashes of the Soviet Union -- Nazarbaev and Karimov.

Balancing Relations

Kazakhstan is geographically the largest of the Central Asian states and Uzbekistan the most populous, so perhaps the rivalry that emerged with their independence in 1991 was natural. Karimov's recent visit to Kazakhstan and complete rejection of Nazarbaev's idea of creating a Central Asian union of some sort (which the Kyrgyz and Tajik presidents support), shows that the rivalry continues.

Post-Soviet relations with Russia are a big factor in understanding why Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan seem to have different fortunes today, and explain why Medvedev is in Kazakhstan and not somewhere else on his "maiden voyage" as Russian leader. The current situation reflects the policies of the early years of independence.

"Karimov tried to take his state and make it into the regional leader, a role that the Uzbeks always saw for themselves and that naturally created some tension with Russia because here was a new country saying, 'I am the regional leader,' so implicitly Russia should step back," MacLeod says.

Uzbekistan could better afford bad relations with Russia, as Kazakhstan is situated between Uzbekistan and Russia, putting Kazakhstan in a different position regarding Moscow.

"Another important factor is that the country is closely interlocked with Russia economically because they have a long border and their economies are more closely intertwined than any other Central Asian state is with Russia and, importantly, also [on] a slightly more equal basis," MacLeod notes. He says other Central Asian countries are "closely tied" to Russia but "more dependent" economically.

Uzbekistan courted better ties with the West, as did Kazakhstan. But Uzbekistan did so at the expense of ties with Russia, whereas Kazakhstan never neglected the country that Nazarbaev once called a "neighbor given to us by God."

"One important difference between the two leaders is that whereas with the Uzbeks, whenever relationships with the West were relatively good, whenever the Uzbeks were courting the West, relations with Russia would be correspondingly poor," MacLeod says. "Whereas Nazarbaev made both relationships work at the same time. It's a different, much more flexible approach."

That approach is now paying off literally and diplomatically for Kazakhstan. Much of Kazakhstan's oil is exported via Russian pipelines and since both countries are getting richer from energy exports they are jointly participating in new projects -- exploring for new oil and gas deposits and constructing new export pipelines. Russia was the leading supporter of Kazakhstan's bid to receive the rotating presidency of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, which Astana is slated to assume in 2010.

Picture Of Stability

That says something about the countries, but what about the leaders of the two countries -- what is their image now?

As mentioned, Karimov courted better ties with the West after independence but Putin's 2000 visit began a thaw in the two countries' frosty ties. Then, in May 2005, there was the bloody violence in the eastern Uzbek city of Andijon.

Western nations condemned the Uzbek government for ordering troops to fire on a crowd of thousands of mostly peaceful demonstrators in Andijon and called for an independent international investigation. U.S. troops based in southern Uzbekistan -- in support of operations in Afghanistan and once warmly welcomed just after September 11, 2001 -- were abruptly told to leave the country within six months.

Russia supported Uzbekistan's efforts to confront what Tashkent said was an attempted coup led by Islamic militants and to restore order and demand that U.S. military forces withdraw from Uzbekistan. But Karimov's fickle foreign policy and events like Andijon have created some skepticism in Russia.

"History makes Karimov less of a known quantity," MacLeod says. He says that, while the Kremlin supported Karimov over Andijon, "it's that sort of incident that would create concerns about the long-term stability of the country, you know? [People start thinking,] 'Is this man the right person to be leading the country?'"

That contrasts with MacLeod's assessment of Nazarbaev: "Nazarbaev has proved a fairly stable character. His behavior politically has been predictable so that when he's worked with the West on oil projects, he's done it in such a way that he managed the undoubted tensions with Russia, because Russia didn't necessarily always want Western companies to be involved in Kazakhstan, but Nazarbaev managed that, made it work for all sides."

MacLeod adds that this stability and predictability of character and longevity in office has led Nazarbaev to a new and unexpected position within the CIS.

Nazarbaev "is the elder figure [even] among the Russian politicians," he says. "He is a known figure to them, many of them will have worked with him in the past but politically he is the elder statesman in the former Soviet Union and particularly in the former Soviet Union among those countries which remain broadly loyal to Russia."

