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Russian Federation: Executive Branch

By Susan Cavan

Putin's PR blitz

In the lead up to the G8 summit in St. Petersburg, President Vladimir Putin made the media rounds, sitting for interviews with foreign media outlets. The tone of his appearances was generally smooth, showing the polish applied perhaps by western political technologists, but he veered occasionally toward smug satisfaction and glibly dropped one-liners, perhaps most notably at Vice President Dick Cheney's expense. The Russian team also chose an odd path of baiting some of its G8 cohort with throwbacks to a proxy war past and veiled charges of imperialism.

While Putin's remarks on NBC's Today Show about VP Cheney's "unfortunate shot while hunting" garnered much attention (and are likely to have played well to the audience for which they were intended), (1) the tenor of his answers to interviewer Matt Lauer's questions certainly revealed Putin's preparation for and comfort with the criticism that seemed to be reaching critical mass before the G8. (2) When asked specifically about the contention that "Russia does not represent the ideals of the G8 family of countries," Putin quipped: "I am pleased that we have our critics because it would be worse if everyone voted unanimously, like at Communist Party congresses during the Soviet era." (3)

Putin's reminder of the Soviet past certainly was not accidental. Another element of the Russian summit publicity was to remind the world that Russians had rid themselves of the Soviet system, and they therefore are not beholden to the west for their freedom. The West did not win the Cold War, and Russia did not lose
the Cold War; it simply pulled its players from the field, forfeiting but a few
matches.

Among the Cold War era themes that Putin did raise however, was a testy take
on western criticisms of Russia's efforts at democratization as neo-colonial
interference:

"[I]f we go back 100 years and look through the newspapers, we see what
arguments the colonial powers of that time advanced to justify their expansion
into Africa and Asia. They cited arguments such as playing a civilizing role, the
particular role of the white man, the need to civilize 'primitive peoples.' We all
know what consequences this had. If we replace the term 'civilizing role' with
'democratization,' then we can transpose practically word for word what the
newspapers were writing 100 years ago to today's world and the arguments we
hear from some of our colleagues on issues such as democratization…." (4)

The results of the G8 summit seem both a disappointment and a boon to Russia.
There was no decision on WTO, but neither did criticism of its internal or external
activities dominate the coverage.

Sovereign democracy
Kremlin strategist Vladislav Surkov recently addressed criticism of Russia's
democratic "backsliding" by launching his own campaign to promote the concept
of "Sovereign Democracy." In a pre-summit press briefing, Surkov expounded
on the concept, bandied about Kremlin circles for some time, that countries take
their own, often unique, paths to democratic development. Surkov chose to
assert Russia's right to find its own political way without foreign state interference
or criticism of its choices, differentiating between "sovereign" and "controlled"
democracies:
"A controlled democracy is a model which is forcefully imposed by certain influential centres by hook or by crook. It is not effective because it is imposed from the outside." (5)

A sovereign democracy, on the other hand, allows for freedom of choice within the state that is developing its own democracy: "while building an open society, we do not forget that we are a free society, and we do not want to be managed from the outside." (6) More specifically, "a country's culture and the speed of implementing reforms" are critical elements to Surkov's (somewhat narrow) concept of sovereign democracy. (7)

It is difficult to argue with the general principle that true democratic development best occurs from the inside out, rather than through the imposition of a foreign state's institutions, norms or directives. However, Surkov's timing and President Putin's defensive comments ahead of the G8 summit suggest an orchestrated campaign to prevent issues such as the restriction of press freedoms, rollback of regional elections and emasculation of Russia's legislative institutions from dominating discussions. While they do seem inappropriate topics for state-to-state contacts, such as the G8 meeting, they are nonetheless still fair game for journalists, scholars, and other concerned individuals and groups (yes, even NGOs).

Official US response to the assertion of sovereign democracy has been somewhat ambivalent. There is some confusion as to US President Bush's opinion on the matter: Some reports claim that he dismissed the idea of "sovereign democracy" in remarks at the Other Russia forum, when speaking with a member of Mikhail Khodorkovsky's Open Russia (8); other reports suggest that the president instead concurred that "democracy in Russia "will be a Russian-style democracy"." (9)
Vladislav Surkov, luckily, had even more intriguing concepts to propose before the G8 summit, including a recommendation, during a speech entitled, "The Economy of a Sovereign Democracy: How Can Russia Grow Faster?" that Russia should take a cue from Che Guevarra and, paraphrasing some of Che's remarks on foreign capital, suggested to the United Russia audience that they assist in safeguarding Russia's economy from foreign capital. (10)

Chaika makes his mark
The new Russian Procurator-General, former Justice Minister Yuri Chaika, has set about a crucial initial task—replenishing the staff of the prosecutor's office. Sergei Fridinsky has been named the new Chief Military Prosecutor and Yuri Semin is the new prosecutor for Moscow. (11) Chaika reportedly plans to replace roughly half the deputy prosecutors of the Ustinov era, choosing primarily from a pool of St. Petersburg siloviki. (12) If Chaika's appointments proceed as predicted and Putin were to depart office in 2008, as currently mandated by the Constitution, at least he could count on friendly cadres in the prosecutor's office.

Capital city of the north?
The G8 summit did provide President Putin with another opportunity to showcase his hometown of St. Petersburg, an occasion he clearly relished. More interesting however, is the apparent decision to move Russia's Constitutional Court to St. Petersburg, a decision that has reignited the rumors of a Putin plan to move the Russian capital north. Putin certainly has taken several opportunities to host international events in the more aesthetically pleasing City of the North, and certainly prefers to choose his associates predominately from that region.

