Huddled masses yearning to speak Russian?

President Putin chose to address issues of immigration at the March 17 Security Council session; citing, in general terms, demographic data regarding Russia's population decline, including emigration figures, the president noted that "more than 100,000 scientists working in traditionally strong sectors in Russia, such as mathematics, chemistry, physics and biology left the country between 1989 and 2001. (1)

Putin's partial solution is to encourage "regulated" immigration and to relieve some of the "chronic bureaucratic ailments" that take a particularly heavy toll on immigrants. (2) Putin's immigration recommendations were couched carefully in rhetoric meant to assuage concerns over illegal immigration, which is viewed as a fundamental cause for increases in violent crimes. Unfortunately, violence, war and terrorism in the Caucasus have reinforced the dim general view of immigration, particularly from Russia's southern neighbors. Putin however, used his Security Council remarks to suggest a reconsideration of the issue.

Given Russia's declining population and the "brain drain" of the post-Soviet years, encouraging some forms of immigration could help to counter some of the effects of Russia's so-called 'demographic disaster' (Putin acknowledged his measures could not provide a true counterweight to declining population numbers). What Putin presented to the Security Council was a recommendation that immigration to Russia be encouraged from the states of the former Soviet Union, where "practically all these people speak Russian and know Russian
Putin raised the intriguing point that citizens of CIS states had little trouble "adapting to Russian life" (presumably because of the years of Soviet rule) and that Russia therefore was in a unique position to benefit from immigration (as opposed to Europe, where immigrants might take generations to adjust to European life). Perhaps most interesting about Putin's remarks was the underlying theme that this was a realistic, perhaps even formidable, means of countering the centrifugal forces currently at work in the CIS; succinctly put, Putin proposed that Russia use its Soviet legacy to lure citizens of former SSRs in order to bind the NIS in a more tightly integrated union.

There are several problems with this approach, but the two most glaring involve the internal contradiction that Russia is losing some of the most valuable members of its work force, but could convince workers from neighboring countries to immigrate (and face the daunting prejudices and bureaucratic hurdles). That circle could only be squared by extreme economic distress in other CIS states (or perhaps civil strife), on which Russia would be positioned to capitalize. But what occurs most remarkable in this presidential proposal to the Security Council is the "policy wonk" nature of Putin's proposition; this doesn't appear to be the type of proposal that would occur instinctively to Putin, rather it sounds more like the result of a long, pessimistic conversation about the long term effects of democratic revolution in Georgia, Ukraine and perhaps other post-Soviet states. Somewhere deep in the Kremlin, some adviser to Putin found an elegant way to suggest that they just try making lemonade.

**Chubais assassination mystery?**

At the risk of sounding callous, the only mystery surrounding the attack on RAO/UES Chief Anatoli Chubais is why such an attack was not attempted years ago. Which is just another was of asking, why now? What has Chubais done lately, (I mean other than suggest that Mikhail Kasianov might be a viable appropriate successor to Vladimir Putin), that could possible make himulnerable to an assassination attack?
While theories of motive, means and conspiratorial planning will overshadow any investigation of the attack, authorities do already have a suspect in custody. Vladimir Kvachkov, a 57 year old GRU spetsnaz veteran of Afghanistan and Chechnya (who reputedly set the snare that cost Shamil Basayev his leg) was detained based on an eyewitness description of a car seen speeding from the area. A search of his automobile and home revealed some explosives (a stick of TNT or two grenades?) and a hunting rifle. Initial reports claimed that Kvachkov rented a dacha near the Chubais dacha, and suggested the retired GRU officer was displeased about either the monetization of military officers' benefits or a minor traffic incident he had with Chubais some time earlier.

Kvachkov quickly denied any involvement in the attack on Chubais and tried to correct some early media speculation (he is not a neighbor of Chubais, his car was in the area because he and his son had stopped at a local market, etc.), but he has stopped cooperating with authorities since learning that his son is now the "real" target of their investigation. Apparently, it didn't take much for this former General Staff official to understand that if he didn't want the honor of being made the scapegoat in this case, his son would be just as effective in the role.

Chubais has announced that he knows who masterminded the attack, but, in truth, there is no upside to his naming the suspect. As for Kvachkov, perhaps he and/or his son really were involved, perhaps he was just in the wrong place at the wrong time, or perhaps he was targeted intentionally to take the heat for an amateurish attack (why were he and his son sitting for so long near the scene?) in some obscure FSB/GRU battle. There was one thing Chubais made clear: this was a political attack. And that speaks volumes about the state of Russia's democracy.

Source Notes:
(2) Ibid.
(3) Ibid.
(4) Izvestiya, 21 Mar 05; What the Papers Say (WPS), 23 Mar 05 via Lexis-Nexis; Vremya novostei, 21 Mar 05; WPS, 23 Mar 05 via Lexis-Nexis. Reports of Kvachkov's career take him from Afghanistan to Germany to Chechnya and finally retiring from the General Staff, where he worked for a time in the civilian service. Accounts differ on just what explosives/armaments might have been found during the search of Kvachkov's premises.
(5) Interfax, 22 Mar 05 via Lexis-Nexis.

Russian Federation: Security Services

By Eric Beene

In televised remarks on the evening of 8 March, Federal Security Services (FSB) Director Nikolai Patrushev told President Vladimir Putin that FSB forces had killed Chechnya's rebel leader Aslan Maskhadov in the Chechen village of Tolstoy-Yurt. (1) Although reports of the event are not completely clear, it appears Maskhadov was killed in a "bunker" in the basement of a house. Initial reports claimed he was killed when FSB commandos threw a grenade into the bunker; later reports claimed he was shot. (2) The survival and capture of three of his aides, two notebook computers, and videotapes in the bunker appear to confirm the latter claim. The customary conspiracy theories germinated within days as experts debated the presence or absence of wounds apparent in pictures of Maskhadov's body; government personnel refused to return Maskhadov's body to his family for burial, citing Russian laws regarding the disposition of terrorists; the house where he was reportedly killed was itself demolished by government agents some days a later; and a Moskovsky
komsomolets reporter, who inspected the house before it was demolished, proclaimed the ventilation in the bunker inadequate for Maskhadov, much less his three-person entourage, to survive for any length of time. (3) What was not debated, however, was the fact that, circumstances notwithstanding, Aslan Maskhadov is dead.

Maskhadov's death was met with predictable reactions. President Putin praised the operation, and many officials in the pro-Moscow Chechen government and in Moscow saw the operation as a clear victory for Russian forces, having removed a very visible, if politically irrelevant, terrorist leader, and weakening the separatist movement. (4) They also took pride in the fact that Russia would pay the promised $10 million reward, a promise made following the Beslan siege for information that led to the capture or death of Maskhadov or Shamil Basayev, the more militant leader of the separatist Chechen forces who claimed credit for the Beslan take-over. The reward recipients, however, were unnamed. Stating gratuitously, "We know how to keep secrets," FSB spokesman Sergei Ignatchenko emphasized that anyone, from anywhere, who could provide Russian authorities with information that might lead to the capture or death of Basayev would also be paid and protected, by means ranging from physical relocation to plastic surgery. (5) Others, mostly outside the administration and the country, criticized the killing as having removed the one remaining legitimate Chechen political leader with whom some negotiated settlement with Moscow might be reached, despite Putin's repeated proclamations that Russia would never consider such negotiations. Many of these same critics also saw this as clearing the way for Basayev to take control of the movement, further radicalizing the conflict. (6)

Some two weeks having passed since the assassination, the dearth of official commentary from the Kremlin, after the initial announcement, is curious. There is some debate as to whether official guidance was to take Maskhadov dead or alive, and whether FSB forces followed this guidance. Had Moscow wanted
Maskhadov taken captive for questioning and imprisonment, as Chechen deputy prime minister and de-facto head of state security Ramzan Kadyrov seems to have been told, and as Putin’s regional envoy Dmitri Kozak understood (7), FSB forces clearly erred, but they appear to have done so precisely, without the use of overwhelming force that has become so typical of recent counter-terrorist operations in the region. Indeed, such an operation involving tanks and flamethrowers would have provided easy cover for the FSB forces and would not have seemed unusual, given similar operations in Nalchik and Makhachkala. (See previous NIS Observed.) Perhaps, then, it was not surprising that government forces later demolished the building where Maskhadov was killed. Were Maskhadov’s death not the Kremlin’s preferred outcome, one might have expected some official criticism regarding a botched operation, either leaked or in a government-influenced newspaper, or even from the Interior Ministry, itself evidently at odds with the FSB over control of counter-terror activities in the Caucasus. Such internal criticism yet has to surface.