Uzbekistan under Karimov, in contrast, is a country with a history of shaky support for the CIS.

Some basic facts help in comparing the two countries today. Kazakhstan is six times the size of France and has a population of some 15.4 million. Uzbekistan is a bit smaller than Sweden and has a population of some 27 million.

Uzbekistan's average monthly wage is about \$20-\$30, while Kazakhstan's is more than \$100. Kazakh businesses are investing in the banking and industrial sectors of many countries, which is not true of Uzbek businesses. Tens of thousands of Uzbekistan's citizens are migrant laborers working mainly in Russia but also, tellingly, in Kazakhstan, which has no significant migrant labor force of its own.

Kazakhstan annually hosts international conferences like the Eurasia Media Forum and Interaction and Confidence-Building Measures in Asia. The latter has attracted several heads of states and high-ranking officials from international organizations such as the UN. Uzbekistan occasionally holds international conferences but they are usually a onetime only event.

#18

Ukrainian Jews lobby for Sheptitzky JTA Brief, May 25, 2008

Ukraine's Jewish community wants a controversial leader of the Greek Catholic Church to be named a righteous gentile.

Andrey Sheptitzky, Metropolitan of the Greek Catholic Church from 1901 until 1944, should be named one of the Righteous among Nations by Yad Vashem, Moshe Reuven Azman, one of the country's chief rabbis, told the Ukrinform Ukrainian news agency during a Wednesday news conference.

Sheptitzky and his controversial activities during World War II have been a source of much discussion among historians of many countries. While Sheptitzky helped save many Jews in Western Ukraine during Holocaust, and issued the pastoral letter, "Thou Shalt Not Kill," a bold outcry against Nazi atrocities, he is accused of collaborating with the Nazis at the beginning of the war.

The Yad Vashem special commission did not find enough evidence to name Sheptitzky a righteous gentile.

"There is no doubt that Sheptitzky saved Jews during World War II and he should be recognized as a righteous man," Rabbi Yaakov Dov Bleich, one of the chief rabbis of Ukraine, told JTA.

#19

Holocaust memorial unveiled in Dokshytsy Belarusskie Novosti, May 24, 2008

The unveiling ceremony for a Holocaust memorial was held Friday in Dokshytsy, a city of 7,500 residents in the north of Belarus.

The memorial is located at an old Jewish cemetery where Jews were massacred by Nazi troops during World War II.

The commemoration was organized by the local government; Voluntas, a Belarusian-registered international charity; and US citizen Aaron Ginsburg.

Fourteen relatives of the massacre's victims arrived from the United States, Russia and South Africa to attend the ceremony, Franklin J. Schwarz, director of the Voluntas international relations department, told BelaPAN.

The park on the territory of the cemetery was renovated with donations from Jewish communities abroad and funds provided by the local government, Mr. Schwarz said.

Aleh Pinchuk, chairman of the Dokshytsy District Executive Committee, initiated the renovation project, which included straightening up old gravestones, building a fence around the cemetery and putting up black marble stones and a memorial slab bearing an inscription that reads, in Belarusian, "Remember the Jewish life that once teemed here," Mr. Schwarz said.

Ceremony participants visited the Dokshytsy general education school to thank its students for taking care of the park and the cemetery. They also expressed gratitude to local residents for honoring the memory of their ancestors and enabling the story of the Jewish community in Dokshytsa to become part of Belarusian history.

On May 23, 1942, most of the Jewish residents of Dokshytsy were herded into a ravine near the cemetery and shot dead.

#20

Turkmenistan's president may get longer term Reuters, May 23, 2008

Turkmenistan's parliament has told President Kurbanguly Berdymukhamedov it would like to extend the term of the presidency to 7 years, which would allow him to stay in power until 2014, official media reported.

Berdymukhamedov, 50, came to power in late 2006 after the death of absolute leader Saparmurat Niyazov who ruled the Central Asian nation for 21 years and was officially president for life.

"In order to facilitate the achievement of the goals set (by the president) it has been suggested to prolong the presidential term to seven years from five," parliament speaker Akja Nurberdyeva said on state television.