One thing is clear: The Chairman of the Constitutional Court, Valeri Zorkin, is not pleased with the idea of moving north: "This is a political issue. If the motherland orders so, we shall obey. Should there be such a political decision, the Court will move to the Sverdlovsk Region." (13)
Source Notes:

(1) President Putin's Interview with NBC Television Channel (USA), 12 Jul 06 via www.kremlin.ru.
(2) In fact, the criticisms did not quite reach a fever pitch, as developments around the world, and in the Middle East in particular, took center stage in reports about the summit. It is not difficult to imagine reporters being forced to dump stories about unemployed journalists who were critical of Putin or the dictatorial behavior of local (unelected) governors.
(3) Interview with NBC, ibid.
(4) President Putin's Interview with TF-1 Television Channel (France), 12 Jul 06 via www.kremlin.ru.
(5) ITAR-TASS new agency Moscow in Russian, 28 Jun 06 and RIA-Novosti in Russian, 28 Jun 06; BBC Monitoring International reports via Lexis-Nexis Academic.
(6) Ibid.
(7) Ibid.
(10) "Let's be like Che Guevara," by Elena Runeva and Anna Nikolayev, Vedomosti, 12 Jul 06; WPS via Lexis-Nexis Academic. Che Guevarra frequently railed against the dangers of foreign capital, notably during an address to the United Nations Conference on Trade and development in Geneva, Switzerland, March 24, 1965 when he commented: "It must be made crystal clear that foreign capital investment dominating any country's economy, the deterioration in terms of trade, the control of one country's markets by another, discriminatory relations, and the use of force as an instrument of persuasion, are
a danger to world trade and world peace." Guevarra's remarks at the conference are very pointed and constitute a "call for justice" on the part of the developing/socialist world versus the capitalist/developed west. Surkov's use of this rhetoric may signal an extremely hypocritical appeal to the lesser developed countries and an a very unwelcome development in general.

(11) "Chaika gathers his flock," by Kseniya Solyanskaya, 6 Jul 06, gazeta.ru; OSC Translated Excerpt via World News Connection (WNC).
(12) Ibid.
(13) Interfax, 3 Jul 06; OSC Transcribed Text via WNC. Zorkin made these remarks while in the Sverdlovsk Region.

Russian Federation: Security Services
By Fabian Adami

“Liquidate the killers”

On June 3, four Russian diplomats in Iraq, named as Fyodor Zaytsev, Rinat Aglyulin, Anatoli Smirnov and Oleg Fedosseyev were kidnapped by insurgents while their car was traveling through Mansour, a district of Baghdad just outside the “Green Zone.” A fifth diplomat, Vitali Titov, was killed during the attack on their vehicle. (1)

Within days, a group calling itself “The Mujaheddin Shura Council” took responsibility for the kidnappings. In a statement posted on a jihadist website, the group threatened to kill its hostages unless Russia withdrew from Chechnya and released all Muslim prisoners from its jails within a 48 hour period. (2) Russia’s response to the kidnappings was to issue a statement, through Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, pleading for the diplomats’ release, emphasizing that Russia was “a sincere friend of the Iraqi people,” and noting that Russia had been opposed to the 2003 invasion of Iraq. (3)
On 21 June, the kidnappers issued a statement indicating that the diplomats would be killed due to Russia’s failure to accede to their demands. Five days later, a video was released that appeared to show the execution of at least two of the hostages. The statement release alongside the video noted that the executions would “serve as a lesson…to those who would still defy the Mujaheddin and dare to set foot in the land of the two rivers,”(4) as well as “revenge for our brothers and sisters for the torture and killing they receive at the hands of the Russian infidel.” (5)

President Vladimir Putin responded to the killings by ordering Russia’s Special Services to “find and destroy the criminals who committed this evil deed.” (6) FSB Chief Nikolai Patrushev responded to Putin’s instruction by stating that the FSB will “make every effort to ensure that the terrorists involved in the killing…will answer for their actions.” (7) A $10 million reward is to be given for any information leading to a “result” in the hunt for the responsible terrorists. (8)

Several prominent defense analysts in Russia have commented on Putin’s “liquidation order.” Sergei Goncharov, Head of the Veterans of Alfa Group, believes that the Security Services are capable of carrying out Putin’s order, given precise intelligence. (9) Goncharov’s opinion has been seconded by Anatoli Tsyganok, head of the Military Forecasting Center in Moscow. (10) Pavel Felgenhauer also has commented on Putin’s order, stating that “We can do nothing…without the cooperation of the Iraqi secret services and those of the coalition…this declaration is an obvious imitation of those of Bush after September 11.” (11) Given the present state of decay in Russia’s armed forces, as well as the evidence of botched past operations, Felgenhauer’s statement is likely to constitute the most accurate evaluation. Whether or not Russia’s Special Services can or cannot carry out Putin’s orders may be, in this instance, a secondary question. The larger issue is the brewing turf war between the FSB, the Foreign Intelligence Service (SVR) and the GRU.
SVR & GRU vs. FSB turf battle?

Last month, it was announced that the Duma would consider a bill providing the FSB with the authority to carry out anti-terrorist activities outside Russia. Given the status of the GRU and SVR as the agencies responsible for foreign operations under Russian law, it seems evident that the bill was designed as the "first step" in an effort to reunify Russia’s intelligence agencies under a single command. (12)

The new anti-terrorism Bill was passed by the Upper and Lower Houses of the Duma respectively on 5 and 7 July.

The fact that a turf battle between Russia’s intelligence agencies is now raging has become increasingly clear in the last few weeks. First, a 5 July Izvestia article sourced to Sergei Shestov, CEO of a Special Services Veterans organization claimed that an SVR Special Operations Team called “Zaslon,” which is “as well equipped as the legendary Alfa and Vympel commandos,” would carry out the liquidation order. (13) Several days later, Defense Minister Sergei Ivanov confirmed a statement apparently made days earlier by Chief of Staff Yuri Baluyevsky, to the effect that the best special forces operatives of the Main Intelligence Department of the armed forces (GRU) were already in Iraq, tasked with destroying the terrorists responsible for the slayings. (14) If all of these statements are to be taken at face value, Russia’s three main intelligence agencies are now competing over the same mission.

It should be noted that the new anti-terrorism bill is not a response to the killings in Iraq. The bill was first presented to the Duma for consideration in March of this year. (15) The diplomats' deaths and "retribution order" form merely the umbrella under which the three intelligence agencies are fighting either to expand or retain their territory. The GRU's and SVR's future status may now hinge on their success in hunting down the embassy killers.
Update: “Provokatsiya” along Georgian border?
Late in May, the FSB announced the future professionalization of the Border Guard Service. Under the auspices of promoting the changes, FSB Director Patrushev traveled to the Georgian border to “familiarize” himself with the border strengthening program. Although “familiarization” was the public explanation for Patrushev’s visit, his presence also may have been designed to send a message to Tbilisi regarding Georgia’s discussion of NATO membership and of leaving the CIS. (16)

On 27 June, President Putin stated categorically that Russian "peacekeepers" would remain in Abzkhaizia and South Ossestia “regardless of provocations.” (17) In the last few weeks, this statement has taken on an ominous character. On 12 July, ITAR-TASS reported that Russian troops in South Ossetia and Abkhazia had been placed on a “heightened alert state.” (18) Apparently, an FSB informant told his controllers that Georgian forces were planning a deception operation during the G8 Summit, involving the planting of bodies on South Ossetian territory. (19)

Realistically, Georgia lacks the military capability to challenge Russia. As such, there are a number of possibilities regarding this story. First, Georgia plans to use a “deception campaign” to garner US sympathy during President Bush’s visit to St. Petersburg, or secondly—and more realistically—Patrushev’s border visit, Putin’s seemingly prophetic statement, and the FSB’s “warning” amount to an orchestrated disinformation campaign designed to allow Russia to claim “preemptive necessity,” and possibly gain US accession in anti-Tbilisi actions planned for the near future.

