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Cavan, Susan
Boston University Center for the Study of Conflict, Ideology, and Policy

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Boston University
Russian Federation: Executive Branch

By Susan Cavan

The Valdai Discussion: Access, substance and rock star status

Earlier this month, a selection of Russia watchers, primarily drawn from the ranks of academia and journalism, gathered for the 3rd annual Valdai Club. The hallmark of the Valdai Club is the meeting between President Putin and his distinguished guests (while the guest list skewed heavily towards western invitees, there also were few Russians on the list; this year, as several participants pointed out, there was "even one Chinese journalist."). (1)

The first Valdai Club meeting in 2004 was remarkable in its occurrence and proximity to events in Beslan. Putin's meeting with foreign journalists then marked his first public attempt to discuss what happened at Beslan and what would happen as a result. (2) This first Valdai Club showcased a very weak Putin: The order-from-chaos President had been buffeted by several traumatic terrorist incidents in the country, including suicide airplane and subway station bombings, and his seeming inability to address his own citizens on the topic was almost more newsworthy than the unprecedented gathering with foreign analysts.

At the first Valdai Club, a critical moment in Russian political development was revealed: Putin discussed with his guests that part of his response to Beslan would be to appoint regional governors and leaders, in order to reinforce the "power vertical." (alluded to in his September 4 address as "strengthening the country's unity") (3) Of course, back in 2004, Putin seemed intent on convincing western leaders that Russia's struggle with Chechnya was the world's struggle with radical Islam. Then, Russia acknowledged that it was "in the midst of a "total, cruel and full-scale war," which require the mobilization of the entire nation
as well as the creation of a "more effective security system" and "an organized
and united civil society". (4)

While Putin's plan to roll back elections to regional executive offices, as well as
its consequences for the independence of the Federal Assembly, was criticized
round the boards in the west, the plans nonetheless seemed intellectual, almost
fragile responses to a viscerally horrible attack on children in Beslan. (5) This
moment highlighted a significant difference in leadership style between Putin and
his predecessor: Yel'tsin, with his once-famous ear for political timing, would
never have responded to Beslan in this fashion; Yel'tsin would have apologized
for failing to keep Beslan's children safe, then left the "power vertical" debate to
his advisers and the regional leaders.

The Yel'tsin comparison highlights a sidebar to the Valdai Discussions:
Apparently the West's fixation with the euphoria of the 1990's, allows Yel'tsin's
image to suffer less from his mistakes on the path to democracy. Putin advisers
point out that the Russian view of the chaos of the 1990's does not take on the
sentimental glow of the west's memories and also note that Yel'tsin was given
the opportunity to take authoritarian detours on the path to a form of
democracy—detours like those for which Putin is castigated. Yel'tsin well may
have received kinder treatment in some quarters, notably those where the image
of Yel'tsin standing on a tank to proclaim defiance of the August 1991 coup still
resonates, but that fact cannot relieve Putin of the onus of responsibility for his
actions as head of state.

Initially, one of the most jarring aspects of this year's Valdai Discussion Club
seemed to be an admission by the participants that they had shirked their own
responsibilities given the access afforded them to Putin. Several reports of the
event made clear that the attendees quite enjoyed the wines and five-course
meal and accompanying brandy—although Putin himself barely touched a drop
of alcohol—being so sated, these experts apparently could not bestir themselves
to ask Putin "tough questions." According to one report, the experts' queries were so banal that "Putin was even a bit bored." (6)

In fact however, the transcript reveals that a broad range of topics was presented and Putin's answers were both straightforward and enlightening. The theme of this year's discussion was "Global Energy—The Role and Place of Russia," and Putin made clear that Russia's aim in holding this meeting was to impress upon his guests that, "The entire international community has an interest in seeing Russia undergo a stable, consistent and dynamic development and remain a reliable partner for its counterparts in the world economy." (7) Hence, Russia's role as an "energy superpower" was raised directly with Putin, who rejected the phrase as reminiscent of the "evil Soviet Union" but made clear that, while Russia is prepared to strike deals with the west and with the east, it finds itself in a strong position to bargain.

While Putin rejected the term "energy superpower," he did adopt its underlying definition: "[W]e do have greater possibilities than any other country in the world. This is an obvious fact. Everyone should understand that these are, above all, our national resources, and should not start looking at them as their own. … [W]e have always behaved responsibly with regard to these resources…. We intend taking part in drawing up rules for this sector of the world economy…. But these rules must be fair and they must take into consideration all aspects of energy security. … [T]he principle of energy security means not just security for the consumers but also for the producers." (8)

Russia's role in the world economy was a dominant theme, but Putin also addressed topics as diverse as climate change and renewable energy sources, as well as Russian relations in the southeast, notably with China and Japan. ["Regarding Japan," Putin said, "we would like to settle all disputes, including territorial disputes." (9) – The four Kurile islands?]
Putin was also asked about the possibility of granting independence to Kosovo, an action that, in addition to contravening a current United Nations resolution, would have significant repercussions for territorial disputes across the former Soviet Union: "It is inadmissible to apply one rule to Kosovo and another to Abkhazia and South Ossetia. How does the situation in Kosovo differ from that in Abkhazia or South Ossetia? It does not. And everyone sitting at this table knows this perfectly well." (10) What is clear is that no one at the table felt the need to discuss the differences in these situations with President Putin. Perhaps his warning will give pause to those who favor recognizing an independent Kosovo.