If, on the other hand, the Kremlin was pleased with the manner in which events unfolded, one might have expected somewhat more official enthusiasm and a possible mention of specific units involved (especially the elite Alfa unit, had it been involved, given the losses it had received in counter-terror operations over the past few months), or even awards for bravery and an official statement broadcasting another victory against terror. However, given President Putin’s visit to Europe, during which he spoke with French, German and Spanish leaders, he may have intended to mute the spectacle to avoid further criticism from E.U. member states, typically vocal critics of Russia’s Chechnya policies. (8) If this was the case, and it appears the more likely possibility, look for more official praise in the weeks following Putin’s return from Europe. Also look for continued support for Kozak’s planned federal guidance that the FSB will lead future counter-terror operations in and around Chechnya. (See previous NIS Observed.)
From the Russian perspective, a couple of notable lessons are to be drawn from this event. The first involves the use of Russian FSB forces in such a situation, without the assistance of regional Interior Ministry troops. This fits with the previously discussed policy of de-Chechenization, whereby Kadyrov’s troops and pro-Moscow Chechen government forces are slowly being removed from their security roles. (9) Ruslan Alkhanov, the Chechen Interior Minister, confirmed somewhat wryly that his forces were not involved: “This was a unique operation, and we can only regret that Maskhadov was not killed by Interior Ministry staff.” (10) Such a policy can leverage tips from the local population to locate individual government-targeted terrorists. Conceivably, by removing the fear of retribution associated with divulging such information to other Chechens (even though they are putatively pro-Moscow forces), the use by the Kremlin of genuinely Russian special forces, along with a financial inducement of up to $10 million, can produce more public relations coups. For these reasons, one may expect other such “FSB-only” operations to be stressed in the future.

On the other hand, the Kremlin may also have taken note of the swift adaptation Chechen separatist forces have shown following Maskhadov’s death. Within days, and with unanimity by such disparate voices as former Maskhadov envoy, Akhmed Zakayev (on the Chechen Press website) and Shamil Basayev (on the Kavkaz Center website), the separatist movement hailed the previously little-known Chechen Muslim cleric Abdul-Khalim Sadulayev as Maskhadov’s successor. (11) According to Zakayev, the decision to appoint him the heir apparently was made as early as 2002. (12) This should be cause for concern for Russian counter-terrorist forces. That the rebel force was able to announce the new leader so quickly and with no observable disagreement reflects a well-ordered and well-led structure. Far from sending the separatists into disarray, Maskhadov’s death showed the Chechen movement, thought by some to have fractured into radical Basayev-led elements and less radical Maskhadov-led groups (13), to be speaking with a single voice, promoting a replacement leader without a ripple. Additionally, that this organization can select and promote a
virtual unknown into this post apparently without drawing any attention from the intelligence elements within the FSB or the Interior Ministry is even more noteworthy. Basayev himself was expected to lead the rebellion after Maskhadov's death, or possibly the "radical warlord" Doku Umarov (14), but expectations by outsiders were clearly off the mark. That no one saw Sadulayev's rise to leadership, a decision apparently made nearly three years ago, not to mention the fact that it apparently took Russian forces this long to locate Maskhadov (and still they cannot locate Basayev, essentially public enemy number one), means that Russia's counter-guerrilla forces, the FSB and MVD, have significant work to do to build an intelligence network with any hope of keeping up with the insurgents.

Source Notes:

(4) Simon Saradzhyan, "Kremlin's Victory May Be Short-lived," The Moscow Times, 10 Mar 05, p. 1.
An ongoing dispute

The announcement that Japanese Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi would not be attending the VE-Day celebrations to be held in Moscow in May, which coincided with President Putin’s apparent decision not to visit Japan this spring, has made evident the strain in Russo-Japanese relations. Although efforts have been made in recent months to secure a stronger strategic relationship, including the December agreement on an oil pipeline running from Russia to the Pacific port of Nakhodka to assist Japan’s energy needs (December), Moscow waits for Japan to make concessions on their main point of contention: the four southernmost Kuril Islands (the “Northern Territories”) and Japan awaits Russian concession on the same point.
In November 2004, Putin returned to the 1956 joint Soviet-Japanese declaration, offering Japan two of the disputed four islands; there was speculation that Putin might compromise over the other two islands, but no further progress has been made. (1) February marked the 150th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Russia and Japan and a resolution was made in the upper and lower houses of the Japanese Diet calling for the return of the "Northern Territories," vague wording that has caused Moscow concern. (2) Until 1956, the Japanese government claimed the entire Kuril Archipelago, as well as the southern half of Sakhalin Island; these claims have been rescinded by the government but remain an issue for the Japanese Communist Party. Members of the Japanese Diet have told Moscow that the resolution’s wording was purposefully vague to appease the Communist Party and get their vote.

Clearly, Japan remains conflicted on issues pertaining to World War II, with territorial disputes taking center stage (China, South Korea, as well as Russia). Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov is scheduled to visit Japan in late May to coordinate arrangements for a Russian-Japanese summit and step up efforts to produce tangible results, but should these issues not be resolved and remain in the forefront of Russian-Japanese interactions, their growing bilateral strategic and energy relations will surely suffer. (3) The misunderstandings of the past might continue to plague the future.

A burst of energy
Russia continues to increase economic ties with China, specifically in the energy sphere. This year, Russia plans to double its electric power deliveries to China to about 500 million kWt/hrs. This is an increase from the 300 million delivered in 2004, and it is set to grow further in 2006 (to 800 million kWt/hrs). Oil exports by rail are also set to rise to 10 million tons in 2005 and 15 million tons in 2006. (4)
This arrangement clearly will suit China's growing energy needs. China also needs Russia as a market for the goods produced by its rapidly increasing economy. Bilateral trade could surge to $60-80 billion by 2010. In turn, this economic relationship could benefit Russia politically, giving it a possible edge over the United States and the EU. (5)

**Commercial or military significance?**
Following the Bratislava summit with President Bush, President Putin signed a deal with Iran to provide nuclear fuel for Iran’s Bushehr nuclear power plant. This generated widespread concern internationally, especially in Washington, where Senators John McCain and Joseph Lieberman went so far as to call for Russia's exclusion from this year's G-8 summit. (6) Putin's response to critics is to insist that this deal with Iran has no military significance and simply represents an alternative energy source, but explanation strains credulity. (7) Britain, France and Germany continue to put together incentives in an attempt to persuade Iran to abandon its uranium enrichment project, but Moscow insists on following through with the deal. Igor Ivanov, Secretary of the Russian Security Council, perhaps hoping to comfort critics (stated that in Russia), there are no such crazy people to help anyone to create nuclear weapons that might end up in the hands of terrorists. (8)

Even if Bushehr could be entirely transparent, its very existence provides valuable expertise concerning nuclear technology and gives Iran an entry ticket to a nuclear Œclub. (9) Such assistance to Iran gives Russia a troublesome wedge in a troubled region. Though some have suggested that this recent deal benefits Russia more in economic than in political terms, the public price tag on Bushehr is just about $900 million, barely one-third of the money the Nunn-Lugar program spent over ten years on securing Russia's own nuclear arsenal. (10) Though money talks, it seems that in this situation, power and influence have the upper hand.
Among friends

On 18 March, President Putin joined the leaders of France, Germany and Spain to discuss ways to bolster EU-Russia ties. The primary aim of this informal summit was to restore a climate of confidence and also for the three Western leaders to extend a friendly hand to Putin and to encourage him down the road of political and economic reforms. (11) The European leaders clearly believe it is in their best interest to attempt a greater integration with Russia, and the EU wants to conclude talks with Russia regarding the four common spaces by 2007. A matter on Putin’s agenda was to win commitments from the three leaders to attend the World War Two victory day celebrations in Moscow on 9 May. (12)

President Putin’s arrival in Paris marked the first time a foreign leader has ever visited the Air Force operative center located just outside of the city; he also went with President Chirac to the Elysee Palace where Russian writers participated in the Paris Book Fair. (13)

To the moon!