Basayev's death
On 10 July, FSB Director Nikolai Patrushev apparently informed President Putin that Chechen warlord Shamil Basayev and several other militant leaders were killed during the course of a special operation. (20) A day later, an FSB source in
the Southern Federal District claimed that Basayev had been killed by a targeted rocket strike, computed using the signal from his cell-phone. (21)

Chechen rebel leaders have confirmed that Basayev was killed, but have denied that Russian forces were responsible. Bashir Aushev, Deputy Prime Minister of Ingushetia stated that Basayev was killed in the “accidental explosion of a truck carrying explosives,” not by Russian Special Forces. (22) At this point in time, there would seem to be at least some evidence that Aushev’s claim is correct: Kommersant reported that the FSB only arrived at the scene of the explosion six hours after the fact. Moreover, Kommersant claimed that the “material evidence gathered by experts” showed that the militants had blown themselves up through “careless handling of explosives.” (23)

Given this evidence, it seems clear that the FSB is claiming Basayev’s death as a “Special Operation” for its own ends: the organization needed a “success” after the Beslan debacle, and it needs political capital with the President if it is to be successful in its aim of recreating a “super agency” along the lines of the Soviet era KGB.

Source Notes:

(2) “4 Russian Diplomats Kidnapped in Iraq Are Killed?” Pravda.ru, 26 Jun 06 via www.english.pravda.ru/hotspots/terror/26-06-2006/82491-Russian_kill-0.
(3) “Russian Diplomats ‘To Be Killed,’” BBC News, Ibid.
(4) Ibid.
(5) “4 Russian Diplomats Kidnapped in Iraq Are Killed?” Pravda.ru, Ibid.
(7) “Russian Security Services Head Vows To Avenge Death of Diplomats In Iraq,” Interfax News Agency, Moscow, in Russian, 28 Jun 06; BBC Monitoring via Lexis-Nexis.
(8) “Russian Security Service Chief Announces Reward For Iraq Killers,” NTV Mir, Moscow, in Russian, 30 Jun 06 via Lexis-Nexis.
(9) “Russian Military Experts Comment on Putin’s Order To Find Killers of Iraq Envoys,” Ekho Moskvy Radio, 28 Jun 06; BBC Monitoring via Lexis-Nexis.
(10) Ibid.
(11) “Putin Orders Liquidation of Baghdad Embassy Killers,” Agence France Presse, 28 Jun 06 via Lexis-Nexis
(12) The ISCIP Analyst, Volume XII, Number 4 (Apr 06).
(14) “Russia Increases Anti-Terrorist Struggle,” WPS Observer, 10 Jul 06 via Lexis-Nexis.
(16) The ISCIP Analyst, Volume XII, Number 4 (20 Apr 06)
(18) “Russian Peacekeepers In Ossetia On Alert After FSB Statement,” ITAR-TASS, 12 Jul 06, OSC Translated Excerpt via World News Connection.
(20) “Russia: FSB Reports Shamil Basayev Eliminated In Ingushetia,” Interfax, 10 Jul 06, OSC Transcribed Text via World News Connection.
(22) “Top Chechen Warlord Dead: Russian Special Forces,” Agence-France-Presse, 10 Jul 06 via Lexis-Nexis.
Odd man out?
Now that Russia’s much-anticipated G8 presidency is winding down, the flaws of Russia’s current foreign policy have become more visible. According to Russia’s official G8 web site, G8 meetings are “designed to harmonize attitudes to acute international problems.” (1) However, the only of the "harmonized attitudes" visible at this summit was the clarification of the differences between Russia and the other G8 members. Calling this an “important result,” former British Ambassador to Russia and long-time summit attendee, Roderic Lyne, concluded, "Liberals in Russia worried that the summit would be seen as a seal of approval for repressive policies and that outsiders would be hoodwinked by expensive and cunning PR agencies. The reverse has been the case. The leaders arrived in St. Petersburg with an outpouring of criticism of Russia from media and political commentators throughout the Western world ringing in their ears." (2)

The upsurge of violence in the Middle East only added to the list of contentions between Russia and the other members of the G8. While every member condemned Hezbollah for provoking the violence by kidnapping Israeli soldiers, Russia and France differed from other members of the G8 by placing some of the blame for the escalation of violence on Israel. Foreign Minister Lavrov told reporters, “This is a disproportionate response to what has happened, and if both sides are going to paint each other into a corner then I think that all this will develop in a very dramatic and tragic way.” (3)
President Bush refrained from calling for a cease-fire and condemned Hezbollah, calling it and its patrons the “root cause” of the current violence in the Middle East. (4) He stressed that Hezbollah, which has made its home in Lebanon, must be seen as a client of Iran and Syria. (5) British Prime Minister Tony Blair supported Bush’s statement. After hesitating for days whether to point fingers directly at Iran and Syria, Blair told reporters on 16 July, “There are those in the region, notably Iran and Syria, who do not want this process of democratization and negotiation to succeed...There has been a real hesitation to put the real truth of this situation.” (6)

Lavrov, however, questioned statements about Hezbollah’s relations with Iran and Syria during a television interview with CNN. Speaking in English with a heavy Russian accent, Lavrov fielded reporter Wolf Blitzer’s questions regarding Hezbollah’s political and economic ties to Syria and Iran by acknowledging Hezbollah’s provocations but refusing to accept Syria's and Iran's roles until “we see the facts.” (7)

Foreign Minister Lavrov may have kept his statements vague for more than just simple concern for Iran and Syria – Russia has sold millions of dollars worth of weapons and technology to both countries.