During the course of the dinner and discussion, Putin also responded to inquiries on the status of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (a "revelation" in the way it grew "of its own accord") and Iran, which "proclaim[s] the goal of another state's destruction and write it into their constitution,…which is not in the interests of world security nor of Iran's own foreign policy." (11)

Putin also was asked to respond to the appearance of corruption and abuse of power within the Kremlin, as members of the President's administration increasingly are selected for the boards of major Russian companies. It appears from his remarks that Putin was a bit put off by the question: "[N]o employee of the Presidential Administration needs to be objective or subjective in relation to other enterprises, companies or corporations. He is not judging them, he is simply representing state interests in the board of directors and in this respect there is nothing here that goes against any of our legislation." (12)

The comment immediately calls to mind the defense of Kremlin Economic Manager, Pavel Borodin, who claimed to Swiss courts that he was found innocent of the charges against him in Russia, and therefore could not be tried in Switzerland (conveniently, there was no law against money laundering in Russia at the time). (13) It also seems to settle the issue of whether or not the positions
currently enjoyed by Sechin, Medvedev, Ivanov, et al. on the boards of these Russian companies are held ex officio. According to Putin's logic, they would seem to be doing the state's business, and therefore the board appointments would accompany the state administrative role. If this is the case, it certainly energizes a significant, and heavily vested, sector of the bureaucracy in the debate over the 2008 succession.

The Valdai Discussion Club remains remarkable both in the decision by the Kremlin to continue to allow access to the Russian President, and for the range of questions Putin fields. The relaxed atmosphere clearly seems to reveal more about the Kremlin's confidence in its ability to get its message across than it does about the openness of the regime. However, if the participants can be encouraged perhaps to forego the enticements and press Putin harder on key issues (or perhaps, even if they simply would forego the rock star treatment, and refrain from asking for his autograph), these meetings could provide crucial information to analysts, policymakers, and of course, interested parties.

Source Notes:

(1) For the complete list of "members" in the Valdai Discussion Club, please see the RIA-Novosti sponsored Valdai 2006 website at http://en.valday2006.rian.ru/authors/authors.html. A variety of accounts of the Valdai Discussion Club contributed to the preparation of this report including a panel discussion with participant Andrew Hutchins and Lilia Shevtsova (both from Carnegie) at Boston University, 11 Sep 06; "Transcript of meeting with participants in the Third Meeting of the Valdai Discussion Club, 9 Sep 06 via www.kremlin.ru; "Russia Experts Granted Ample Answers to Softball Questions, by Andrei Zolotov Jr., Editor, Russia Profile, 10 Sep 06 via Johnson's Russia List (JRL) #204, 10 Sep 06; "Putin Holds Court for Russia, with digs at EU and US," By Stefan Wagstyl, Financial Times, 11 Sep 06 via NCSJ Weekly Briefing, 15
Sep 06; "The Rules According to Putin," by Jim Hoagland, Washington Post, 10 Sep 06 via NCSJ Weekly Briefing, 15 Sep 06.

(2) Putin did address the nation prior to the 1st Valdai Discussion Club. However, he did not answer questions or put forth a plan of action until Valdai.

(3) Text of Putin's Address, Vremya novostey, 6 Sep 06; Official Kremlin International broadcast via Lexis-Nexis Academic.


(5) "Vladimir Putin: I'm not a politician," by Ilya Kriger, Novaya gazeta, No. 71, 18-20 Sep 06, pp.8-9; What the Papers Say (WPS) via Lexis-Nexis Academic Search.

(6) "Russia Expert...," by Andrei Zolotov, Jr., Ibid.

(7) Transcript of meeting with participants...," Ibid. During the initial phases of the transition from Soviet to Russian rule (late 1991-1993), the objectives of the "reformer" wing around Yel'tsin centered on the idea that economic transition had to be initiated and entrenched in order for there to be any hope of "true reform." Some argued at the time that an over-emphasis on the economic could have harmful political consequences. Russia's current situation may well support both arguments.

(8) Transcript, Ibid.

(9) Ibid.

(10) Ibid.

(11) Ibid.

(12) Ibid.

REGIONAL REVIEW: Northwestern Federal District – “Ethnic strife” and its implications

Recent events in the Republic of Karelia marked the confluence of a number of growing trends that should be of great concern to those with an eye on the Russian Federation. On the night of 30 August, in the town of Kondopoga, a brawl occurred between ethnic Slavs and ethnic Chechens in the Chaika Restaurant, owned by an Azerbaijan native who has lived in Kondopoga for ten years. Two Russians, Sergei Usin and Grigori Slyzov, were killed in the fight. According to some sources, the Chechens involved in the fight were members of a criminal organization. (1) Several witnesses stated that there were local policemen present at the scene of the fight, but that they did nothing to intervene. (2) The fights led to mass riots from 2 to 3 September with ethnic Chechen families in Kondopoga run out of town and housed in Petrozadovsk hotels under police guard.