It looks as though the European space exploration plan will eclipse national programs; France and Russia signed an agreement on the joint development of new launch vehicles and manned space missions. Russian-European cooperation on space launch options could generate an array of new ideas and approaches to space exploration. (14) Europe is considering phasing out its Arianne-5 workhorse and a new rocket is set to be developed with Russia; the first Russian-European launch vehicle should take off in 2020. (15)

Turned down?

Finance Ministers from the Group of Seven (G-7) have said they will reject Russia’s bid to become a full member of the G-7, saying that as the world’s 16th largest economy ($533 billion), Russia is not big enough to justify membership. (16) Russia is supposed to chair the Group of Eight (G-8) most politically
powerful governments in 2006 and traditionally, the country chairing the G-8 also chairs the G-7. Vito Tanzi, Undersecretary of Finance for Italy from 2001-2003 said, "The G-7 will work hard to keep others out." (17) These others would include China, which is already larger than Canada (a G-7 member). Germany has supported Russia's membership in the G-7 and Jim O'Neill of Goldman Sachs Group in London believes that, "At a financial level, it is quite ridiculous not to include China at a minimum, and there is a very good case to consider having Russia, India and Brazil, too." (18) But perhaps there are reasons beyond economics why Russia's bid might be rejected. Stuart Eizenstat, who served under President Clinton, stated, "Pushing for G-7 status is a great stretch for Russia, as it simply doesn't deserve it" Russia's economy is too small and isn't free enough to merit membership, and it has drifted on democracy and reform. (19) Russia's democratic failures seem to strike again.

Source Notes:

(1) Eurasia Daily Monitor, vol 2, issue 49, 11 Mar 05; www.euraisadaily.org
(2) Ibid.
(3) RIA novosti, 18 Mar 05, 12:05 via (http://en.rian.ru/rian/index.cfm).
(4) Moscow News via CDI Russia Weekly, 18 Mar 05, #21.
(5) Ibid.
(6) Moscow Times via CDI Russia Weekly, 11 Mar 05, #12.
(9) Eurasia Daily Monitor via CDI Russia Weekly, vol 2, issue 43 3 Mar 05, #25.
(10) Ibid.
(12) Ibid.
Gubernatorial shenanigans

On March 9, President Vladimir Putin removed the governor of the Koryak Autonomous Area, Vladimir Loginov, from his post, and appointed Boris Zolotarev as the new regional leader. Ostensibly, Loginov was fired for failing to provide an adequate fuel supply for his region in the midst of winter. Loginov’s deputy Mikhail Sokolovsky is facing criminal charges for mishandling the fuel supplies.

Loginov was elected to his second term in April 2004. This is the first time that Putin has used his newly legislated power to remove a governor, and it helps clarify a point of ambiguity in the new law: Putin has demonstrated that he can (and will) fire governors who were popularly elected, not just regional leaders appointed under the new system.

Putin does not appear to be picking fights haphazardly, however. On March 15, he reappointed Mintimer Shaymiyev as president of the republic of Tatarstan. This decision reflects an unwillingness to engage in action that could prove politically damaging for Putin. Tatarstan has struggled vigorously and doggedly
for its autonomy since the early 1990s, and Shaymiyev has been one of the most vocal critics of Putin's move to appoint regional leaders.

Had Putin appointed a different candidate, he faced the possibility that Tatarstan's regional legislature would reject his appointment. Failure to confirm a presidential appointment, after three votes, can result in the dissolution of the legislature and new parliamentary elections. If Putin had appointed a candidate and dissolved the legislature in the face of continued resistance, he would have run the risk that the Tartar voters would return the same legislators. This scenario would have proven a great political embarrassment for Putin and would cast doubt on his ability to select viable candidates.

As it is, Putin's appointments and removals have some governors taking defensive measures. Konstantin Titov, head of the Samara region since 1991, found himself in a precarious position in mid-March. He expected demonstrations to protest Samara's economic conditions to occur on March 12-14. Anticipating these rallies (and probably mindful of Loginov's fate), Titov issued a statement on the protests, claiming that their intent was to turn the governor into 'their own man' who will protect the interests of financial-industrial groups exclusively...² (1)

Titov's preemptive attempts to divert blame from himself may be emulated by regional leaders as they adjust to the president's new powers. Although Putin seems hesitant to tangle with powerful ethnic leaders such as Shaymiyev, the dismissal of Loginov has established a clear precedent for other governors.

It is possible that Putin would be more hesitant to fire someone that he has appointed personally because it might reflect on his ability to choose competent governors. However, the removal of a popularly elected governor by presidential decision makes the current position of regional leaders very precarious. While it might be prudent to request presidential reappointment early in order to secure
presidential favor, a governor's request for early appointment also might be seen as a timely opportunity for the president to replace him.

**Duma acknowledging limits of sovereignty**

The Duma rejected a bill, proposed by the Rodina faction, which would facilitate the incorporation of autonomous regions of former Soviet republics within the Russian Federation. The bill's authors said, “in view of the lately increasing attempts of some states, namely the former Soviet republics of Georgia, Azerbaijan and Moldova, to extend their sovereignty to the territories of the unrecognized republics of Abkhazia, Adjaria, South Ossetia, Nagorno-Karabakh and the Dniestr Moldovan Republic, it is particularly timely today to assess the legality and juridical validity of such claims.” (2)

There are several objections to the bill’s reasoning. First, Russia acknowledged the borders of the other former union republics during the disintegration of the Soviet Union. Second, since Russia has recognized these republics, followed by the international community, allowing the autonomies to join Russia would be a clear infringement on the sovereignty of those states (i.e. Georgia, Azerbaijan and Moldova) and a violation of international law. Russia already is politically and militarily involved in areas such as the breakaway region of Abkhazia in Georgia, and while these actions themselves may be construed as violating Georgian territorial sovereignty, the passage of this proposed law would leave no doubt.

The bill received only 91 of the 300 votes it needed to pass, signaling that, however willing the Duma might be to enlarge Russia's territory; it is hesitant, at this stage, to issue an open challenge to the international community.

**Or perhaps the Duma hasn't grasped the concept of sovereignty**

The State Duma is preparing a communication to the Georgian parliament to challenge Georgia's objections to the continued presence of Russian military bases on Georgian soil. Russia Defense Committee chief Viktor Zavarzin
denounced the "categorical tone for the Georgian president that sanctions will be used against Russia if concrete dates of the withdrawal of the Russian bases from the Georgian territories are not set." (3) The Russian bases already have exceeded the initial terms of the agreement between Russia and Georgia; thus, Georgia has a sovereign right to demand the removal of the bases. Although the Duma still hesitates to accept other countries' autonomous regions into the Russian Federation, perhaps it has not learned the true definition of sovereignty after all.