In late 2005, the international community came down hard on Putin for attempting to sell to Syria Iskander-E tactical missiles, which are said to be favorites of terrorists for their ease of operation and ability to transport. President Putin eventually gave in to international pressure, but Russia continues to send Strelets (SA-18) surface-to-air missiles to Damascus. (8)

On 9 February, amid intense controversy surrounding Russia’s role in aiding Iran’s nuclear ambitions, Russia confirmed that it would sell twenty-nine Tor-M1’s, low-altitude surface-to-air missiles, and two Pechora-2A systems, medium-range surface-to-air missiles, to Tehran in exchange for $700 million. (9)
Russian officials have stipulated that the systems sold in this deal, which media outlets believe to have been brokered in December 2005, are to be used solely for defense purposes, but they might well serve as insurance against possible attempts to take out Iran’s potential nuclear weapons facilities. (10)

The Middle East has long been an important region for Russian foreign policy. Not only is it potentially lucrative to broker arm’s deals with oil-rich countries like Iran, but Russia finds it politically valuable to pursue relations also with countries like Syria, which are not as oil-rich. As the successor to the USSR, Russia seems also intent upon claiming superpower status, which involves expanding beyond the role of being just a regional power. Today, in place of a Soviet ideologically-driven zero-sum foreign policy there is an effort to enhance Russia’s national interests. (11) Yet to remain relevant amid various political and economic crises, Russian policymakers have all but ignored any long-term strategies in favor of short-term gains, as evidenced by the decision to supply arms to Syria and Iran without looking at the possible future consequences of those deals (e.g. "seepage" of the weapons into the hands of terrorist groups like Hezbollah). Until now, Moscow has been attempting to appear even-handed. Aside from the recent arms deals, Russia has held talks with Hamas while simultaneously maintaining normal relations with Israel. President Putin fended off US Vice President Richard Cheney’s recent critique, sparring back at him during an interview with NBC’s Matt Lauer, (12) while maintaining a supposedly “solid friendship” with President Bush. (13)

However, this week’s G8 summit has highlighted these discrepancies. On top of the differences of opinion on Syria’s and Iran’s role in the current violence in the Middle East, Russia also irked various other G8 members; it differed from the European majority in its failure to ratify the Energy Charter and it differed from the United States regarding its stance on Iran and its place in the WTO. (14)
On Iran, President Putin opposes UN sanctions, telling reporters, “We need to take efficient diplomatic steps that will not disrupt the delicate fabric of negotiations in the search for a mutually acceptable decision.” (15)

Russia’s new troubles regarding its WTO membership bode even worse for its foreign relations with the United States. On 4 July, Putin threatened to drop WTO rules if Russia was not admitted: "The conditions in which the Russian economy is functioning are much more open and more liberal than those in some countries that have already joined [the WTO]. And if we, for some reason, do not succeed in reaching a final agreement, we will, of course, revoke our commitments to some of the agreements that we have not only adopted but are also fulfilling without being a member of the organization." (16)

Not only was Russia not admitted to the WTO during the G8 summit, but the United States remains the last hold-out (unless Georgia withdraws from its bilateral trade agreements following the recent Russian border closing). After negotiating for days over Russia’s WTO status, the United States ultimately decided to hold off on an official agreement because of certain stipulations about US meat exports to Russia. While Putin said the “difficulties” were not “unexpected,” (17) other members of the Russian camp took this as a slight. Russian Finance Minister Alexei Kudrin complained, “We are in the role of the younger brother for whom it’s harder, who is looked down upon.” (18) Kudrin characterized Russia’s WTO status as “an economy class ticket for the price of 1st class one.” (19)

Clearly, the G8’s mission to “harmonize attitudes” on various issues did not go quite as planned for any of the members who refused to consider other options than those with which they arrived on the most contentious of items.

Source Notes:
(1) “G8 History,” 17 Jul 06, Official Website of the G8 Presidency via en.g8russia.ru.
(5) Ibid.
Newly Independent States: Caucasus

By Anastasia Skoybedo

GEORGIA

Lemon juice on a paper-cut

Russian pressure on Georgia has been stimulated in the past few weeks by the G8 summit. Russia tried to prevent discussion of its political and economic relations with Georgia and the so-called frozen conflicts, while Georgia tried very hard to make its voice heard and its grievances addressed. Thus, in the weeks preceding the summit, the two countries have been involved in a diplomatic battle to influence the summit's agenda. In order to soften their relations and to create at least an appearance of improvement, or just simply to show the ability to negotiate, President Mikhail Saakashvili initiated a meeting with President Vladimir Putin on 13 June. (1) This meeting was supposed to address questions regarding Abkhazian and South Ossetian separatism, as well as the recently imposed Russian embargo on Georgian food and wine. It began with an awkward and strenuous conversation in front of the journalists, ended behind closed doors and accomplished nothing. In relation to the conflicts, Saakashvili exclaimed: “We have nothing to give! No one will get a single piece of Georgia!” (2) Putin, meanwhile, spoke of referenda and patience. (3) The economic sphere came out in better shape, with both presidents agreeing that economic
relations were “improving.” However, lack of elaboration, avoidance of key issues, such as the wine embargo, and no actual evidence of an improvement point to movement in a different direction. (4)

On 7 July, Saakashvili travelled to the United States to meet President Bush, where they discussed the same questions that Saakashvili had tried to resolve with Putin. (5) This meeting ended more successfully – Saakashvili received an assurance from President Bush that the Georgian “territorial question” will be brought up during the G8 summit, as will Russia’s general relations with Georgia. (6) Georgia did not try to conceal the fact that Saakashvili’s trip to US was “to have consolidated support at the G8 summit.” (7) This posed understandable difficulties for the Russian plan to avoid discussing Georgia during the summit. Furthermore, preceding the US trip, Saakashvili denied any possibility of referenda in either breakaway region as a means of solving the conflicts. Saakashvili maintains that the territorial integrity of Georgia will be the foremost factor in any resolution, stating that “we will resolve the conflicts, we hope, together with Russia or without it.” (8) Russia has insisted on a referendum as the most acceptable means of resolution, and Putin tried to impose this view on Saakashvili during his St. Petersburg visit. This was a double blow, for not only does Saakashvili wish to invite Western powers into a region that Russia considers its own sphere of influence, he also wanted to bring up this topic during the G8 summit and has full assurance of support from President Bush.