On 3 September, a town meeting was held at which it was decided to clear the town market of businesses run by persons from the Caucasus and to give control of the market to “local” individuals. (3) Meanwhile, the local Chechen community surrendered to the police three Chechen men who were suspected of involvement in the 30 August murders. (4) On 4 September, Ramzan Kadyrov, Prime Minister of Chechnya, threw in his two cents. He blamed the police force for its ineffectiveness in staunching the violence and threatened (though without being specific) to become involved: “On this point I say with full responsibility that if the Karelian authorities cannot find ways and means to settle the situation, we can find legal methods to return the situation to a lawful course.” (5) The parliament of Chechnya and Chechen president Alu Alkhanov both sent
delegations to Karelia. (6) Also on 4 September, local residents tried, for the second time since the original brawl, to burn down the Chaika restaurant. (7) According to the head of the fire department, Aleksei Akhmetov, fifteen fires were reported in Kondopoga following the Chaika murders. (8) After the funeral of the two murdered Russians, a protest rally drew about 2,000 persons. (9)

Although the original incident seems to have taken place without external provocation, nationalist groups such as the Movement against Illegal Immigration (DNPI), quickly used the opportunity to provoke additional unrest. According to the Moscow Human Rights Bureau, “DPNI leaders were the first to arrive on the scene, organizing events with media support, leading the mob into the city square. They participated in negotiations with municipal authorities, forcing them to adopt a resolution on expelling Chechens from the city.” (10) Aleksandr Belov, DPNI’s official spokesperson, denied DPNI involvement in coordinating the riots. (11)

On the other side of the spectrum, the Nashi youth movement also sent approximately 200 Nashi representatives to “teach the locals tolerance.” (12) As Nashi spokesman Robert Schlegel said, “We’ll try to explain to the people that the fascists are deceiving them.” (13) The Public Chamber also sent some of its members to investigate.

Ethnic Karelians comprise only 10 percent of Karelia’s population, with ethnic Russians forming the majority at 73.6 percent. (14) The disparity between the titular nationality and the actual composition of the population explains why, in an “ethnic” republic, the recent conversation has centered exclusively on the conflict between ethnic Russians and peoples from the Caucasus, rather than on the effect of internal migration on ethnic Karelians.

The source of the ethnic unrest seems to derive, according to Head of the Republic Sergei Katanandov and Kondopoga Mayor Anatoli Papchenkov, from
business conflicts between persons from the Caucasus and Russians or, as Papchenkov phrased it, in “property ownership disputes.” (15)

Presumably in response to the backlash over events in Karelia, Katanandov has appointed a new representative to Kondopoga. On 9 September, Katanandov named Valeri Bessonov as his official representative there. Bessonov previously served as Katanandov’s representative to the republic’s legislature. (16)

The result of unrest in Kondopoga thus far has consisted of the expulsion of the Chechen population from the town (most of them currently staying in police-guarded hotels in Petrozavodsk), thousands of dollars in damage to various businesses as the angry crowd tried to sack them and set them on fire, (17) and an ongoing discussion as to whether Chechens and other people from the Caucasus should be allowed to participate in the local market. Additionally, according to one report, Kondopoga’s Chechens have begun to investigate the possibility of migrating to Finland. (18)

The performance of Kondopoga’s authorities in response to the original incident was problematic. After going to Karelia and investigating the matter, Public Chamber member Anatoli Kucherena stated, “A total lack of action by the local bodies of power, primarily law enforcement agencies,” contributed to the violence in Kondopoga. (19) Despite the fiasco, Head of Karelia Sergei Katanandov concluded, “We have no more right to make mistakes, but, in my view, we did everything right.” (20)

The brawl in the restaurant and resulting riots, protests, and expulsion of Chechens and other people from the Caucasus highlights several key trends in Russian domestic affairs. First, there is a pervasive distrust and prejudice against people from the Caucasus. This bias is nothing new and seeks its justification in such deplorable incidents as Nord-Ost and Beslan. However, terrorist attacks were not the factors cited by persons involved in the riots or the rest of
Kondopoga’s citizenry at the town meeting held with Katanandov. Rather, some claimed that the Chechens in Kondopoga consistently broke the law (beating up a policeman, for example), (21) or complained that Chechens made more money or had more stalls at the market than the ethnic Russian population. And, as usual, there was the standard charge that Chechens and other people from the Caucasus were running organized crime rackets. As previously stated, bias against people from the Caucasus is not a new phenomenon. However, Kondopoga does seem to indicate that inter-ethnic strife is spreading to the regions beyond the cities with large Chechen populations (e.g., Moscow). There is, of course, always the likelihood that this ethnic discord is being motivated by the possibility of political gain by other parties.