Last month Berdymukhamedov appealed on parliament to revise the Niyazov-era constitution, saying it was part of his push to liberalise the long-isolated state. Thursday's proposal was the chamber's first response to his appeal.

Berdymukhamedov, who chaired Thursday's session, gave no immediate reaction to the proposal but told parliament he wanted to restore its legislative powers, taken away under Niyazov.

The new constitution is expected to be drafted by September.

The West has long criticised Turkmenistan over human rights and urged its new leadership to show more commitment to democratic change. There are no registered opposition parties in Turkmenistan and the government tolerates little dissent.

#21

Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan improve relations

By JOHN C.K. DALY

United Press International, May 22, 2008

For the last 17 months Russia and China have been engaged in a three-way tussle with Western energy companies to develop Turkmenistan's vast natural gas resources. Since the death of Turkmen "President for Life" Saparmurat Niyazov, his successor, Gurbanguly Berdymukhamedov, has been adroitly talking to Moscow, Beijing and Washington about exploiting the country's reserves.

While Russia had the original inner track to its Soviet-era Transneft pipeline monopoly, China has also struck a deal with Ashgabat to construct a pipeline, a development that seemed to leave European and American investors out in the cold. Recent diplomatic developments between Turkmenistan and Azerbaijan indicate, however, that a "Western" export option via a pipeline under the Caspian, Washington's favored option, may yet see the light of day.

Prior to the implosion of the Soviet Union in December 1991, the Caspian Sea was divided between Soviet and Iranian spheres of influence on the basis of 1921 and 1940 treaties. In the aftermath of the Soviet Union's disintegration, four new states emerged, sharing the Caspian with the Islamic Republic of Iran. After the breakup, Western companies saw an opportunity to become major players in developing the Caspian and were eagerly courted by Azerbaijan and more cautiously by Kazakhstan. But the collapse of the Soviet Union produced a major diplomatic conundrum -- how to divide the Caspian's offshore waters?

Almost immediately two opposing positions developed -- Russia favored a division based on shoreline length, while Iran, whose coastline under such an arrangement would have given it a 13 percent share, argued for an equitable 20 percent sharing of the offshore waters among the five riparian states. Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan eventually lined up behind Moscow's position, but Turkmenistan under the mercurial Niyazov equivocated, sometimes backing Tehran, sometimes supporting Moscow. The end result is that 17 years later the issue has yet to be resolved. What has occurred, however, is that all the nations concerned have quietly begun offshore developments near their shorelines in what would clearly be their national sectors whatever the eventual outcome. Now an Azeri-Turkmen rapprochement may break the diplomatic impasse.

On May 18 Berdymukhamedov made his first visit to Baku, the capital of Azerbaijan, and held talks with Azeri President Ilham Aliyev. The discussions were the first since 1996. In an indication of the sensitivity of the talks, only TV correspondents and correspondents of the Azerbaijani state news agency AzerTadzh received accreditation to cover the summit. Journalists speculated that the two leaders would consider the whole range of bilateral relations, including bilateral cooperation in the energy sector.

The meeting was not the first between the pair; the two presidents met for the first time on the sidelines of a Commonwealth of Independent States summit in St. Petersburg in June 2007. Earlier this year the bilateral Azeri-Turkmen economic cooperation commission resumed meetings, while last month Turkmenistan reopened its embassy in Azerbaijan, shuttered since 2001 over ongoing disputes about division of the Caspian's resources.

The rift was exacerbated by the fact that the previous Azeri president -- Ilham Aliyev's father, Heidar Aliyev, who died in 2003 -- intensely disliked Niyazov, who reciprocated the antipathy. Their antagonism focused on the disposition of the Caspian offshore Kapaz oil field, known as Serdar in Turkmenistan. The Kapaz formation, located nearly equidistant between the Azeri and Turkmen shores, contains an estimated 100 million to 150 million tons of oil reserves. Further aggravating bilateral relations was the fact that since the early 1990s, before Caspian development took off, Baku owed Ashgabat money for fuel. Azerbaijan recently paid its outstanding \$44.8 million debt.