On 8 July, Russia closed the only officially recognised checkpoint on the Georgian border for “repairs.” (9) The Georgian side immediately branded this as a provocation and demanded an explanation and a set date for re-opening, while Russia refused to offer any explanation on the incident. (10) In response, the Georgian Parliament intensified its efforts to end the mandate of Russian "peacekeepers" in South Ossetia and prevented a scheduled meeting of a Mixed Control Commission for the Settlement of the Georgian-Ossetian Conflict by
detaining Ambassador Yuri Pavlov and commander of "peacekeeping" forces Valeri Evnevich twice at a checkpoint near Tskhinvali. (11)

All these moves are going to have a detrimental effect on a meeting between the two countries planned for after the summit. Saakashvilli, however, emerges successful from this battle, for Georgia was discussed at the G8 summit, although Russia can take credit for minimizing the impact of that conversation. Putin did not allow this celebration to be spoiled.

NORTH CAUCASUS
Terrorists, thrice beheaded
The assassination of Aslan Maskhadov in the spring of 2005 was a major blow to Chechen resistance, depriving it of an important icon. Since then, there have been no events of equal importance until this past month. These two eliminations of Chechen leaders by themselves might not have had such a large bearing, but, combined, they present rebels with a serious dilemma. For the first time they find themselves without any visible leaders, save for Doku Umarov, the recently named "President of Ichkeria" of the Chechen resistance.

On 17 June, underground rebel president Abdul-Khalim Sadulayev was killed in what was swiftly deemed a successful special operation, organized to capture Sadulayev. (12) Immediately after the assassination, as contradictory and confusing accounts began to emerge and rumors grew, Ramzan Kadyrov stated that Sadulayev was caught while preparing another terrorist attack. (13) It is well known that Sadulayev, as a true follower of Maskhadov, opposed terrorist attacks and violence against civilians. Moreover, Sadulayev has never been incriminated in any of the terrorist attacks. Kadyrov also claimed that Sadulayev was "sold" for US $55, while local sources testified that there were reports of "suspicious bearded men" hiding in the basement, but no knowledge that one of them was Sadulayev himself, (14) pointing to the fact that the special "Sadulayev operation" might not have taken place. Furthermore, such an operation was unlikely simply
because Russian leadership has been ignorant of Sadulayev's precise role in Chechen resistance ever since he assumed the post of President. It has perceived him as subservient to Basayev and quite unimportant, while, in fact, he had strong influence on Basayev, and was held in high regard among the rebels. In addition, Sadulayev organised the so-called Caucasian Front, which finalised the spread of Chechen armed resistance to other areas of the North Caucasus. Hence, a "special operation" evaporates and becomes rather a stroke of luck, which apparently occurred during a police check of a suspicious building.

After the death of Sadulayev, Doku Umarov was promoted to President of Ichkeria, while Shamil Basayev was named Prime Minister; several days later, Basayev himself was killed in another dubious "special operation." (15) Basayev was reported to have died on 10 July when he was blown up in an Ingushetian village of Ekazhevo by a detonator placed by the FSB in a truckload of explosives that he allegedly had received from abroad. (16) The circumstances of his death remain sketchy at best, with many rumoured versions of events. Why have there been so many contradictory accounts and no single official account? Who exactly carried out the operation? And why did Basayev require a truckload of explosives from abroad when he was perfectly content using Russian ammunition in the past? These are only a few of the questions that remain unanswered.

Thus, Doku Umarov remains the only known leader of the Chechen resistance, and Russia is rejoicing over this success. However, there are several factors that cause serious concern for everyone (except the Russian government, which is too busy congratulating itself). First, there is a whole generation of young fighters who have grown up during the war and have no memory of Chechnya in peacetime, most of whom are unknown to the "upper echelons;" there might be more than one potential successor to Basayev among them. Second, the insurgency already has spread to other republics, and Sadulayev’s official Caucasian Front exemplifies this reality. Chechnya’s status as the focus of
Caucasian resistance has been diminished in recent years, so even if the Chechen branch is completely eradicated, it will not stop the larger process that is underway. Third, if Doku Umarov were killed and Akhmed Zakayev were extradited by the UK (which seems to be Russia’s goal), there would be no relatively moderate leaders of the resistance left. If Russia really wants to bring peace to the region, it has to act now, while Umarov and Zakayev are alive and able to negotiate. Although Russian policy has eschewed this approach, Russia may have to accept that new, young Chechen leaders might not want to discuss a peaceful solution. Russia has been successful thus far in its anti-terrorist campaign. However, the actions that Russia does or does not take now will show whether it is truly committed to settling the conflict. At the moment, Russia is wasting valuable time and resources, and continues to suffer from the nearsightedness that has plagued its policies in the Caucasus for a very long time.

Source Notes:

(2) Ibid.
(3) Ibid.
(4) 15 Jun 05, Rustavi-2 Television; OSC Translated Text via World News Connection.
(6) Ibid.
(7) 4 Jul 06, Georgian TV; OSC Translated Text via World News Connection.
(8) 11 Jul 06, Interfax; OSC Transcribed Text via World News Connection.
(10) Ibid.
(12) 17 Jun 06, Interfax; OSC Transcribed Text via World News Connection.
(13) Ibid.
(16) Ibid.

Newly Independent States: Central Asia
By Monika Shepherd

Back in the CSTO – Uzbekistan returns to the fold
On June 23 at a meeting of the Collective Security Council of the CSTO (Collective Security Treaty Organization) in Minsk, Russian President Vladimir Putin announced that the Uzbek government had “lifted its moratorium on active work within the Collective Security Treaty Organization” and now should be considered a full member of the organization. (1) Uzbekistan was one of the first states to sign the CIS Collective Security Treaty in May 1992, only to suspend its membership in 1999 and join the GUAM alliance (Georgia, Ukraine, Armenia and Moldova) instead, in an effort to distance itself from Russia. (2) The Uzbek government withdrew from GUAM in June 2002 (3) and in recent years has turned away from the US and Western Europe and started building a closer relationship with Russia. US dissatisfaction with the slow pace of political and economic reform in Uzbekistan already had caused relations to cool somewhat. (4) However, Washington’s sharp criticism of the Uzbek government’s harsh response to the May 2005 demonstrations and civil unrest in Andijon (5) and repeated calls for the Uzbek government to permit an independent, international investigation of the incident sent US-Uzbek relations into an acute downward
spiral from which they have yet to recover. Subsequently, Uzbekistan decided to close the US airbase in Termez, depriving American military forces of one staging area for their operations in Afghanistan.