The second trend evident in the Kondopoga fiasco is the rise of Russian nationalist organizations, notable among them the Movement against Illegal Immigrants (DPNI). Whatever else this organization may be (and it is many things, most of them quite nasty), DPNI apparently is confused about the meaning of the word “illegal.” Most of the individuals in question in Kondopoga were Chechen. Chechnya is still a member of the Russian Federation; therefore persons migrating within Russia from Chechnya are not immigrants but legal internal migrants. This may seem like a semantic debate, but, in terms of national discourse, the distinction is important. The frequent mention of the Movement against Illegal Immigrants in connection with Chechens in the media creates and strengthens a mental association between Chechens and illegal immigrants. It reinforces the sense of Chechens as “other” rather than “one of us.” In this manner, DPNI is negatively shaping the national dialogue with respect to Chechnya and with regard to other internal migrants who leave their ethnic republics. Rather than being treated with the rights and protection they deserve as citizens, these internal migrants (whatever their destination within Russia) are treated as foreigners in their own country.
The third trend illustrated by Kondopoga is the political theme of “ethnic strife” and the rise of the nationalist or fascist specter. Over the last year or so, the Russian media and central government have played up the theme of growing xenophobia and the rise of a “brown” fascist movement. These claims do seem to be reinforced, for example, by the escalation in killings of persons of non-European descent in Saint Petersburg over the winter. The existence within Russia of chauvinistic, ultra-nationalist, even neo-Nazi movements, which are capable of violence, is not in dispute. However, the way in which attacks attributable to these groups have been covered in the media is of concern. For example, when a Senegalese university student, Samba Sala Lanksar, was murdered in Saint Petersburg on the night of 7 April 2006, few of the Russian media reports even mentioned Lanksar by name. (22) Their coverage focused not on the specific crime or its victim, but rather used the incident to give evidence of the rise of xenophobia. The attack seemed to be highlighted specifically because it coincided with the Kremlin’s heightened emphasis on a fascist threat to Russian domestic stability. Similarly, Kondopoga is another event that has been framed primarily as an example of extreme nationalist groups becoming increasingly involved in local affairs. If such events continue to garner this type of media coverage, they will likely contribute to the rise of a strong Kremlin to “defend” the Russian people from a fascist threat.

Source Notes:

(1) Russian regional authorities fear riots may spread, 4 Sep 06, RIA NOVOSTI; BBC Monitoring via Lexis-Nexis.
(2) Kondopoga unrest was engineered from outside Karelia, 6 Sep 06, ITAR-TASS via Lexis-Nexis.
(3) Russian regional authorities fear riots may spread, 4 Sep 06, RIA NOVOSTI; BBC Monitoring via Lexis-Nexis.
(4) Chechen diaspora turns in murder suspects at Russian regional governor request, 3 Sep 06, RIA NOVOSTI; BBC Monitoring via Lexis-Nexis.
(5) Chechen PM accuses Karelia of inaction in face of riots, 4 Sep 06, RIA News Agency; BBC Monitoring via Lexis-Nexis.

(6) Kadyrov is ready to restore order in Karelia, 5 Sep 06, Nezavisimaya gazeta; What the Papers Say (WPS) via Lexis-Nexis.

(7) Chechen families flee north Russian town after riots, 4 Sep 06, NTV Mir; BBC Monitoring via Lexis-Nexis.

(8) Fifteen fires registered in turbulent Kondopoga, 4 Sep 06, Ekho Moskvy; BBC Monitoring via Lexis-Nexis.

(9) The people’s rage and cudgels, 11 Sep 06, Novoe vremya; WPS via Lexis-Nexis.

(10) Who will be held accountable for inciting riots?, 6 Sep 06, Gazeta; WPS via Lexis-Nexis. See also the DNPI website in Russian, www.dpni.org.


(12) Kadyrov is ready to restore order in Karelia, 5 Sep 06, Nezavisimaya gazeta; WPS via Lexis-Nexis.

(13) Unrest in Kondopoga: Criminals using ordinary citizens as tools?, 6 Sep 06, Izvestia; WPS via Lexis-Nexis.


(15) Unrest in Kondopoga: Criminals using ordinary citizens as tools?, 6 Sep 06, Izvestia; WPS via Lexis-Nexis.


(17) Chechnya sends emissaries to Kondopoga in wake of riots, 5 Sep 06, Moscow Times via Lexis-Nexis.
(18) Kondopoga - the start of a "war of the worlds"?, 15 Sep 06, WPS via Lexis-Nexis.

(19) Public Chamber faults police over Kondopoga unrest, 13 Sep 06, Interfax via Lexis-Nexis.

(20) Russian regional leader warns of Internet provocation, 5 Sep 06, ITAR-TASS; BBC Monitoring via Lexis-Nexis.

(21) A group of Caucasus migrants was terrorizing the city, 7 Sep 06, Izvestia; WPS via Lexis-Nexis.

(22) See The ISCIIP Analyst, Domestic Issues and Legislative Branch, 20 Apr 06.

**Russian Federation: Armed Forces (Internal)**

By Monty Perry

**The Russian Navy's continued woes**

A recent fatal fire aboard the Russian Navy's nuclear submarine Daniil Moskovsky again highlighted major problems that continue to plague the Russian Federation Navy. In this incident, two sailors died, apparently of carbon monoxide poisoning, after being pulled out of the submarine alive. The fire was the result of a short-circuited power supply that Russian Navy Chief Vladimir Masorin readily attributed to the absence of scheduled maintenance, which had become long overdue. (1) The practice of "extending the service life" of equipment rather than performing costly maintenance inspections has become a routine procedure since 1990. (2)

This fire is only the most recent in a string of mishaps dating back to the Kursk nuclear submarine disaster in 2000, which resulted in the deaths of all 118 crewmembers. In August 2003, a submarine sank in the Barents Sea while being towed to the scrap yard killing nine of the ten sailors on board. (3) Almost exactly two years later, a Russian bathyscaphe with seven sailors aboard became stuck in a fishing net and releasing it in time to save the sailors required
British assistance. (4) Less than two months ago, while powering up a nuclear submarine in home port, the crew experienced a radioactive water leak in the system used to cool the reactor. (5) While Navy officials reported no danger associated with the leak, the international ecological group Bellona, which investigated the incident, disagreed, (6) claiming that the problems clearly are not the sole domain of the submarine forces. In July, a Russian Navy Tu-134 carrying the Navy Chief, crash-landed at Simferopol airfield in Ukraine. This mishap, which resulted in no deaths, but destroyed the aircraft, was the fourth in a string of Russian aviation incidents over a period of just 36 hours. (7)

The causes of the Navy’s decline are easy enough to identify. Since the demise of the Soviet Union, the Russian economic situation has forced what funding was available to be directed to entities other than the Navy. As the post-Soviet military has struggled to identify its new roles and missions, the importance assigned and the attention given to the submarine fleet specifically have decreased. This decision has cost dearly—not only in lives, but in readiness, and in the long run, economic considerations.