Currently Azeri-Turkmen relations are regulated by more than 30 documents, but these could be dwarfed if the summit talks achieve an agreement on a trans-Caspian gas pipeline, which is actively supported by both the United States and the European Union.

Such an undersea pipeline between the ports of Turkmenbashi and Baku, being clearly in the Azeri-Turkmen "national" waters, would have the advantage of not impinging upon Kazakh, Russian or Iranian sectors, simplifying issues of sovereignty for potential foreign investors. Foreign interest in the project is longstanding, as last year the U.S. State Department gave a grant for a feasibility study of the pipeline project, while in April EU Commissioner for External Relations Benita Ferrero-Waldner visited Ashgabat.

Optimism over a possible breakthrough is running high in Baku. While neither government issued specific details of the talks, the head of the International Relations Department of Azerbaijan President's Office, Novruz Mammadov, said, "Relations between Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan were raised to a higher level and further developed." The Azeri business community also senses opportunities. The president of Azerbaijan Export & Investment Promotion Foundation, Emil Majidov, whose institution up to now has operated only in Kazakhstan's Caspian Aktau port, is optimistic that it will soon open offices in Turkmenistan.

What is unclear at this stage, however, is the reaction of Russia and Iran to such a development. If such a project comes to fruition, Moscow stands to lose billions in transit revenues from its pipeline monopoly, while Iran, which has been upgrading its Caspian port facilities in the hope of diverting Caspian trade southward, would similarly see its hopes dashed. While the future is murky at best, both Baku and Ashgabat can certainly expect increasing diplomatic pressure from both Moscow and Tehran as they attempt to export their energy in an era of record-high energy prices.

#22

AZERBAIJAN: OFFICIALS PLAN FOR "PROBLEM-FREE" PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION

By Rovshan Ismayilov

Eurasianet, May 21, 2008

In looking ahead to a presidential election in Azerbaijan later this year, officials are emphasizing a sense of calm and continuity, and opposition leaders are divided among themselves. As a result, campaign season has been almost eerily quiet so far.

The election will not take place until October, so there is still plenty of time for politics to heat up in Baku. But some observers are predicting a continuation of relative silence on the domestic political front. With energy-

export revenue streaming into state coffers, the government remains in a dominant political position. Under current conditions, few ordinary Azerbaijanis doubt that Ilham Aliyev will win reelection in October.

Many pundits wonder whether the opposition will be able to come together in time to mount any semblance of a campaign. At present, unlike in the past, there are no opposition rallies (authorized or unauthorized), and no talk about opposition consolidation. The government, meanwhile, is content to count down the days until October. State-controlled mass media outlets have paid scant attention to the looming vote.

From the opposition camp, only Musavat Party leader Isa Gambar, and For the Sake of Azerbaijan coalition chairman Eldar Namazov have announced plans to run for president. The Azadlig (Freedom) bloc, which includes the Popular Front of Azerbaijan Party, the Liberal Party and two smaller political parties, intends to boycott the election.

Rather than taking aim at the presidential incumbent, Aliyev, opposition leaders have been preoccupied mainly with internecine bickering. On May 17, the Yeni Musavat newspaper, which is close to Gambar's Musavat Party, published an article that accused Popular Front Party of Azerbaijan leader Ali Kerimli of "fulfilling the orders of Iranian and Russian circles." The article contained similar accusations against Liberal Party chief Lala Shovket, another leader of the Azadlig bloc.

The following day, the Azadlig newspaper, which has close ties to the Popular Front, responded with an article that accused Yeni Musavat Editor-in-Chief Rauf Arifoglu of "fulfilling government orders."

It may be that Aliyev's greatest challenge in the coming months comes from within his own administration, some experts suggest. Several indicators have surfaced in recent weeks that suggest a behind-the-scenes power struggle is under way among Aliyev's top lieutenants.

Experts' attention has focused mainly on the usually publicity-shy presidential administration chief Ramiz Mehdiyev, who has made several provocative statements in recent weeks, including a complaint about supposed "interference" by the United States and European Union in "Azerbaijan's internal affairs." Mehdiyev also castigated Defense Minister Safar Abiyev, who officially nominated President Aliyev for reelection. Mehdiyev asserted that it was improper for defense minister to make the nomination, adding that "the armed forces should not be involved in politics."

