

Congress to raise issues of their treatment when Mr. Aliyev comes to Washington. (The president is not related to the accused men.)

American officials say that Azerbaijan has been liberalizing slowly, and evolving into a more responsible state. But given Mr. Aliyev's uneven record and the allegations against him, his visit has raised fresh questions about the degree to which American standards are malleable.

"Russian public opinion, when it looks at the United States policy in Azerbaijan, cannot ignore the fact that the United States has a desire not in favor of democracy but in favor of profits and geopolitical domination," said Sergei Markov, director of the Institute for Political Studies here and a Kremlin adviser.

Mr. Markov and others have noted that the West has penalized Belarus for police crackdowns after tainted elections last month.

"This is one of the reasons that Russian public opinion is very suspicious of United States policies in the former Soviet political sphere, and its propaganda about democracy," Mr. Markov said.

"Ilham Aliyev will be in the White House not because he promotes democracy," Mr. Markov said. "He will be in the White House because he controls oil."

In Armenia, Mr. Aliyev's invitation has also generated interest.

Armenia fought Azerbaijan over Nagorno-Karabakh, a wedge of territory within Azerbaijan's boundaries that each country claims. The conflict has been frozen for several years, but Mr. Aliyev's recent statements have often been bellicose.

"The visit at this time should not be viewed as appreciation of their democratic or other policies," Vartan Oskanian, Armenia's foreign minister, said via e-mail.

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RETREAT FROM THE FREEDOM AGENDA

(By Jackson Diehl)

President Bush's retreat from the ambitious goals of his second term will proceed one small but fateful step further this Friday. That's when, after more than two years of stalling, the president will deliver a warm White House welcome to Ilham Aliyev, the autocratic and corrupt but friendly ruler of one of the world's emerging energy powers, Azerbaijan.

Here's why this is a tipping point: At the heart of Bush's democracy doctrine was the principle that the United States would abandon its Cold War-era practice of propping up dictators—especially in the Muslim world—in exchange for easy access to their energy resources and military cooperation. That bargain, we now know, played a major role in the emergence of al-Qaeda and other extremist anti-Western movements.

To his credit, the reelected Bush made a genuine stab at a different strategy last year in Azerbaijan and another Muslim country, Kazakhstan. Both resemble Iran or Iraq half a century ago. They are rapidly modernizing, politically unsettled, and about to become very, very rich from oil and gas.

With both Aliyev and Kazakhstan's Nursultan Nazarbayev planning elections last fall, Bush dispatched letters and senior envoys with a message: Hold an honest vote and you can "elevate our countries" relations to a new strategic level. The implicit converse was that, should they fail to deliver, there would be no special partnership—no military deals, no aid, no presidential visits to Washington.

Both Aliyev and Nazarbayev made token efforts to please Bush. But both dismally failed to demonstrate that they were willing to liberalize their countries rather than using oil wealth to consolidate dictatorship.

The State Department said of Aliyev's parliamentary elections, "there were major irregularities and fraud." Nazarbayev's election was worse. Since then, two of Nazarbayev's opponents have died or been murdered in suspicious circumstances. Three of Aliyev's foes are being tried this month on treason charges, and his biggest rival has been jailed.

Aliyev is nevertheless getting everything he might have hoped for from Bush. Aid is being boosted, the Pentagon is drawing up plans for extensive military cooperation—and there is the White House visit, which the 44-year-old Azeri president has craved ever since he took over from his dad three years ago. If Nazarbayev chooses, he will be next. He has been offered not just a Washington tour but a reciprocal visit by Bush to Kazakhstan.

Why the retreat on the democracy principle? Azeri observers speculate that Bush may want Aliyev's help with Iran, which is its neighbor and contains a large Azeri ethnic minority. But administration officials tell me a more pressing reason is a rapidly intensifying campaign by Russia to restore its dominion over former Soviet republics such as Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan—and to drive the United States out of the region.

Though nominally Bush's ally in the war on terrorism, Russian President Vladimir Putin has cynically exploited Bush's effort to promote democracy in Eurasia. His diplomats and media aggressively portray Washington's support for free media, civil society groups and elections as a cover for CIA-sponsored coups. Autocrats who stage crackdowns, such as Uzbekistan's Islam Karimov, are quickly embraced by Moscow, which counsels them to break off ties with the U.S. military. State-controlled Russian energy companies are meanwhile seeking to corner oil and gas supplies and gain control over pipelines, electricity grids and refineries throughout Eurasia. If they succeed, Russia can throttle the region's weak governments and ensure its long-term control over energy supplies to Central and Western Europe.