As its relationship with Washington began stalling, Uzbekistan started bolstering its ties with Russia, signing in June 2004 a strategic partnership treaty, which called for greater political and economic cooperation, particularly in the sphere of energy resources. The Uzbek government was so eager to move forward with the development of its energy resources that a production-sharing agreement between Uzbekneftegaz and LUKoil to develop Uzbekistan’s southwestern gas fields was signed the same day. The two sides also pledged to work together to create a regional security system in Central Asia. (6) In November 2005, Uzbekistan went one step further by entering into an alliance with Russia in which each of the two countries committed itself to provide military aid to the other in case of an act of aggression by a third country. The agreement also gave each side the right to use the other’s military bases and “other facilities.” (7) Now, less than a year later, Uzbekistan has rejoined the CSTO, thereby committing itself to defend not just Russia, but all of the other members of the treaty organization (Russia, Belarus, Armenia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan). By joining the CSTO, the Uzbek government also has granted the other member states the right to weigh in on decisions regarding the stationing of military personnel from non-CSTO states on Uzbek soil, which, at first glance, would seem a particularly egregious surrender of its rights as a sovereign state. Fortunately, thus far, the provision of the CSTO charter which requires “consultations” with the other members whenever any one of them wants to allow the deployment of non-CSTO troops or facilities on its territory (8) has not received so much as lip service (there are Indian and French troops stationed in Tajikistan, US troops in Kyrgyzstan, and German troops in Uzbekistan; none of these troop deployments were discussed within the CSTO). (9) However, should Moscow decide to flex its not inconsiderable military muscles and insist on stationing Russian troops and permanent military facilities in the CSTO states
as part of the consolidation and reorganization process that it wants to implement, (10) then the CSTO’s Central Asian members might find themselves ceding control over their own military and security forces to Moscow, and with it, full control over much of their own foreign policy.

President Karimov undoubtedly is expecting to reap both economic and military benefits from Uzbekistan’s re-entry into the CSTO, perhaps hoping that Russia now will shoulder the financial burdens involved in training and equipping Uzbekistan’s border troops and internal security forces. He also most likely expects that Uzbekistan’s membership in both the CSTO and Eurasian Economic Community (EurAsEc) will open more doors for investment and trade between all the member countries. However, judging by his comments at a post-summit press conference, the Uzbek president’s greatest expectation seems to be that by rejoining the CSTO, his country now will receive the international attention and respect that he claims it deserves, particularly from the United States (President Karimov’s comment on how Uzbekistan’s CSTO membership will be perceived on the international stage: "As you know already, today Uzbekistan has become, or to be more precise, has restored its membership of the CSTO. This is an event which, naturally, will attract the attention of not only those journalists and the media present here today but also of those people who are concerned by this, including those who are located far away from the territory we are on now."

(11)

Uzbekistan has been virtually ignored all too often by the powers-that-be in Washington, especially during its first few years of post-Soviet independence, when President Karimov’s administration was still relatively receptive to Western overtures and had not yet adopted the politically repressive policies that characterize his regime today. Although Uzbekistan does not offer the same economic opportunities for Western investment that its oil- and gas-rich neighbors do, its geographic position and the fact that it remains one of the strongest and most politically stable countries in the region give it a very
significant role to play in Central Asian geopolitics. Unfortunately, over the past 15 years, few US policy-makers seem to have recognized Uzbekistan’s geopolitical importance in Central Asia and even fewer have taken steps to develop US-Uzbek relations, in order to create a positive environment for US investment and influence in Central Asia. The result is that not only Uzbekistan, but also Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, have shifted their focus to improving their relations with Russia, as well as with China. In the short-run, allying themselves with Russia may bring greater economic, military, and even political benefits to the CSTO countries; however, in the long run, there may be a considerable price to pay. Thus far, the Russian government’s goals in Central Asia seem to revolve mainly around exploiting its mineral resources and gaining and/or retaining control over its oil and gas pipelines, as well as gaining as much sway as possible over the Central Asian countries’ foreign policies. Should Russia manage to accomplish these goals, the Central Asian states easily could devolve into being little more than Russian colonies.

Source Notes:

(1) “Uzbekistan is now full CSTO member – Putin,” RIA Novosti, 23 Jun 06 via en.rian.ru/world.
(2) “Uzbek decisions of the Minsk summit are purely perfunctory at this point,” The Times of Central Asia, 27 Jun 06 via Lexis-Nexis Academic Universe.
(3) “Uzbekistan Quits Regional Transport Corridor,” Xinhua News Agency, 14 Jun 02 via Lexis-Nexis Academic Universe.
Newly Independent States: Western Region

By Tammy Lynch

UKRAINE

What about the Maidan?

Almost two years ago in Ukraine, up to one million people joined together to protest against a regime that had suppressed their freedom, supported a culture of deep corruption, rigged an election and been implicated in at least one murder. In Independence Square, these people they chanted slogans demanding “bandits to jail,” “freedom,” and “Yushchenko – President!”

Their chants followed a presidential election found by all internationally accredited election monitoring organizations to be unfair and not free. During the election, then-Prime Minister Viktor Yanukovich’s government reportedly used state resources and well-paid “private” security services to, among other things, bribe and intimidate voters, while altering the vote counts in some areas.

After 17 days of protest, the election was invalidated, a new ballot was held, and Ukraine welcomed its new President Viktor Yushchenko. “The people won!” said
Anya, after the announcement that Yushchenko had been elected. “For 70 years we were slaves,” said Andriy. “In 1991, we received freedom on paper, but it was still slavery, just different masters. Now, people want to hold their heads up. People want freedom. … This was a victory of the nation.” (1)

What a difference two years make.

On 18 July, Viktor Yanukovich was nominated by the new parliamentary majority to return as prime minister. Since Ukraine has now become a parliamentary-presidential republic, Yanukovich – the man disgraced, discredited and literally chased out of town in 2004 – could now become more powerful than the president.