According to retired Maj Gen Pavel Zolotarev, director of the United States and Canada Institute, Russia's economic future is dependent on a powerful navy to protect its economic interests in the near seas (e.g., North-European pipeline, mineral resources of the Arctic shelf, sovereignty issues, etc.) rather than focusing on world-wide force projection. (8) Difficult questions arise about the future of the Russian navy; the current leadership, guided and influenced by its Soviet "superpower" experiences, seems to be pursuing the familiar tactic of bigger, newer, and more.

President Putin, in a recent speech to submarine crews, said “The state’s main goal is to create a Navy that is adequate to the level of present-day threats and capable of repelling any form of military-political pressure on the country.” While this sounds like a pragmatic approach, later in the same speech, Putin spoke of
measures being taken to “achieve strategic parity with the leading naval powers and reinforce Russia’s fame as a great naval power.” (9) These words simply may represent an attempt to excite the crewmembers about their futures, but they also may well have policy implications.

As recently as March of this year, funds were programmed into the 2006 defense order for completion of the Belgorod atomic submarine. (10) The (Oscar-II class) Belgorod was originally laid in 1992 and then mothballed later in the 1990’s. Construction was resumed for a period after the Kursk disaster in 2000, but was halted again at the 80% completion point, due to funding issues. In July, only 4 months after the announcement was made to fund completion, funds again were stripped and the project was cancelled. The reason given for the most recent decision is that “it is too expensive to finish the construction of outdated submarines at the time when we have started building a new submarine.” (11) The fate of the Belgorod is a source of some controversy.

In a similar but more advanced scenario, controversy also surrounds the future of a recently completed Project 971 Nerpa nuclear submarine. The sub was floated out three months ago to begin testing. Construction of this sub also began in the early 1990s but was suspended due to a lack of funding. According to the head of the Defense Ministry’s ship and weapons procurement department, Rear-Adm Anatoli Shlemov, “[the vessel] will enter service with the Pacific Fleet in February 2007.” (12)

Though refuted by the Ministry of Defense in the case of both submarines, media reports emanating from sources close to the shipbuilder say the subs will be leased to the Indian Navy. The fact that a group of Indian naval officers is being trained for nuclear submarine operations at a training center in Sosnovyy Bor in the Leningrad Region lends support to these reports. (13) Regardless of the future of these two subs, construction is also well underway on three new fourth-generation ballistic missile nuclear submarines. (14)
Construction of newer and better equipment is, of course, necessary for all militaries. But at what cost is the Russian Federation pursuing this tactic? A military service struggling to rebuild itself could benefit by focusing on the basics...leadership, training, and maintenance. Funding efforts might be better utilized if diverted somewhat from new acquisitions and instead, aimed at more and better training for the troops and at least adequate maintenance of existing equipment.

A major leadership change took place a year ago this month when the President and Minister of Defense took a step toward reform, albeit a tentative one, by dismissing Vladimir Kuroyedev as the Chief of the Navy and appointing Vladimir Masorin to the position. (15)

In an interview last month given by the new Navy Chief, Masorin responded to questions about combat training by both commenting on slight increases over the past couple of years and admitting the need for significant improvements. He said, “First and second class vessels spent 26 days at sea in 2005, while ships of the third and fourth classes only 15 days.” Along the same lines, “flight time of naval aviation amounted to 34 hours per crew.” (16)

This kind of training pace and the resultant lack of proficiency it creates is dangerous and invites mishaps. In a 10 August report in Nezavisimaya gazeta, Russian military analyst Vladimir Mukhin highlighted the issue saying that “although the nation’s leaders boast of the dramatic increase of defense spending, most Russian Navy vessels spend 11 months of the year in port. The same goes for naval aviation. In other countries, naval pilots get at least 150 hours flying time per year: three times more than Russian pilots can hope for.” (17)
Masorin, in responding to a question about future shipbuilding plans, sounded as though improvements in maintenance were becoming a higher priority: “[In the future] what is most important is the formation of a system of comprehensive provisions [for] ships’ maintenance throughout their entire life cycle.” He went on to summarize that over the next ten years, while research and plans would be developed for full scale development of the Navy, more funding would be provided for the maintenance of existing ships. (18)

It’s clear that major changes are needed. Identifying the changes, and then implementing reforms, seem to be the sticking points. With old and inapplicable Soviet superpower thoughts still in the minds of the leadership, a baby-steps transition process of going "back to the basics" appears to be a tough pill to swallow.

Source Notes:

(1) “3rd LD Russian Nuclear Submarine Catches Fire, Killing Two,” 7 Sep 06, Xinhua General News Service via Lexis-Nexis.
(10) “Russian MOD Finds Money to Finish New Atomic Submarine This Year,” 17 Mar 06, ITAR-TASS news agency; BBC Monitoring via Lexis-Nexis.
(18) “Development of the Navy is a State Task,” Krasnaya Zvezda, ibid.