Source Notes:

(1) ³Samara governor's concerns over impending demonstrations, reappointment prospects examined,² Izvestiya, 14 Mar 05 via World News Connection (WNC). (2) ³Duma rejects bill on new autonomies joining Russian Federation,² Itar-Tass, 11 Mar 05 via WNC. (3) ³Russia[n] Duma preparing address to Georgian parliament about bases,² Itar-Tass, 15 Mar 05 via WNC.

Russian Federation: Armed Forces
By Jeff Kubiak

The Armed Forces and the war on terror
Unlike the U.S., Russia has not published a single document outlining their strategy for combating terrorism. However, with only a cursory survey of official statements made by high-level government officials and by reviewing policies taken in the name of the war against terrorism, a reasonably clear picture emerges as the basic Russian strategy. Defense Minister Sergei Ivanov stated in December 2004 that "I have many times stated that a war has been declared to us, and when at war behave like it is a war." (1) In September 2004, Chief of the Russian General Staff, Col-Gen Yuri Baluyevsky said that Moscow is prepared to
deliver preemptive strikes at terrorist bases no matter where they are located. Confirmed on numerous occasions later by Ivanov, the Russian's declared preemptive strike posture has generated debate not only in regards to the legality of such a policy, but also as to the targets that might be struck and the means with which Russia would strike them. Leaving the issues of legality and targets aside, a question rises as to the capability of the Russian armed forces to project power outside of the Russian borders in a strike supporting national objectives in the battle against terrorism.

Leonid Ivashov, the vice-president of the Academy for Geopolitical Problems, thinks that the threat of pre-emptive strikes is, "A highly dangerous statement! Dangerous because it is a complete bluff, out of touch with the realities and utterly presumptuous. Knowing the situation in the armed forces, I can make the claim that we have no means of applying either strategic or operational pressure on terrorists." (2) Ivashov blames the General Staff for not properly equipping the army. "To investigate, for example, why a mobile infantry regiment did not go to the aid of the lawful authorities and the populace when gunmen attached Nazran. The story is that it was because of the shortage of batteries for its armored vehicles." (3) This statement is in line with most observers' general assessment of the Russian armed forces and supports the idea that the Chief of the General Staff and Defense Minister are bluffing. However, when directly confronted with the question as to the credibility of the threat, Ivanov responded, "These are not political declarations. We really will carry out preventive strikes. We have high-precision weapons, we have spetsnaz troops." (4)

**Reaching out and touching terrorists**

Instead of simply being dismissive, one should examine the facts. Ivanov mentioned "high-precision weapons." High precision weapons capable of striking targets outside of Russia most likely would have to be launched/released from an aircraft. According to the Russian Air Force Chief of Staff, Col-Gen Boris Cheltsov, "Today our long-range aviation has high-precision long-range weapons..."
which enables it to find terrorists anywhere in the world and inflict on them the
damage they deserve." (5) Notwithstanding the unlikelihood that the weapons he
spoke of actually could assist in “finding” the terrorists (one should know where
the terrorists are before employing the weapon), Cheltsov’s claim that some of
Russia’s Soviet-era cruise missiles have been modified to carry a conventional
warhead is widely accepted. The Kh-555 cruise missile (modified version of the
nuclear-armed Kh-55) can be carried by the 1950’s vintage, turbo prop, Tu-95
Bear as well as the 1980’s vintage, supersonic Tu-160 Blackjack strategic
bombers. Test firing of these weapons/platform mixes were accomplished most
recently in Spring 2004. (6) The Air Force is scheduled to receive two additional
(one new and one refurbished) Blackjacks in 2005 to bring their total to 15, in
addition to an unspecified number of modified cruise missiles. The Air Force also
should begin receiving the new Kh-101 conventional cruise missile in early 2005.
The Kh-101 is said to have a 600kg conventional warhead, an intercept-defeating
radar cross section of 0.01m², a range of approximately 5,000 km, and a
predicted accuracy of between 6 and 20 meters. The missile, however, still relies
on a terrain reference system for en route navigation and a televiusal system for
terminal guidance. This means that it has limited capability at night or in poor
weather. (7) The other platform capable of delivering precision weapons over a
substantial distance is the Tu-22M3 Backfire bomber. The Russian Air Force has
66 updated Backfires still in their inventory. The Backfire, with a nominal combat
radius of 1,300 miles, is said to have enjoyed more success than the older frontal
aviation aircraft in the second Chechnya campaign thanks to its updated fire
control system, flexibility in weapons load, and all weather capability. (8)

The combinations of heavy bombers with cruise missiles, and medium range
bombers with precision guided munitions (PGM), sound like a formidable strike
force. The reality is, however, that Russia’s inventory of PGMs is woefully
lacking. Similar to the cruise missile mentioned above, Russia’s PGMs are not
GPS guided but rather they rely on laser or electro-optical guidance, which
reduces their utility in bad weather. In addition to hardware shortfalls, the chronic
funding shortages over the past 15 years have resulted in a fairly low level of readiness of pilots and maintenance crews in nearly all flying units. It is this reality that accounts for the fact that 10 out of the 11 Russian Air Force combat aircraft lost in mishaps in 2003 crashed due to "human factors"—violations of regulations either intentionally or due to a lack of training. Although averages don't tell the whole story, Russian bomber pilots averaged less than 40 hours per year (compared with more than 200 hours per year for their U.S. counterparts).

(9) The complexity of a mission employing precision weapons requires significantly more training than would be available to the average pilot. The long range aviation of the Air Force is obviously not in any position to carry out sustained combat operations. However, a handful of bomber pilots undoubtedly receive more training than average and are more capable of executing operational strikes. Considering that one Tu-160 can carry up to 12 of the modern Kh-101 (more than is likely in the inventory at present), it wouldn't take more than a couple planes to do real damage to point targets in a terrorist haven.

Sneaking up on terrorists

Ivanov also mentioned the possibility that Russia would use spetsnaz to conduct preemptive strikes. While several of Russia's power structures have special force units attached to them, what Ivanov likely was referring to was the special designation forces assigned to the General Staff's Main Intelligence Directorate (GRU), known as spetsnaz. Spetsnaz brigades, 2,000 men strong, are assigned to the intelligence directorates of each of the 7 military districts and each of the 4 fleets. Within each brigade, there are several 200-man commando units that actually do the work. (10) Specializing in small team operations, these commando units were trained to carry out local missions like reconnaissance or sabotage in the enemy's rear area, or capturing key infrastructure (like NATO tactical nuclear weapons sites) or beachheads in advance of the main forces. However, it became apparent during the first Chechen campaign that the spetsnaz units were the only truly battle worthy units left in the army. For this reason, they were used for any number of missions outside of their designed
specialty, including storming cities and conducting defensive actions. Today, although most units are still manned primarily with conscripts, the spetsnaz retain considerable capability. To maximize their capacity, there is current discussion about combining all the spetsnaz units under a single command with the creation of a new "Special Purpose Forces" segment of the armed forces. Under the current force configuration, attempting to combine the efforts of multiple units requires overcoming significant bureaucratic obstacles that exist between the Defense Ministry and the military districts. By creating a separate command for special purpose forces, training and operational planning and employment become much more standardized and efficient. (11)