In late February Putin arrived in Azerbaijan at the head of a large delegation and proceeded to buy everything Aliyev would sell, including a commitment to export more oil through Russia. Earlier this month he welcomed Nazarbayev to Moscow, and scored an even bigger success. Not only did the Kazakh leader endorse Putin's plan for a Moscow-dominated "common economic space," but he also signed a deal that will double Kazakhstan's oil exports through Russia. Despite heavy U.S. lobbying, Nazarbayev has yet to firmly commit to sending oil through a rival Western pipeline, which begins in Azerbaijan and ends in the Turkish port of Ceyhan.

Putin's aggressive tactics forced the hand of the administration, which had been holding back its White House invitations in the hope of leveraging more steps toward liberalization. "We don't want to see Azerbaijan closed off by the Russians, because that will close off the energy alternative to Russia for Europe," one official said. He added: "If Azerbaijan falls under Russian influence there will be no democracy agenda there at all."

In short, the race for energy and an increasingly bare-knuckled contest with Moscow for influence over its producers have caused the downgrading of the democracy strategy. It might be argued that the sacrifice is necessary, given the large economic and security stakes. But, then, that was the logic that prevailed once before. According to Bush, history proved it wrong.

NORTH KOREA FREEDOM WEEK

Mr. SANTORUM. Mr. President, as we are in the midst of North Korea Freedom Week, I would like to speak to the human rights situation in North Korea. As we continually strive to protect the freedoms that this country holds dear, such as the freedoms of religion, press, speech and assembly that are recognized in our Constitution, we must also concentrate on spreading these freedoms to those who do not enjoy them. As these rights should be enjoyed by all people, not just Americans, freedom must extend beyond our borders to reach those who live in a world unknown to many of us, one that includes starvation and deprivation of all freedoms. North Korea Freedom Week gives us the opportunity to shed light on the situation inside this oppressive regime.

Several years ago in order to help promote freedom throughout the world, I began the Congressional Working Group on Religious Freedom. The purpose of this group is to focus attention on issues of domestic and international religious freedom. As a group, we seek to uphold and help enforce the meaning of article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which states: "Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance."

As has been noted by human rights groups and others, the human rights situation in North Korea is severe. Hundreds of thousands of North Koreans have fled their country in hopes of survival and in search of a free life. However, even if they manage to escape, they still live in constant fear of repatriation and imprisonment. President Bush has called North Korea's autocratic leader, Kim Jong Il, a "tyrant" who runs "concentration camps." Despite the country being embedded in secrecy, unfortunate stories of persecution, starvation, and public executions for crossing the border manage to be released to the rest of the world. Such actions under this regime are a terrible travesty.

While the North Korean constitution provides for "freedom of religion," such freedom does not exist. The U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom said in their 2005 annual report: "By all accounts, there are virtually no personal freedoms in North Korea and no protection for universal human rights. In pursuit of absolute control of all facets of politics and society, the government under dictator Kim Jong Il has created an environment of fear in which dissent of any kind is not tolerated. Freedom of thought, conscience, and religion or belief remains essentially non-existent, as the government severely represses public and private religious activities and has a policy of actively discriminating against religious believers."

There are a growing number of reports from North Korea refugees that any unauthorized religious activity inside North Korea is met with arrest, imprisonment, torture, and sometimes execution by North Korean officials."

Furthermore, the U.S. Department of State's 2005 Country Report on Human Rights Practices sums up North Korea's actions by listing documented or alleged human rights abuses over the years. Such instances include: abridgement of the right to change the government; extrajudicial killings, disappearances, and arbitrary detention, including many political prisoners; harsh and life-threatening prison conditions; torture; forced abortions and infanticide in prisons; lack of an independent judiciary and fair trials; denial of freedom of speech, press, assembly, and association; government attempts to control all information; denial of freedom of religion, freedom of movement, and worker rights; and severe punishment of some repatriated refugees.

I also want to note President Bush's appointment last August of Ambassador Jay Lefkowitz to the position of Special Envoy for Human Rights in North Korea. The Special Envoy post was established under the North Korea Human Rights Act, and with this appointment, signaled the administration's intensified attention to human rights in North Korea. I am confident that Ambassador Lefkowitz will continue to take steps toward ending North Korea's suppression of freedoms.

As we in the Senate continue to address the persecution and the fears that North Koreans face, it is my hope that we will do all we can in order to improve the conditions in this communist state and to spread the freedoms that we all enjoy.

DARFUR

Ms. CANTWELL. Mr. President, Elie Wiesel once told us that "a destruction, an annihilation that only man can provoke, only man can prevent." Our American heritage calls upon each of us to stand up, to speak out, and to act when we witness human rights abuses. As a global leader, the United States has a special and solemn obligation. We must live up to this responsibility.