One day later, the bloc of former Prime Minister Yulia Tymoshenko walked out of parliament in protest, calling on the president to disband the parliament, with the members draping their seats with a massive Ukrainian flag as they went. (2)

The return of Yanukovich officially occurred as a result of the disintegration on 7 July of the “orange coalition of democratic forces,” comprised of the parties that had led the revolution protests – Viktor Yushchenko’s Our Ukraine, The Yulia Tymoshenko Bloc (BYUT) and the Socialist Party. But it was actually a much longer process – beginning in September 2005, when Yushchenko dismissed Tymoshenko from her position as prime minister, thus splintering the “orange team” – and intensifying after the parliamentary elections of March 2006.

Following the parliamentary elections, the three “orange” parties together could have secured a slim majority, and should have been able quickly to put together a coalition to create a government.

But the disappointing third place finish of President Yushchenko’s party, following a series of (legally unproven) corruption charges against some of the top names
on his party’s electoral list, made negotiations difficult. Neither Yushchenko nor his allies appeared able to accept that their party had finished behind the bloc of former Prime Minister Yulia Tymoshenko – until then, always a junior ally.

But, in March, Tymoshenko’s calls to clean up corruption and fulfill the “goals of the Maidan” (Independence Square), resonated with voters. Her party’s 22 percent of the electorate placed it well ahead of the 14 percent gained by Yushchenko’s Our Ukraine, and the 5% of the Socialists. When seats were redistributed after subtracting the votes given to parties that did not pass the electoral threshold, the three partners would have had a majority of 239 out of 450 deputies.

Still, Yushchenko and Our Ukraine delayed, seemingly hoping that by postponing a coalition agreement, they could extract bigger dividends. The biggest, of course, was the prime minister’s post, which Tymoshenko immediately claimed, as the leader of the largest party in the potential coalition. Our Ukraine officially balked, suggesting that their party, as the party of the president, should choose the prime minister.

Our Ukraine also undertook “secret” negotiations (although they were reported throughout the media and confirmed by individual party members) with the party that placed first in the poll—Viktor Yanukovich’s Party of Regions. Drawing on the heavily populated, Russian-speaking Eastern regions of the country, Yanukovich’s party received 32 percent of the vote.

The Our Ukraine cat-and-mouse game with BYUT and the Party of Regions continued for almost three months, leaving the country with a caretaker government. Clearly, Our Ukraine and the president had a difficult job and a difficult choice – one not made easier at all times by the demands of BYUT. But Yushchenko’s delay in choosing to unite with his former revolution partners was costly. By that time, the Party of Regions had badly outmaneuvered the “orange”
team. Regions had gone behind Yushchenko’s back to “steal” the Socialist Party.

Just days after Our Ukraine, BYUT and the Socialists announced their “coalition of democratic forces,” Socialist leader Oleksandr Moroz switched sides and joined his party with the Communists and Yanukovich, creating a new majority. (3) From the parliamentary tribune, Tymoshenko claimed that large amounts of money had changed hands, while the deputies in her faction chanted, “Moroz is Judas!” Regardless, the “democratic majority” was over before it began. (4)

The episode was oddly and ominously similar to the situation following the parliamentary election in 2002.

Then, Our Ukraine, BYUT and the Socialists officially attempted to form a majority with certain members of the Communist Party and other unaffiliated deputies. However, throughout the negotiations to form Ukraine’s first ever “democratic majority,” Yushchenko also negotiated with then-President Kuchma’s United Ukraine Party. In exchange for a promise to name him prime minister, Yushchenko reportedly agreed to work with United Ukraine instead of the Socialists and BYUT. But at the last moment, United Ukraine reneged on its promises, used various techniques to convince individual deputies to desert the “democratic forces,” and created a majority without Yushchenko, BYUT or the Socialists.

“The agreement to appoint Viktor Yushchenko as prime minister was brilliant bait,” Yulia Tymoshenko said at the time. “While the businessmen of United Ukraine made a show of discussing details of the agreement with Yushchenko, the authorities were actively pulling away people’s deputies from the opposition majority.” (5)
According to a number of individuals familiar with the negotiations, the Party of Regions also used the prime minister position as bait in 2006. The party reportedly said it would allow Our Ukraine to name the prime minister – something the Yulia Tymoshenko Bloc would not do. It seems, however, that this offer may have been intended to be fulfilled; Yanukovich told several officials privately that he had agreed to give up the position. In the end, Yushchenko turned this offer down. But, it appears that the damage was done.

This damage, ironically, had been predicted by Tymoshenko. “It would be a tragedy,” she said on 29 March, “if we lost the chance to form the coalition of our three forces. All these votes could be lost . . . if we lose time. . . . In 2002, we lost this chance to create such a coalition. I don’t want to repeat this mistake and these bad results. I don’t want this to finish the same way. I appeal to Our Ukraine and all the leaders of the bloc not to postpone under any circumstances these negotiations.” (6)

At that time, Tymoshenko’s allies privately suggested that representatives from the Party of Regions had begun calling individual deputies and offering various incentives to leave the coalition. It appears that, with enough time, these incentives worked.

Following the announcement of the new Communist-Socialist-Party of Regions majority, several citizens groups set up a new “tent camp” on the Maidan to protest a possible government led by Yanukovich, and to urge the president to dissolve parliament and call new elections. BYUT and the Ukrainian People’s Party (Rukh-Kostenko) quickly joined them. Our Ukraine did not.

After negotiating again with both BYUT and Regions, Our Ukraine declared itself in opposition. But a number of media reported that negotiations continue with Yanukovich, to try to bring Our Ukraine into the government. “Our Ukraine has no right to be in the opposition,” Foreign Minister Borys Tarasyuk said. “We must
influence the process of development of our state whoever the Prime Minister is and whatever coalition is formed.” (7)

Our Ukraine’s desire to influence the government makes it unlikely that Yushchenko will take the drastic step of dissolving parliament, as BYUT suggests. Even more, Our Ukraine’s poll ratings have slipped considerably since March, meaning a new election is likely to diminish the party’s influence further.

In Ukraine, where a central power has always ruled strongly and exclusively, there is a limited understanding of an opposition’s role. Nevertheless, a number of politicians within the Our Ukraine party – reform-oriented politicians who have always supported a “democratic coalition,” and who worked hard to unite the parties – has announced its intention to construct a “shadow government.” Its members also are working with BYUT to determine how they will influence and monitor the cabinet. This assumes, of course, that BYUT will return to the parliament, and that Our Ukraine will remain in the opposition.