Should this new branch of the armed forces be created by the Security Council, it will be very important to distinguish the roles and missions of the new arm from that of the Airborne Troops. The Airborne Troops represent one of the few truly capable elements of the Russian armed forces. With more than 30,000 troops organized into 5 airborne divisions, eight airmobile assault landing brigades, and other special units including a spetsnaz unit, the airborne troops are the best equipped, best trained troops in the Russian army. The premier airborne division is the 76th Pskov Guards division. Nearly a third of this elite division, now manned completely by contract soldiers, have just returned from deployment to Chechnya during which they were responsible for closing up rebel transit routes and safe havens in the mountainous region of southern Chechnya, doing so with some acknowledged success. (12) Having returned home, the 76th is readying itself for a fast-paced exercise schedule. In 2005, Russia will conduct joint military exercises with the forces of India, Uzbekistan, China and Germany. The 76th will participate in all these exercises, not only putting Russia’s best side forward in the international arena, but also providing that unit invaluable experience operating in various terrain and combat environments. (13)

Summary
As capable as the airborne troops might be, they still suffer from some serious deficiencies. The professionalization of the 76th has proved that this process alone will not fix the discipline and crime problems that plague nearly all of the armed forces. (See previous NIS observed.) Equipment modernization, while picking up speed as defense budgets soar and procurement increases, still lags even in these elite units. The limits placed on training and operational deployments by the lack of funding for fuel, aircraft maintenance, and aircrew training, has the biggest impact on the total capability represented in the form of the Airborne Troops. (14) Execution of last summer's major anti-terrorism exercise, Mobility-2004, which required the movement of 800 airborne troops from Pskov to the Far East, took the combined effort of the military's airlift capability as well as civilian airliners to accomplish. The Defense Ministry started saving fuel for this exercise months in advance. According to then-chief of combat training for the armed forces, Col-Gen Alexander Skorodumov, "At present the Russian army needs over a month to transport 800 servicemen to the Far East. We had to use civil jetliners. Our troopers could not return to the base for two months because we did not have enough fuel." (15) The Russian military surely would struggle to move and sustain a force of significant size any distance to accomplish even a modest objective.

Although the armed forces are not without some capability to accomplish an international strike, thanks to outdated weapon systems and low rates of total force readiness, the Russian armed forces are really only capable of achieving limited objectives over a short period of time. A strike would most likely take the form of a cruise missile attack from a 4-ship of bombers, a limited assault across border from a formation of airborne troops, or a covert spetsnaz mission abroad against a very small objective. In all cases, there would be huge political risks associated, varying greatly with target selection and perceived legitimacy of the strike, which would result in little operational gain given the sum total of forces that could be brought to bear.
More to the story?

There are some who think that the government's tough military talk with reference to the war on terror has objectives beyond threatening terrorists. According to one analyst, "the Russians are seeking to rationalize their continued commitment to maintaining an arsenal of nuclear and conventional weapons fit for a superpower by rolling them into the global war on terrorism," and that "the Russians continue to use the language of the global war on terrorism to justify their wider program of rearming." (16) The validity of this analysis becomes clearer when you consider the views of Ivanov with regards to the role of the armed forces in the war on terror and foreign relations in general. Back in June of 2004, the Russian newspaper Rossiyskaya gazeta made the observation of Mobility-2004 that it was a "somewhat strange" way to exercise a counter-terror operation. The paper quoted Ivanov agreeing that launching a large-scale operation against terrorist was like "beating off mosquitoes with a hammer." (17) Clearly, Ivanov was not a big supporter of fashioning a military to do simple anti-terrorist missions. Subsequently Ivanov has had to back pedal, claiming that he didn't mean that the armed forces shouldn't be used in the war on terror. It is very unclear what he did mean then. The reality is that the Defense Ministry is still very focused on the military's role in great power politics, not its role in law enforcement activities domestically. Ivanov sees the world like this: "Nobody has put it better that (Tsar) Aleksandr III. As before, we have two allies, the army and the navyŠ.the reliable defense of our sovereignty can be ensured only by a strong army and navy and an effective economy." (18) Ivanov believes that although Russia prefers to use political, diplomatic and other non-military means to protect its interests, Russia must possess a sufficient military to make this protection effective. (19) Ivanov's understanding of the need for a strong military is slightly different from those within the defense establishment who still see the U.S. as the real threat to Russia. Subtle words uttered by high ranking general officers, think tank specialists, and journalists make this very clear: While discussing the test of newly modified air-launched cruise missiles, Major-General Anatoly Zhikharev, commander of the 22nd Air Division, comments that "A Tu-
95MS carries six missiles. It takes six to eight missiles to destroy an aircraft carrier;" (20); Leonid Ivashov says that "Russia is surrounded by a network of military bases, and NATO aircraft patrol the length of Russia's borders. Yet the defense minister and the General Staff never tire of reiterating that they see no threat to Russia's security;" (21) Explaining his perception of the Defense Ministry's thinking regarding Russian military exercises with Germany, Nezavisimaya gazeta author Vladimir Mukhin states "Ten years ago, Russian troops withdrew from East Germany. Now there is a training war again. Germany is the main opponent of the United States within NATO, so it is necessary to be friends with Germany as well." (22) Clearly reforming and reequipping the Russian military will increase its capability to combat the terrorist threat at home and possibly accomplish strikes abroad. Just as clearly, however, the Russian perception of the role of military power and the nature of its enemies doesn't stop with international terrorism. Russia seems to understand that cooperating with the West is vital to the growth of its economy and that the economy is central to achieving some level of greatness. Its current strategy of using the cover of the war on terror to build its military capability allows Russia to continue its drive for re-attaining great power military status, focused on balancing the U.S., while at the same time, appearing to be an ally in the war on terror.

Source Notes:

(2) "Russia's Threat of Pre-Emptive Strikes Exposes it to Greater Danger," Nezavisimaya gazeta, Moscow, 21 Sep 04; BBC Monitoring via ISI Emerging Markets.
(3) Ibid.
(4) "Russian Defense Minister Gives Views on Army, Terrorism," Komsomolskaya pravda, Moscow, 26 Oct 04; BBC Monitoring via Financial Times Information.

(5) "Russian Air Force Commander Boasts New Defense, Capability to Hit Terrorists," RIA News Agency, Moscow, 8 Dec 04; BBC Monitoring via JRL.


(16) "Putin Puts Confidence in New Generation of Missiles," Mark Galeotti, Jane's Intelligence Review, 1 Feb 05.
NEWLY INDEPENDENT STATES: WESTERN REGION

By Elena Selyuk

MOLDOVA

Parliamentary elections results
The results of the Moldovan parliamentary elections were validated by the Constitutional Court last week. Almost sixty-five percent of eligible voters cast ballots. According to the final results, the Communist Party won 46 percent of the vote, the centrist Democratic Moldova Bloc (BDM) 28.5 percent, and the right-wing Christian Democratic Popular Party (PPCD) obtained 9.07 percent of the vote. None of the other parties managed to poll above the 6 percent threshold. As a result, in the new parliament, the Communist party will hold 56 out of 101 seats, the BDM 34 and the PPCD 11 seats. (1)
The number of seats gained by the Communists will allow them to form the government and parliamentary bodies on their own (for which a simple majority of 52 seats is required), but they will not have enough votes (61) to elect the president. This suggests at least two possible scenarios: First, the opposition parties can boycott all three attempts to elect the president, thus forcing new parliamentary elections to take place earlier than scheduled; second, several parliamentary members from the opposition parties might defect and vote for the Communist president. Since the voting will be secret, the only way to stop the "deserters" will be to boycott the parliamentary meetings. It is doubtful, however, that either of the opposition parties will resort to this step. The chances are also extremely slim that the opposition will unite to force new parliamentary elections, which leaves a (temporary) alliance with the Communists the only realistic scenario for opposition members.

**Why did the Communists win?**

During these parliamentary elections, President Vladimir Voronin managed to play both domestic and foreign relations cards well, thus appealing to the needs and interests of a wide audience and assuring his party’s parliamentary victory.