In addition, Mehdiyev, during a recent visit to Moscow, received the Order of Friendship from Russian President Dmitri Medvedev, and then proceeded to call for Azerbaijan to adopt the Kremlin's practice of using the presidential administration's supervisory department to keep various economic sectors "under control."

"In fact, they are keeping all institutions in the country – in construction, social, industrial and defense sectors – under control. It is a very useful experience and I believe we should use this experience and apply a similar control system in Azerbaijan," Mehdiyev told the Azertag news agency on May 15.

Independent political analyst Ilgar Mammadov believes that both the defense minister's statement and Mehdiyev's comments in praise of Moscow and criticizing the West are signs of "some controversies inside the ruling elite concerning the upcoming elections."

"It is difficult to say exactly which games are being played there, but obviously these statements and moves are signaling the existence of some problems," Mammadov said.

Elkhan Shahinoglu, an analyst from the Baku-based Atlas political research center, believes that the power struggle will intensify. "Probably closer to the elections, we will witness more controversies inside the government," Shahinoglu said.

Such government tug-of-wars are usual during Azerbaijani elections campaigns, he added. "However, this time I do not expect anything extraordinary as happened in 2005 with Farhad Aliyev and Ali Insanov," Shahinoglu said in reference to the arrest of the then economic development minister and health minister on the eve of Azerbaijan's parliamentary elections for alleged involvement in a coup attempt.

The political jockeying does not appear to have had a noticeable effect on logistical preparations for the elections. Even with Aliyev's reelection seemingly assured, authorities do not seem willing to leave anything to chance.

Changes to the election code, expected to be adopted in late May, indicate that the government has decided to reject calls from the Council of Europe on ensuring parity between the ruling Yeni Azerbaijan Party and opposition groups in election commissions, according to one non-governmental organization activist familiar with the proposed amendments.

"The draft proposes 82 amendments to the existing election code. However, all of these changes are technical," said Alekser Mammadli, a member of the Azerbaijan Lawyers Association, which monitors pending legislation. "The amendments do not imply parity in election commissions."

One additional election code amendment has already provided fire for opposition claims that the election is stacked against them. Under the draft, presidential candidates must pay 300,000 manats (about \$364,000) to register for the vote if they fail to collect the signatures of 45,000 voters in 50 constituencies. Currently, candidates must pay a 30,000-manat fee.

Authorities rebuff criticism. "Let the international organizations criticize elections in their own countries," parliamentary administration chief Safa Mirzoyev said during a May 2 news conference in Baku. "Parity [in election commissions] is a useless thing which will hamper the elections."

That dismissal is unlikely to assuage international concerns about the vote's conduct. The May 14 decision of a Baku court to cancel the registration of the country's largest election monitoring non-governmental organization (the Election Monitoring Center), has already set off alarm bells. The Ministry of Justice filed suit calling for the annulment of the organization's registration after the publication of several media reports that the United States Embassy in Baku allegedly planned to ask the center to run a parallel vote tabulation of the October 15 elections.

"It [the court decision] puts the government's promises to hold free and fair elections under question," the center's chairman, Anar Mammadli, said at a new conference held the day after his center's registration was revoked. The US Embassy and the Baku office of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe have issued statements calling on the government to restore the Election Monitoring Center's registration.

Political rallies – always a sensitive subject in elections past – have also encountered difficulties. Amendments to the law on freedom of assembly specify that protests can be held only in those places designated by city officials, and only after the city's official permission is received.

On May 4, the Baku city government denied the opposition Musavat Party permission to hold a demonstration in the city center, offering instead stadium space in an outlying suburb. Musavat declined the offer. Meanwhile, officials are stressing that they will not tolerate mass opposition protests along the lines of those seen in Yerevan in February.

#23

After '05 Uzbek Uprising, Issues Linger for West

By Sabrina Tavernise

New York Times, May 29, 2008

Andijon, Uzbekistan — The theater that burned has a fresh coat of paint. Bullet holes have been plastered over. Newspapers talk of cattle farming, tennis courts and World War II victories.