Since the government will likely include a number of individuals previously charged with crimes, the monitoring function of the opposition will be essential. Should the new “democratic opposition” prove able to effectively monitor and influence the government in power, Ukrainians will be able to say that the gains of the orange revolution have not disappeared.

BELARUS
Banking on oil and gas
Over the last several months, the US and EU repeatedly have criticized Belarusian President Aleksandr Lukashenko for holding a fraudulent election, jailing political opponents and outlawing public gatherings and protests. Yet, while statements opposing Lukashenko have been numerous, actions have been few and ineffective. This is understandable in a world environment dominated by
bombs, civil war and war crimes tribunals. But it is unfortunate, given the real possibility to make a difference in a country bordering the EU.

On 19 March, Belarusians voted in what was deemed by international and independent domestic election monitors as an unfair presidential election in an environment that was not free. During the campaign, observers documented numerous, flagrant violations of international electoral standards. Opponents of Lukashenko were regularly harassed; they were not allowed to hold rallies or meet groups of voters numbering more than ten; they were investigated by police; they were beaten; they were arrested. The media were – and are – entirely censored. Election observers themselves were arrested or deported. In short, the atmosphere provided no choice – except that imposed by the government.

Throughout the campaign, EU and US representatives threatened punitive measures if the election was found to fall short of accepted election standards and practices – standards Belarus agreed to follow when it became a member of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe.

Following the election, the EU, the US, Canada and a number of other countries, announced travel bans against dozens of Belarusian officials. The EU also prohibited "persons who are responsible for the violations of international electoral standards and the crackdown on civil society and the democratic opposition" from accessing bank accounts or resources on EU territory. (8) One month ago, the US followed suit. In his letter to Congress announcing the banking freeze, President George Bush wrote, "There is simply no place in a Europe whole and free for a regime of this kind." (9)

Lukashenko laughed. He had no bank accounts in the EU or US, he said, and offered a reward to anyone who could prove he did. (10)
In fact, experts suggest that any money held by Lukashenko outside of Belarus likely is kept not in the West, but in places like Cyprus and the Pacific island of Nauru, which have long been favorites of the former Soviet elite. This is perhaps why Belarus' most popular opposition politician, Aleksandr Milinkevich, praised the sanctions for creating "serious moral pressure," but stopped short of suggesting they would have any practical effect. (11)

His caution seems to have been justified. Despite the warnings and sanctions, over 1,000 opposition activists and election monitors were arrested in the months following the election and sentenced to anywhere from days to years in prison.

On 13 July, Aleksandr Kozulin, one of Lukashenko's opponents in the election, was sentenced to more than 5 years in prison for "aggressive hooliganism" and "organizing disturbances." Those disturbances were peaceful demonstrations against an oppressive and unbalanced electoral environment. "I think this is revenge against a man who dared to say the truth at the moment of the election," Milinkevich said following the sentencing. (12) Milinkevich himself was released from prison in May after a 15 day jail sentence. (13)

So, if the current sanctions are having no effect, what can be done?

First, the EU could remove Belarus from its General Customs Preferences System (GPS). This provides preferential import duties for "developing nations," and reportedly saves Belarus 300 million euros every year. Yet, despite threats to remove this preferential treatment, the EU left it in place until at least September, when it will be reconsidered.

Belarus' neighbors reportedly expressed concern over how the removal of the GPS from Belarus would impact the balance of trade between their countries. However, the abandonment of a sanction that would have had a measurable
practical effect no doubt sent a powerful message to Lukashenko about the EU’s commitment to the cause of human rights in his country.

Second, the EU could restructure how it deals with the question of Belarusian oil. Last year, the Bratislava-based Pontis Foundation completed an examination of Belarus’ energy market in relation to its economy, and found that Belarusian authorities and government-owned businesses make considerable profits by importing Russian oil into Belarus at bargain prices and then exporting it to the EU at market – or just below market – prices.

These contracts with the EU are reportedly worth up to 3.3 billion euros each year and allow Lukashenko to maintain his country at a minimum subsistence level. Russia’s agreement to maintain Belarusian oil prices well below market price is the main reason that Lukashenko can maintain power and avoid the economic reforms that would bring his country closer to Western standards.

Pegging the price of the oil it imports from Belarus to the price paid by Belarus to Russia could strike a direct blow against the Minsk government. The EU is hesitant to take such a drastic step, and cautions against taking actions that would harm the population. Officials also no doubt are concerned about their oil supplies, and wonder about the response of Russia.

In fact, Belarus avoids the negative economic effects of its current isolation thanks to massive Russian subsidies of oil, gas and food products, among other categories. Although Western officials have asked Russia to end this support for Belarus, the country has never truly been pressured on this point.

Still, it is unlikely that Russian officials, who have become steadily more irritated at Lukashenko’s actions, would further jeopardize already difficult relations with the West for Lukashenko when faced with a unified, determined EU front.
Already, Russia is slightly shifting its Belarus policy by demanding higher prices for gas.

Therefore, as Russia lessens some of its subsidies to Belarus, it may be the opportune moment for the EU to do the same. Otherwise, Lukashenko can continue to enjoy bantering back and forth with Western officials over his policies, secure in the belief that it will never develop into anything more.

Source Notes:

(1) Author interviews, Dec 04, Independence Square, Kyiv.
(2) Parliamentary Session, 19 Jul 06 via Rada TV/5 Kanal.
(3) Agence France Presse, 1210 GMT, 7 Jul 06 via Lexis-Nexis.
(4) Parliamentary Session, 8 Jul 06 via Rada TV/5 Kanal.
(5) "Ukrainian Former Deputy PM Claims Role of Opposition Leader," Segodnya, 17 Jun 02, p. 4.
(6) Press Conference of Yulia Tymoshenko, 29 Mar 06.
(7) ForUm, 1124 GMT, 7 Jul 06.
(8) Agence France Presse, 1545 GMT, 18 May 06 via Lexis-Nexis.
(9) "Lukashenko's Banking Secrets; President Bush freezes the accounts of ten Belarusian officials," Gazeta, 21 Jun 06 via Lexis-Nexis.
(10) Ibid.
(11) PAP News Wire, 16 May 06 via Lexis-Nexis.
(12) Agence France Presse, 1833 GMT, 13 Jul 06 via Lexis-Nexis.
(13) Agence France Presse, 0741 GMT, 12 May 06 via Lexis-Nexis.