Russian Federation: Armed Forces (External)
By Daniel DeBree

The Devil went down to Georgia
It has been an interesting summer in the Caucasus, with the sound of sabers rattling in both secessionist regions of Georgia: Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Georgian President Mikhail Saakashvili has pledged to bring both republics back into the Georgian fold, but only by peaceful means. So what do the distinctly non-peaceful noises of the recent summer portend?

Hunters in the gorge
Earlier this summer, conflict erupted in the Kodori Gorge between Georgian troops and Emzar Kvitsiani’s Monadire (Hunter) militia, comprised of a small group of Svans who are native to the Gorge and ethnically Georgian. The Upper Gorge is the only part of secessionist Abkhazia that is controlled by Georgia and had been administered through Tbilisi’s appointed plenipotentiary, Kvitsiani. Kvitsiani’s loyalty to the Shevardnadze regime throughout the Rose revolution soured his relations with the Saakashvili government. In late July, Kvitsiani essentially declared independence from Georgia. (1) This provocative declaration precipitated a quick and equally bold response from the Georgian government, which sent troops into the Upper Kodori Gorge on a “police action” to defeat the rebellion. (2)

The Georgian Kodori force included somewhere between 500 and 4000 troops (the actual number is difficult to discern since Georgian officials prevented journalists from coming within five kilometers of the fighting). The paucity of information is exacerbated by the lack of international observers of the peacekeepers in the upper gorge. A U.N. observer presence was outlined in the 1994 Moscow agreement that ended the 1992-93 fighting. However, patrolling in the upper gorge was suspended in 2003, after two U.N. observers were abducted. (3) It was apparent, nonetheless, that the Georgian force was supported by Mi-24 and Mi-8 helicopters. More significantly, it was confirmed that the leader of the expedition was the Georgian Minister of Defense—rather than the Minister of the Interior—a fact that seriously undercuts the assertion of a police action. (4)

By all reports, the Georgian military acquitted itself well in the first large-scale operation it has undertaken since 2004. In two days, it allegedly had “cleared all villages and populated spots” of rebels and scattered the remnants of the Monadire militia to the forests. In addition, over ten tons of weapons and ammunition were recovered. (5) All this was accomplished with only two Georgian and one civilian casualty. However, there are conflicting reports of
events. Opposition groups have claimed that Kvitsiani’s home village of Chkhalta was virtually wiped out in an aerial attack by helicopters, with all of the residents fleeing to Abkhazia. One aspect of this allegation has been confirmed by the Georgian authorities, who acknowledged that there was an air attack on the village. The most notable failing of the operation, however, was the apprehension of Kvitsiani himself. Kvitsiani’s whereabouts are presently unknown, although he did release a video message early this month in which he claimed to be in the gorge. (6)

Although the military operation was completed expeditiously, Georgian forces have remained in the upper part of the gorge ever since. Various reports indicate both that they are reinforcing the gorge and that they are withdrawing troops, so it is difficult to tell how many are there to stay. The fact that some forces will remain is not in doubt. Georgian Presidential Chief of Staff, Geogy Arveladze, has stated that troops will not leave the gorge until the “second phase” of operations is complete and all those responsible for the rebellion are in custody. (7) Presumably, this includes Kvitsiani himself.

Georgian troops have not been idle, however. They have spent the time since late July building a number of facilities aimed purportedly at helping the Svans—a hospital, school and helipad, in addition to refurbishing the road into the gorge and the Kodori airport. Additionally, a new government building has been constructed for the “true” government of Abkhazia. This government-in-exile will be relocated from Tbilisi, where it has been since 1993, to the Kodori Gorge no later than the end of September, according to President Saakashvili. (8)

Abkhazia reacts
At least initially, the Abkhazian reaction was rather reserved. Abkhazian de facto President Sergei Bagapsh elected not to mobilize his reserves, although he claims to have difficulty “restraining” his many volunteers. Even the war of rhetoric was rather muted at first, with the Abkhaz officials simply claiming that
Georgia had violated the 1994 Moscow agreement by sending military troops into the Kodori gorge under the guise of a “police action.” They also denied Georgian allegations that the Kvitsiani uprising had been incited by Abkhazia (with Russian cognizance) and pointed out that “artificial crises” have been a fairly common method for the Georgian government to consolidate popular support. (9)

More recently, however, Abkhazia has taken on a much more militant tone. President Bagapsh has threatened to deal with the government-in-exile by force if it is set up in the gorge. He further claims that it will take just one regiment of his reserves only a matter of “three hours” to remove the exiled leaders. President Bagapsh’s hyperbolic claims seem outlandish to those familiar with the capabilities of the Abkhazian armed forces and the nature of the terrain. The fact is that it would be exceedingly difficult for either side effectively to conquer the entire Kodori Gorge. Control of the Gorge is another matter entirely: Divided in the middle by a very narrow pass and traversed only by a single, ill-maintained paved road from the Soviet era, it would take only a small force to seal off the gorge in either direction. Military operations in the gorge also become significantly more difficult as the winter weather approaches.