Three years ago this month, the government in this eastern Uzbek city turned its guns on its own citizens, killing hundreds and drawing condemnation and sanctions from the West for what was the bloodiest repression since Tiananmen Square.

In a Soviet sleight of hand, however, the Uzbek government has deleted the event from this city's past and in recent months has taken some unusual steps: It allowed the International Committee of the Red Cross back into its prisons; released a number of human rights advocates; and enacted laws canceling the death penalty and introducing habeas corpus.

But this is Uzbekistan, a repressive country where laws mean little, rights are relative and torture is endemic, human rights advocates say. They argue that the government's gestures are intended to distract attention from the fact that it never allowed an independent review of the killings in Andijon.

"Saying everything is O.K. in Uzbekistan is like saying it's peaceful in Baghdad," said Vasila Innoyatova, a human rights worker in Tashkent, the capital.

But Western governments say further ostracizing Uzbekistan by extending sanctions — America's come up for consideration in June — will cause it to close back up, increasing instability in a region of vital energy transportation routes and strategic proximity to the war in Afghanistan.

A newly softened tone has already paid political dividends. After Andijon and a volley of criticism from Washington, Uzbekistan ejected the United States from a military base that was supplying the war effort in Afghanistan. Though there are not yet plans for the base to reopen, the Uzbeks have allowed the Americans limited access to a German base at Termez, and Uzbekistan recently offered NATO the use of its railway to ship goods to Afghanistan.

That highlights the difficult questions that relations with Uzbekistan raise for American foreign policy: How much influence should the United States try to exercise — if any at all — over another country's behavior? And will that country be receptive, given the abuse, indefinite detentions and closed tribunals that have been part of the United States' record in recent years?

As the gateway to Afghanistan and Iran, and an area where both China and Russia vie for influence, the five Muslim countries of Central Asia — the other four are Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan — have a strategic importance to the United States well out of proportion to their size. Uzbekistan is the region's heart, with its most religious population, and also, at 28 million, its largest.

The killings in Andijon tested that strategic bond for the United States. The government of President Islam Karimov acknowledged 187 deaths but dealt so viciously with those who gave information about it — a gravedigger who spoke to an Uzbek journalist was stabbed to death shortly after publication, and the journalist fled the country — that the true figure was impossible to establish. Human rights groups put the toll around 750.

Western nations pressed the government to allow an independent investigation. The European Union imposed a visa ban on officials involved in the crackdown, and the United States resettled a large number of refugees and is considering a visa ban of its own. Yet, three years later, the Uzbeks have not budged. In a five-part report in 2006 it said perpetrators of the uprising — "terrorists" and "bandits" — were responsible for the deaths of the 62 "civilians," or nonparticipants, who it acknowledged were killed.

A spokesman for the Uzbek Foreign Ministry said there had been no response to a request for comment sent two weeks ago.

So when European and American attitudes toward Mr. Karimov began easing late last year — the European Union partly suspended the visa ban in October, and in January, Adm. William J. Fallon, the most senior American military commander in the region, visited Tashkent, the first high-level visit in two years — many human rights advocates were bitterly disappointed.

"To be honest, they abandoned us," said one, a former ecologist who fled Uzbekistan in April because he believed that a criminal case was being prepared against him. He has not been identified for safety reasons.

Supporters of engagement with the Karimov government argue that punishing the country with sanctions leads only to less leverage over its policies.

“Uzbekistan is simply too important to ignore,” said one Western official who said diplomatic rules forbade him to use his name. “People on the ground want contact with foreigners. They value it. Once you go into isolation mode, you lose the ability to engage with the rest of the population.”

Mr. Karimov, 70, who has been in power since the Soviet Union collapsed, is not known for his democratic instincts, and many analysts are skeptical that any policy will encourage him to open up. He won a third term in a tainted election in December, though under Uzbek law, only two terms are allowed. Some say Mr. Karimov has not chosen a successor for fear that the president-in-waiting would kill him.