Voronin's electoral strategy apparently involved solidifying the Communist's base support, while launching a moderate non-threatening political platform. The pro-communist electorate consists mainly of middle-aged and elderly people, and many voters appreciated the fact that the current authorities paid attention to their needs and increased their pensions and salaries. This, apparently, was enough for people to close their eyes to the Communists’ numerous abuses of power during the last four years, to forget the opposition protests, journalists’ hunger strikes, and attempts to block democratic development in the country.

Second, the cardinal change in the Communists’ political direction appealed both to the domestic electorate and Western politicians. Even though almost all
parties running for this election had similar political programs (emphasizing pro-Western, pro-EU direction), the Communist Party was the most persuasive. In addition, Voronin’s post-election visit to Kiev, as well as the unexpected appearance in Moldova of Georgian’s Rose revolution leader, Mikhail Saakashvilli, reinforced Voronin’s image as a reformed pro-European leader.

Now that the electoral campaign is over and the Communist party won the majority of the parliamentary seats, it is yet to be seen if Voronin will stay faithful to his campaign promises.

BELARUS

By-elections in Belarus
A by-election in the No. 52 Hrodna Tsentralny election district to fill the only vacant seat in the House of Representatives took place this week. President Lukashenko, as expected, was not planning to give up this last parliamentary seat to the opposition, even to provide the appearance of democracy. The government-backed candidate, Syarhey Maskevich, rector of Hrodna State University, was not too embarrassed to state that he was absolutely certain of his future victory: ³I believe I stand a 100 percent chance of winning the vote.² (2) The two opposition candidates were certain from the start that they had no chance of winning these elections: ³How can one comment on the elections when the electoral legislation is being amended on the go and deputies of local councils are expelled form polling stations in accordance with these amendments?² said Syarhey Antusevich of the Belarusian People’s Front. (3) Polish journalists attempting to cover provincial elections were detained and thrown into jail.

UKRAINE

Putin's visit to Kiev
The second official visit of the Russian President to Kiev (19 March), following Yushschenko’s election was more amiable than the first. Despite unpleasant
memories of Putin's support for Yushchenko's opponent, the visit proceeded smoothly, and Putin concluded that problems between Ukraine and Russia simply do not exist. Nonetheless, the Russian president had many reasons to be apprehensive about the ambiance of this visit. Russia’s possible involvement in Yushchenko’s poisoning, the issue of potential re-privatization of Russian assets in Ukraine, as well as Boris Nemtsov’s connection with the new Ukrainian government already have caused tension between the leaders.

Putin was remarkably open to Ukraine’s rapprochement with the E.U. At his meeting with the leaders of France, Germany and Spain, Putin said that Russia welcomes Ukraine’s broadening cooperation with the E.U., as it corresponds to our interests. Russia may well have been left with little choice but to support Ukraine's course following Putin's failed attempts to influence the Ukrainian elections; a pro-E.U., supportive approach to Ukraine was the only road to follow that would circumvent criticism.

Despite those in Ukraine who do not want to see their country join the Common Economic Space with Russia, Belarus, and Kazakhstan, Yushchenko spoke in favor of creating a free trade zone, which would be a step towards joining the CES. Yushchenko’s outlook was a clear indication that alienating his neighbor was not in his plans.

The Ukrainian-Russian border was another sensitive issue. If Yushchenko is serious about Ukraine joining the European Union, the borders in the Azov Sea, Black Sea and Kertch Strait should be settled before the negotiations can start. Putin reassured Yushchenko by saying that the necessary agreement will be achieved given the will on both sides.

While Putin’s visit proceeded in a friendly atmosphere, it did not result in any breakthroughs. One can say, however, that the fact that both presidents had
enough wisdom at least publicly, to put the ordeal of the past Ukrainian presidential elections behind them and adapt to the realities left in their wake.

Source Notes:

(1) Interfax-Ukraine news agency, 17 Mar 05; BBC Monitoring via Lexis-Nexis.
(2) Belapan new agency, 19 Mar 05; BBC Monitoring via Lexis-Nexis.
(3) Ibid.
(4) Interfax news agency, 21 Mar 05; Diplomatic Panorama via Lexis-Nexis.
(5) RIA novosti, 21 Mar 05 via Lexis-Nexis.
(6) Ibid.

Newly Independent States: Caucasus
By Tammy Lynch

CHECHNYA
The Disappeared
³I thought they were taking my son away. I ran and shouted, ŒWhere are you taking him?¹ I couldn’t really see. Š But the children started crying, ŒThey are taking mommy away!¹ Š I ran up with her passport, but they did not take it. Š They just dragged her away.² (1)

The above statement is from the mother of 37-year-old Chechen, Khalimat Sadulaeva. The mother of four was taken from her home in Argun on September 12, 2004 by forces believed to represent either local pro-Moscow Chechen authorities or Russian Internal Affairs or Defense units. Sadulaeva has not been seen since. It is unknown why she may have been targeted; security forces in the republic claim they are not holding her and her family can find no information on her case. She simply has become one of the Chechen ³disappeareds.²
On March 21, Human Rights Watch released a 57-page report examining the continuing level of unexplained disappearances in Chechnya. The case of Sadulaeva and several dozen others are examined in the document. The authors, while condemning Chechen rebels for unspeakable acts of terrorism, suggest that, Russia’s federal forces, together with pro-Moscow Chechen forces, have also committed numerous crimes against civilians, including extrajudicial executions, torture, arbitrary detention and looting. (2) In all, monitoring organizations estimate that since 1999 between 3,000 and 5,000 Chechens have been taken away and never heard from again. In 2004, both pro-Moscow Chechen forces and Human Rights Watch say that the number of abductions has not decreased, and may have actually gone up in some areas.

Even more, Human Rights Watch suggests that the latest round of extensive field interviews by the organization’s local representatives uncovered an increasing atmosphere of pervasive and crippling fear. It’s worse than a war, said a father who watched his son summarily executed. During the war, we weren’t so scared. We knew, of course, that we might be hit by a bullet – no one was safe from that. But now, how can one sleep through the night? They wake people, take them away, shoot them. I’m terrified to talk, the prosecutor’s office is terrified – we’re all scared! At any moment [the security forces] might come after anyone of us. (3)

In fact, Human Rights Watch representatives found that, for the first time in four years of field visits, many Chechen civilians were too fearful to speak to them. People who have survived the chaos of two wars and actively protested the abuses perpetrated in their villages are now too terrified to open the door even to their neighbors, let alone to complain, the authors of the report wrote. A woman searching for her son explained, I searched [for him] everywhere, but did not write a petition [to the prosecutor]. Here, many who write petitions [themselves] disappear. I was afraid... I have two other sons at home. If I were to tell someone, [they] might take them away as well. (4)
This and similar evidence has led Human Rights Watch to call on the international community to recognize the situation in Chechnya as a \(^3\)crime against humanity,\(^2\) as delineated in the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court as well as the UN Declaration on the Protection of All Persons from Enforced Disappearance. (5) Both documents recognize the \(^3\)systematic\(^2\) practice of abduction to be a \(^3\)crime against humanity.\(^2\) In particular, the Rome Statute notes that, in order to fit within this category, the disappearances must be \(^3\)committed as a part of a widespread or systematic attack directed against any civilian population, with knowledge of the attack.\(^2\) (6) This definition, say HRW and other human rights groups, fits the situation within Chechnya perfectly.

The organization is also calling on the UN Commission for Human Rights to pass a strong resolution \(^3\)to send the message that Russia's continuing practice of disappearances will have consequences.\(^2\) (7) However, reaction to this report by the international community has been muted at best. In fact, contrary to HRW's request, for the first time since 1999, the Chechen conflict is not on the agenda of the UN Commission for Human Rights annual meeting. HRW's Executive Director Rachel Denber calls the decision by the EU not to pursue the case at the Commission \(^3\)unconscionable.\(^2\) (8)

It is likely that the EU understands it cannot succeed at the Commission. For three years, resolutions condemning the practice of abduction in Chechnya have failed in the face of massive lobbying by Russia. This lobbying reportedly has included threats to increase trade restrictions on European agricultural products and possibly increase the cost of the oil and gas Russia provides to the continent. There is no reason to believe the result of a resolution battle this year would be any different.