In addition to these rhetorical blasts, Abkhazian defense officials have taken some concrete steps towards their region’s defense. Although not actually mobilizing their reserves, they have begun to register all of their adult males, which would likely expedite any future mobilization. A number of (Russian) “light gunships” also have appeared in Sukhumi harbor, (10) possibly in response to reports that the Georgians had deployed their NATO-supplied patrol boats on the Inguri River. (11) Finally, they have announced that they will conduct military exercises in the Southern Kodori Gorge in September, which will include virtually all of their military ground forces—approximately 3000 troops. (12)

**Second front—South Ossetia**
South Ossetia also has become the scene of troubling developments recently. In late August, South Ossetians began shooting at Georgian helicopters transiting “their” airspace. Significantly, they successfully hit a helicopter carrying the Georgian Defense Minister and a delegation of US senators who were visiting Georgia on a fact-finding mission. Claims on results vary, but it is admitted by both sides that at least one helicopter sustained enough damage to force a landing. On the heels of the aerial attacks, three South Ossetian policemen were killed and a number of Georgian troops wounded in a clash near the border of South Ossetia. (13)

Geographically closer to Tbilisi and backed by significant numbers of Russian troops just across the border, South Ossetia arguably presents a larger threat to Saakashvili. Soon after these clashes, he announced that Georgia would build up reserve forces to more than 100,000. (14) Georgian defense expenditures also have been increased significantly over the past year, doubling to $340M USD or 4.7% of GDP, which also would add to their military capability. Finally, Georgian troops have been trained by US advisors for some time now, and the Kodori Gorge operation may have provided a means of testing that training. (15)

It is unlikely that President Saakashvili is beginning a multi-phased military operation to subdue Abkhazia forcibly. The simple geography of the region, relative parity of their armed forces, and, most importantly, the presence of C.I.S. (actually Russian) "peacekeeping forces" in the area probably would doom any such undertaking to failure. The Kodori Gorge operation may, however, represent a concerted effort to show both his domestic audience and the West that he has the ability to address separatist problems by taking the Upper Kodori Gorge as a bargaining chip in future negotiations. Brinkmanship may come with unanticipated costs, however.

Source Notes:
Russian Federation: Foreign Relations

By Marisa Payne

Lavrov at the Middle East buffet – samples everything, but opts out of full meal

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov's visit to the Middle East, September 7-8, included stops in Lebanon, Syria, Israel and the Palestinian Territory. His trip would “confirm Russia’s unflagging attention to this strategically important region,” said a Foreign Ministry spokesperson on 1 September. (1) The Foreign Ministry’s statement illuminates Russian foreign policy in the Middle East – to knock on every door, say hello, but to never step inside. Russia, it seems, is hoping to keep all its options open.
On this latest tour, Lavrov attempted to maintain Russia’s non-committal position, despite increased pressure from Israel for Russia to take action regarding indications that Russian-made weapons have been funneled into Hezbollah’s hands via Syria and Iran. In alignment with its current policy – “to confirm unflagging attention” – Russia acknowledged the allegations but avoided taking any action.

The weapons issue was first raised officially with Russia by Israel just four days after the United Nations brokered the truce between Israel and Lebanon. On 18 August, a delegation under Deputy General Director of the Israeli Foreign Affairs Ministry Mark Sofer met with Kremlin officials in Moscow. He presented what he stated was concrete proof that Hezbollah had been bombing Israeli forces in southern Lebanon with Russian-made weapons such as the modern Kornet and Metis missiles, Sagger missiles, TOW anti-tank missiles, and older rocket-propelled grenades. (2)

Russia at first denied the accusations. Defense Minister Sergei Ivanov referred to the idea as “complete rubbish” and called it a reflection of “internal political problems in Israel.” (3) However, by the time Lavrov visited Israel, Russia had altered its original stance. Falling far short of an admission, Lavrov acknowledged the possibility that the accusations could possibly be true. He told reporters upon his arrival in Beirut, “If the facts are put on the table and Russia can help the investigation, we will be involved.” (4)

This answer did little to dissuade Israel from probing deeper into the issue. Upon Lavrov’s arrival in Israel, Knesset member, Zeev Elkin stated: “Israel is interested in advancing relations with Russia. It cannot, however, remain indifferent to the fact that Russia is selling arms to Syria and other Arab countries that turn it over to Hezbollah terrorists.” (5)
Besides the weapons issue, Israel also took notice of Lavrov’s comments regarding Hamas and Hezbollah, two groups that the United States and Israel classify as terrorist organizations. In an interview in a Russian newspaper, Lavrov was asked about prospects for Hezbollah’s legitimation. He answered: “I don’t think that legalization for Hezbollah is an issue. It’s already a legal political structure in Lebanon. It is represented in the parliament and the government… It is not an imported product.” (6) The last comment strikes at the core of Israel’s contention that Hezbollah is an Iranian-created organization. Lavrov clarified Russia’s position further after his first day of meetings in Beirut and Damascus on 7 September by stating both Hezbollah and Hamas must be included in the international community, and support given to UN Resolution 1701 supposedly to encourage these groups’ responsibility to their own people. (7)

Whereas Lavrov’s statement about Hezbollah’s weapons provided some progress, his comments about Hamas and Hezbollah imitated Israelis. At the last minute, Israeli Defense Minister Amir Peretz pulled out of a meeting that he was supposed to attend on Thursday with Lavrov and Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert. Instead he attended a memorial for Israeli soldiers killed in the war. (8)