This week marked both Armenian Remembrance Day and Holocaust Remembrance Day. In the final years of the Ottoman Empire between 1915 and 1923, the world witnessed the mass killing of as many as 1.5 million Armenian men, women, and children. Five-hundred thousand survivors were expelled from their homes. Our U.S. Ambassador to the Ottoman Empire Henry Morgenthau organized and led protests by foreign officials against one of the most horrible tragedies of the 20th century.

Sadly and almost unimaginably, more human devastation followed. Later years witnessed the Holocaust—

the Nazis' systematic state-sponsored persecution and murder of 6 million Jews. In 1945, the U.S. Third Army's 6th Armored Division liberated the Buchenwald concentration camp and the U.S. Seventh Army's 45th Infantry Division liberated Dachau in Germany.

We reflect in order to remember—honoring the dead, pledging never to forget atrocities of the past, and fighting to stop them today. In 2004, then-U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell told the U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Committee that genocide has been committed in the Sudanese region of Darfur. A consistent, widespread, and terrible pattern of atrocities and burning of villages continues as the situation in Darfur remains grim. I believe the U.S. must lead urgent international efforts to stop the killing in Darfur. We must act immediately, working with the United Nations, NATO, and the African Union to stop the ongoing violence. We must remain focused and never waver in our fight to bring an end to the genocide.

2006 NATIONAL PARK WEEK

Mr. THOMAS. Mr. President, I think each of us enjoy walking on a trail, learning a little more about our Nation's history, or perhaps paddling a canoe on a lake, river, or stream. Often we take part in these activities in our national parks. This week, April 22 to April 30, is National Park Week, a time when we can recognize all of the 390 units of the National Park System. There will be special events going on at parks throughout the system, and I encourage everyone to seek them out and take part in them.

As I have mentioned before, I have a special attachment to Yellowstone National Park, the world's first national park, located in Wyoming, my home State. But Yellowstone, Grand Teton National Park, the other National Park System units in Wyoming, and those across the Nation, extending from Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands to Guam and American Samoa, all remind us of ourselves, where we have been, and perhaps where we will go in the future. They have been called by others the best idea we ever had.

America's national parks provide people of all ages with a wide range of opportunities to learn more about our country's natural environment and cultural heritage. The National Park Service provides a variety of programs and activities for children, teachers, and communities designed to foster an interest in the natural environment and history and to cultivate a future generation of park stewards.

The theme for National Park Week 2006 is "Connecting Our Children to America's National Parks." This theme was chosen because of the vital role children play in the future conservation and preservation of our national parks.

Through the creation of innovative education programs such as the Junior

Ranger Program, the National Park Service is fostering a new constituency of park stewards. Today the Junior Ranger Program exists in more than 286 parks, striving to help connect youth to national parks and the National Park System and helping them gain an understanding of the important role of the environment in our lives.

The Junior Ranger Program encourages whole families to get involved in learning about, exploring and protecting our Nation's most important scenic, historical, and cultural places. Children have great enthusiasm for the Junior Ranger Program because it helps connect them to something big our country and our shared heritage as Americans. Additionally, online through WebRangers, kids can "virtually" visit the parks at their own pace in their spare time and when they are not in the parks. In fact, one of the events that will take place this year during National Park Week is a virtual, shared visit to Carlsbad Caverns National Park, which could involve more than 28 million students.

Of course, our visits to parks are enhanced through the interaction we receive from the people who work in them. During this week, we should also thank the thousands of National Park Service personnel, concession and contract employees, volunteers of all ages, and others who help to make our system of national parks the envy of and example for the rest of the world.

As the chair of the National Parks Subcommittee, I will continue to see that our system of parks retains its high standards. I would encourage each of you to spend some time in a national park unit, this week and throughout the year.

SECURING AMERICA'S ENERGY INDEPENDENCE ACT

Mr. SMITH. Mr. President, I rise today to introduce the Securing America's Energy Independence Act of 2006. This bill is designed to extend the investment tax credits for fuel cells and solar energy systems in the 2005 Energy Policy Act through 2015.

Having reliable, clean energy is fundamental to economic prosperity, our national security, and protecting the environment. The Energy Policy Act of 2005 encourages homeowners and businesses to invest in solar energy and fuel cell technologies through investment tax credits. That law established a tax credit of 30 percent for investments in fuel cells, capped at \$1,000, and a tax credit of 30 percent for investments in solar systems, capped at \$2,000.

However, these credits will expire after 2 years, and therefore are too short lived to encourage significant market penetration or to stimulate expansion of manufacturing for solar energy or fuel cell technologies. Installations of solar energy or fuel cell systems require lead times of a year or more, and manufacturing expansion requires a development schedule of 3 to 4