Simply put, world leaders repeatedly have chosen to side with Russia on the issue, or at least to calm their consciences by accepting Russia's claims that the
situation within the republic is improving. It would appear that Russia’s trade, military and economic position within Europe may outweigh concerns about the continuing disappearances in Chechnya. It would also appear that the international community is hesitant to criticize any country for its fight against terrorism.

A field researcher who spent two weeks in Chechnya interviewing witnesses for the HRW report says the response of the international community shows that Russia has been extremely successful in exploiting the global war on terrorism. However, Anna Neistat suggests, Our research shows that the majority of people who disappear are civilians. She says, Of course, nobody is challenging Russia’s right to fight against terrorists. But, I spent two weeks in Chechnya interviewing witnesses and I can tell you that most of the people who disappear cannot be terrorists. She notes that one man who disappeared had been severely disabled in a mining accident and had limited mobility. Further, she said Human Rights Watch documented numerous cases of the abduction of women – many of whom were mothers with up to eight children and no known connections to terrorist activity. Even more, Neistat notes that under international law, no country has the right to make people disappear, particularly with no trial and no records. (9)

Still, it seems unlikely that the international community will come to the defense of Chechen civilians. And this year, that decision likely will resonate much further with the segment of Chechen society looking for a way out that does not include bombs and abductions. For the first time, this population is without former Chechen President Aslan Maskhadov. To the majority of moderate Chechen civilians, Maskhadov was their voice, and their one chance at a negotiated settlement. His death, coupled with the rejection of their complaints by the international community, has the potential to further alienate this population – feeding into a sense of hopelessness and hostility, while perpetrators of violence
are emboldened by apparent impunity. For some, terrorist acts, including the targeting of Russian civilians, become more acceptable in this environment.

Therefore, it is more important than ever that the international community be the voice of civilians caught up in a cycle of violence. While continuing to condemn the acts of those Chechens who see Russian civilians as acceptable targets, the world should also condemn those Russian and pro-Moscow security services who use attacks on civilians to create a climate of fear, submissiveness and hopelessness. At this pivotal point in the Chechen conflict, these civilians must be provided a voice that is an alternative to violence. Otherwise, the only sounds the international community may hear from them in the future are explosions.

GEORGIA
Finally, Progress?
On March 16, Russia made what appeared to be a large concession on the issue of the closure of its bases in Georgia. Speaking to the ITAR-TASS news agency, General Alexander Rukshin, the Deputy Chief of Staff of the Russian Armed Forces, said Russia would eliminate its bases within four years. He said,³This is the limit, which we are ready to accept, in order to be able to withdraw from Georgia, in a civilized way, all our servicemen, weapons and military hardware.² (10)

The statement, which has not been refuted by other Russian officials, came less than one week after the Georgian parliament passed a toughly worded resolution that could lead to the outlawing of Russia’s military bases. The resolution states,³In case of failure to reach a bilateral agreement on withdrawal of the military bases by May 15, 2005, the Russian side shall be demanded to put an end to the existence of Russian military bases on the territory of Georgia by January 1, 2006.² Further, ³In case of failure to reach, by May 15, 2005, an agreement with the Russian side on the concrete, acceptable for Georgia and reasonable time frame for withdrawal of RF’s military bases from the territory of Georgia, the
Executive Authorities of Georgia shall carry out, in accordance with the law, adequate measures with regard to these military bases. These listed measures include the denial of visas to Russian servicemen, assessment of charges to Russia for the costs incurred while supporting the bases, creation of special regime movements for Russian troops, and a determination of ecological damage done as a result of activities at the bases. (11)

Rukshin attempted to portray his statement not as the concession it was, but as a demand. The Georgian parliament may indicate any time limit it wishes, but our stand on this problem will be immutable, he said. (12) Rukshin did not mention that just weeks before, Russian authorities had said it would be impossible to withdraw their troops in less than 12 years.

Nevertheless, Georgian officials now express optimism that this issue finally may be solved. Foreign Minister Salome Zurabishvili confirmed that Russian negotiators have suggested a three-four year timeframe for withdrawal of Russian troops and armament, and called this solution optimal. (13)

It remains to be seen, of course, whether a concrete negotiated settlement can be developed. This is largely because the price Russia may attempt to exact for the military base agreement is unclear; Gazprom has stated its desire to own Georgia’s trunk pipeline system, and the country continues to battle with Russia over the state of joint border patrols. Still, Georgia’s success at moving Russia’s position on this issue should stand as an example to other states or organizations currently in negotiations with the country. Georgia’s decision to take a loud and public stand and not move, even in the face of military, economic and political threats, resulted in at least limited success. It is an important lesson that deserves attention.

Source Notes:
KYRGYZSTAN

Elections: The end of Akaev’s rule?

On 27 February and 13 March, Parliamentary elections were held in Kyrgyzstan. In the weeks leading up to the polls, it became clear that the ballot would not
proceed as smoothly as the Kyrgyz government would wish. The events in Ukraine of last winter have caused reverberations around Central Asia, but governmental disquiet has been most visible in Kyrgyzstan. At the international level, Akaev directly accused the United States of funding Otunbaeva’s candidacy, and warned the OSCE that interference in the elections would not be brooked. But the Kyrgyz government did not help its own cause in seeking to forestall unrest. Five days before the election, the printing house of an opposition newspaper, Moya stolitsa novosti, experienced a 48 hour power outage.

Pre-election protests were reported in three of Kyrgyzstan’s seven oblasts over the exclusion of other, less well known opposition candidates. Significant numbers were involved in some cases: in Issyk-Kul for example, 2500 people blocked a major highway for five days, demanding that former Prime Minister Arslanbek Maliev be restored to the ballot. These protests continued to occur in various districts until Election Day. Voting on 27 February proved inconclusive: only 30 of 75 seats were decided, meaning that a second round, scheduled for 13 March, would be required. (1)

Initially, the Kyrgyz government must have breathed a sigh of relief: only one small protest in Bishkek (led by Otunbaeva) was reported on Election Day, while the remainder of the country apparently remained quiet. On 4 March, a series of major protests erupted, and the governments' hopes for a quiet inter-round period were shattered.

In the Southern city of Jalal-Abad crowds numbering up to 3,000 gathered in the main square to protest against election fraud and support the candidacy of local opposition figure Jusupbek Bakiev, whose brother Kurmanbek leads the People's Movement of Kyrgyzstan—the country’s biggest opposition bloc. (2) Protesters did not confine themselves to the streets for long; hours after the demonstration began crowds occupied the provincial administration building and began to call
for the resignation of several senior local officials—as well as that of President Akaev himself. (3)

The Jalal-Abad protest seems to have been the catalyst opposition protesters needed. Similar actions involving thousands of people began to occur across the country, including in Osh, Uzgen, Aravan and Naryn, where, although demonstrators were unable to occupy the region’s administrative building, they were able to surround the edifice and prevent access by blockading surrounding highways. (4)

The emergence of multiple protests resulted in a concerted attack by opposition leaders and deputies, who on 10 March issued a resolution outside the Parliament building in Bishkek, calling for early Presidential elections. Forced to meet outside the building (allegedly because of repair work being done) the deputies stated that the "president who has publicly spoken in favor of fair elections but at the same time has helped disrupt the elections should no longer be the leader of the country." (5)