“He is totally fixated on remaining in power,” said Paul Quinn Judge, an analyst at the International Crisis Group and a former journalist, who has observed Mr. Karimov since the 1980s. “He is not the kind of person who would allow things to seriously open up.”

Indeed, some Uzbek human rights advocates say that Mr. Karimov has increased the pressure on them since the warming with the West began. In December the authorities arrested a poet, Yusuf Juma, on what human rights advocates and family members say were trumped-up charges, after he and his sons held up hand-lettered signs in a one-family protest against Mr. Karimov’s candidacy. In April, Mr. Juma was sentenced to five years in prison.

In March the authorities broke up a small group of protesters who had been gathering for weekly demonstrations since last year. The government then seized the offices of the group, Human Rights Movement of Uzbekistan. Two members fled.

“The silence of the West gave a good opening to Karimov to arrest my father,” said Alisher Yusufjon Ugli, the poet’s son.

Andrea Berg, an expert on Central Asia at Human Rights Watch, said that without the threat of sanctions, “Tashkent has no incentive to improve human rights.”

But at a time when the United States is fighting an increasingly complicated war right next door in Afghanistan, some analysts argue that realpolitik must prevail.

“It’s a really bad set of choices that the U.S. faces,” said Martha Brill Olcott, a Central Asia expert at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace in Washington. “If we didn’t have a war in Afghanistan we might have the luxury to take a moral stance.”

Nor is Uzbekistan quite the prison colony it is reputed to be. Despite the political arrests and brutality in prisons, the overwhelming majority of citizens are more concerned with making ends meet than with fears that the secret police will knock down their door.

“You can’t compare Uzbekistan and North Korea,” said a European who has lived in Tashkent for years, and who was not identified for safety reasons. “Not every right is violated all the time. It’s not that systematic.”

In Tashkent, a glittering city of clipped lawns and fountains, an Uzbek in his 20s, who is expanding his fashionable nightclub in central Tashkent, noted that there were long lines of Uzbeks in banks to apply for credit cards, and construction was booming. He said he did not read newspapers, but believed that Uzbekistan had press freedom because “there are fresh newspapers every day and they seem to be writing something.”

But good mojitos are far easier to come by than independent political articles. By the end of 2007, after Andijon and the ensuing crackdown on civil society, a large portion of foreign nongovernmental organizations and news outlets were forced to stop their work. Ms. Innoyatova, the human rights worker, estimates about 900 organizations closed. In an Orwellian twist, government-controlled nongovernmental organizations sprang up.

Yet, with the economy outside the capital stagnating, wages below subsistence level and millions of people migrating to Russia and Kazakhstan for work, most Uzbeks do not count freedom of expression among their top concerns. "None of this will work until there's a critical mass of people who feel they have rights and are ready to protect them," said the ecologist turned human rights advocate, making the point that, under Soviet rule, no one had rights.

Even the plight of the poet, Mr. Juma, left some residents from his southern town, Karakul, unmoved. "He had money. Why did he do it?" asked one young unemployed man.

Uzbeks have become poorer, less educated and more isolated in the 17 years since the Soviet Union collapsed. At the same time, the most religious parts of society have been brutalized by the government. It is a combination that has proved poisonous in other countries, including Iraq.

Ms. Olcott argues that Uzbek society is much less inclined toward secular values than it was 10 years ago, a shift that could eventually lead to Uzbekistan's becoming a religious state. "There's a lot riding on transition," said Ms. Olcott, who has researched the role of religion in Uzbekistan. "I think you're going to get another Islamic state down the road. The question is whether it's going to be tolerant or intolerant."

The Bush administration's counterterrorism practices since 2001 have eroded its moral authority with countries like Uzbekistan, analysts said. "The U.S. doesn't have the kind of leverage it had," said Sarah Mendelson, a Russia expert at the Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington. "We've got this elephant in the room."

In Andijon, the policy of forgetting is rigorously enforced. On the anniversary, newspapers ran headlines about sports competitions and the grain harvest. Even those who took part in the uprising seemed to have rehearsed the government line.

"The past is in the past," said one participant, who lived in Baltimore as a refugee but returned to Uzbekistan in 2006. "People don't want to remember."