As with the pre-election protests, the government's reaction has been to both dismiss and threaten the demonstrators, with President Akaev claiming that unrest had been launched by disenchanted, failed candidates, and Prime Minister Nikolai Tanayev stating that agitators would be "brought to account." (6)

It was in this atmosphere of heightened tension, that second round voting took place on 13 March. As was to be expected, Bermet Akaeva won her seat by a comfortable margin, while preliminary Central Election Commission reports showed Pro-Presidential parties winning a two thirds majority (50 of 75 seats) in the Parliament. (7) Opposition candidates secured only 5 seats in the new legislature. Although the OSCE has yet to publish a full report into the elections, the organization noted that many of the violations observed in the first round
(publicly acknowledged "vote buying" and "administrative interference") were also prevalent in the second round. (8)

Opposition protests continued during the second round, and they have intensified in the week since. Many of the cities which witnessed inter-round protests reported that demonstrators had occupied additional buildings. (9) But the protests have also spread to other areas. Demonstrations were reported in Batken and Talas, (10) while in Bazar-Kurgan, protestors stormed government offices, and for six hours held hostage Maramarsul Torayev, the district's chief administrator. (11)

Surprisingly, it is not Otunbayeva who has emerged as the opposition's rallying figure, but Kurmanbek Bakiev, the former Prime Minister and leader of the People's Movement of Kyrgyzstan which is headquartered in Jalal-Abad, who has been calling loudest for Akaev's resignation and early Presidential polls. Bakiev has insisted that only top-level negotiations between Akaev and the opposition leadership will suffice to resolve the situation. (12)

Last weekend, the situation escalated even farther. On Sunday, 10,000 people armed with sticks and petrol bombs, stormed Jalal-Abad's main police station. Police officers reportedly fired on the protestors (a spokesman insisted that only blanks were used), but none were injured. Hours later, the protestors burned down the building. No fatalities were reported, although several police officers were wounded. (13)

Early on Sunday morning, the government made good on its threats to use violence: OMON troops from the Kyrgyz Interior Ministry in Osh and Jalal-Abad stormed several buildings controlled by the protestors. The attempt to quell the demonstrators was unsuccessful: reports from the region indicate that the crowds simply "redeployed" to other areas of the cities, including the suburbs and the airport. (14)
On 22 March, President Akaev made an announcement, first stating that election results which had "sparked strong public reaction" would be reviewed, (15) and then offering to hold top level negotiations with opposition leaders. (16) Later the same day, it emerged that Prime Minister Tanayev had traveled to Jalal-Abad as Akaev's personal representative to begin discussions with protest leaders. (17) During the speech in which he offered negotiations, President Akaev also categorically ruled out his own resignation, stating that only an election or action by the Parliament could legally force his departure. (18)

It seems clear that this position is not viable. A central part of the opposition's demands is Akaev's resignation. Although he may be able to remain in his post until October, it is difficult, given the scale of protests and the ferocity of anti-Presidential sentiment, to believe that the opposition will countenance another term for the incumbent. It is likely that demonstrations would erupt on a huge scale if Akaev were to seek another term. One possible solution for Akaev may be to withdraw from the contest himself, and to place all his political and financial resources behind a presidential bid for his daughter, who has not been attacked directly by the opposition. At this point however, it is too early to predict an outcome, and negotiations between the two parties are likely to last some time.

Akaev's rhetoric seems to have been anchored in the fact that the protests had been confined to the southern regions of the country—by Wednesday no protests had occurred in Bishkek, and no clear opposition leader had emerged. It is now clear that Akaev grossly miscalculated the situation. On Thursday morning, mass protests erupted in Bishkek. Within a matter of hours, protestors had stormed the Presidential compound, taking over the White House (Akaev's residence), as well as the country's main government run television station, KyrgyzTV, (19) where members of the opposition announced that the government had fallen. With the state's protective forces evaporating, President Akaev and his family apparently fled the country. (20)
While leadership of the disparate opposition forces thus far has been lacking, Felix Kulov, the former vice-President, was released from prison, on Thursday and began was beginning to coordinate between the various opposition factions. (21) Protestors in Bishkek, Osh and Jalal-Abad generally have represented a "rainbow" of opposition forces, yet Kulov may prove vital in uniting and stabilizing Kyrgyzstan's various opposition voices.

KAZAKHSTAN

Unified opposition candidate for presidency?
Several weeks ago, Kazakhstan's major opposition group, Ak Zhol began to undergo a major crisis, which came about largely due to the party's election failure. (22) Last month, Alikhan Baimenov, co-chairman of the party, called a special plenary meeting during which a vote of no confidence was passed against Altynbek Sarsenbayev—another of the party's co-chairman. At the heart of Baimenov's complaints against Sarsenbayev was Sarsenbayev's betrayal of the opposition's cause by serving in President Nursultan Nazarbaev's government prior to September's elections and his participation in "coalition talks" with other opposition groups, (aimed at agreement on a joint candidate) for next January's presidential election. (23) After the plenum, Baimenov and Sarsenbayev continued their war of words, and it seemed likely that Baimenov—who holds the Party's sole seat in the Majlis, might be tempted to split from the party. This has proven to be the case: during Ak Zhol's 5th Congress, held in Astana, Baimenov announced his intention to resign from the party. Interestingly, several delegates of the party, including Sarsenbayev, refused to accept Baimenov's resignation. (24)

Just days before Baimenov attempted to resign, news emerged which may explain the Party's refusal to countenance Baimenov's decision: the Coordinating Council of Democratic Forces (the group at the center of Sarsenbayev's 'coalition talks') announced that a new movement called For a Just Kazakhstan had been
formed. Although not a political party in its own right, this group aims to elect a single, unified candidate for next year's Presidential polls. (25) Ak Zhol is the strongest of Kazakhstan's opposition groups. It is possible that the party is now attempting to maintain unity, in the hopes that the single candidate will be selected from within its own ranks.

Source Notes:

(1) For details, please see NIS Observed: An Analytical Review, Volume X, Number 3 (4 March 2005).
(2) AKIpress News, 7 Mar 05; AKIpress News Agency via ISI Emerging Markets Database.
(3) Ibid.
(5) Weekday Magazine Kyrgyzstan, 10 Mar 05; Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty via ISI Emerging Markets Database.
(6) Weekday Magazine Kyrgyzstan, 8 Mar 05; Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty via ISI Emerging Markets Database.
(7) TCA-Kyrgyzstan, 16 Mar 05; The Times of Central Asia via ISI Emerging Markets Database.
(9) "Kyrgyz Election Protests Spread," RFE/RL Newsline-Transcaucasus & Central Asia Volume 9 Number 50, 16 Mar 05.
(10) TCA-Kyrgyzstan, 16 Mar 05; The Times of Central Asia via ISI Emerging Markets Database.
(11) AKIpress News Agency Website in Russian, 16 Mar 05; BBC Monitoring via ISI Emerging Markets Database.
(13) Ibid.
(16) Kyrgyz Television First Channel, Bishkek, in Russian, 22 Mar 05; BBC Monitoring via ISI Emerging Markets Database.
(17) TCA-Kyrgyzstan, 22 Mar 05; The Times of Central Asia via ISI Emerging Markets Database.
(18) Kyrgyz Television First Channel, Bishkek, in Russian, 22 Mar 05; BBC Monitoring via ISI Emerging Markets Database.
(19) "Kyrgyz President's Palace Overrun", 24 March 05 via www.news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/asia-pacific/4378029.stm
(22) See NIS Observed: An Analytical Review, Volume X, Number 3 (4 Mar 05).
(23) Ibid.
(24) TCA-Kazakhstan, 14 March 05; The Times of Central Asia via ISI Emerging Markets Database.
(25) TCA-Kazakhstan, 11 Mar 05; The Times of Central Asia via ISI Emerging Markets Database.

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