Olmert, however, chose to attend the meeting. Some analysts suggest that Israel went ahead with the meeting despite Russia’s controversial comments because it fears Russia eventually will revert to the old Soviet practice of aligning with Arab countries through arms deals. (9) Others contend that Russia already has chosen sides in the Middle East, and rather than perceiving Russia as ineffectual, this view holds that Russia consistently works against the interests of Israel and the United States. Russia’s meeting with Hamas, its support for Hezbollah (possibly even arming it indirectly) and provision of nuclear technology to Iran all highlight a dangerous trend in Russia's relations in the Middle East. Lavrov’s most recent visit may have signaled an attempt to operate in a more even-handed, non-committal fashion, but Russia would have some serious work to do to be considered an honest broker in the Middle East.
Dagestan After Basayev
The July 9 death of Chechen rebel leader Shamil Basayev put Russia at a crossroads: Would Russia be able to rein in the North Caucasus rebels or would Basayev’s death cause extremists’ to intensify their efforts? In Dagestan, a republic that borders Chechnya and has a history of insurgent violence, the
prognosis thus far is mixed. Targeted violence against political figures has waned little, however, the general population seems to have developed a more positive outlook on the future.

Just nine days after Basayev’s death, Federal Security Service (FSB) chief Nikolai Patrushev announced a new amnesty program that would provide insurgents “who have been deceived by the ring leaders and lured into criminal activity” with “the chance to return to a peaceful life.” (1) Doubts, both within the rebel groups and the Dagestani government, soon began to emerge about the effectiveness of the proposed amnesty, which is set to be in effect until 1 January 2007.

In a statement on the Internet, the Dagestani Shari’ah Jamaat, the group considered the strongest rebel organization in Dagestan, announced: “We have never declared an amnesty to Patrushev and other criminals from the gangs of infidels, and we will continue to destroy them until the mojahedin call to prayers from the walls of the Moscow Kremlin.” (2)

Dagestan’s local government, without directly criticizing the Kremlin’s amnesty proposal, has signaled that other methods could be more effective at stopping the insurgents. For example, shortly after Patrushev announced the amnesty proposal, Dagestani President Mukhu Aliyev called for increased security measures. (3) The move reflected fears that amnesty actually might increase violent insurgency.

The issue of amnesty and its effect on violence is contentious. While the insurgency has yet to regain sway in the lives of the general population in Dagestan, it is still very much existent in political circles. Just weeks after the amnesty was initiated, extremists attacked two Dagestani governmental officials. Bitar Bitarov, the prosecutor of Buynaksk, was killed when a roadside bomb exploded near his car. The same day, while leaving Dagestan’s capital,
Makhachkala, en route to investigate the Bitarov bombing, Dagestani Interior Minister Adilgerei Magomedtagirov’s convoy came under attack in a similar fashion. Magomedtagirov emerged unharmed, but two police officers traveling with him died at the scene. (4)

Two days after the attacks, Dagestani President Aliyev called the situation regarding extremist violence in parts of the region “not so good.” (5) Aliyev emphasized the need to increase security forces, rather than address the role amnesty may have played in the attacks. He said the current law enforcement authorities made a “serious blunder” and underlined the cohesiveness of the insurgents: “There must be whole headquarters that prepare such crimes, headquarters equal to us in their professionalism. It must be working…” (6)

Officials in Moscow view the situation differently. Russian Interior Minister Rashid Nurgaliyev praised Dagestan’s law enforcement bodies, saying that they “largely managed to neutralize with their courage and professionalism criminal groups and terrorist groups operating in the republic.” (7) Worth noting, this statement came directly after he announced the official death toll of police and interior troops at the hands of terrorists and bandits in the last four years: 200 killed overall; 60 deaths last year alone; and 120 additional troops wounded in 2005. (8)

Terrorist attacks in Dagestan appear carefully selected, only rarely targeting civilians. In a quantitative analysis, Princeton University’s Woodrow Wilson School scholar Jason M.K. Lyall described Dagestan’s insurgency as “extremely selective” in its choice of targets and tactics. (9) He stated that today’s attacks focus “mainly on government officials and have been conducted through assassinations that appear designed to minimize casualties.” (10)

Lyall argues that the reason for this selectivity has little to do with amnesty or security forces. Instead, it has to do with inter-ethnic competition. In Chechnya,
where insurgent violence is less selective in its targets, 98 percent of the population is Chechen. Dagestan, on the other hand, boasts more than 40 ethnic groups, the largest being the Avars, who comprise 28 percent of the population, yet fill the ranks of Dagestan’s terrorist groups. Lyall postulates that if the Avar-based insurgent groups were to attack more indiscriminately, like the Chechen insurgents do, they could face a “backlash” from rival ethnic groups. These ethnic groups, who would feel threatened, then might begin to support Russian military forces to protect their territory. (11)

Although insurgent violence cannot be ignored completely by the local population in Dagestan’s capital, it does not play an overwhelming role in daily life. During a recent trip to the republic, the possibility of violence had an effect primarily on travel plans; the only place completely off limits was the Chechen border.

Source Notes:

(3) “Russia Dagestani President Calls for Preventive Measures Against Terrorism,” 20 Jul 06, Respublika Dagestan website; BBC Monitoring via Lexis-Nexis.
(5) “Russian Regional Leader Demands Punishment of Prosecutor’s Assassins,” 10 Aug 06, RGVK-TV Makhachkala; BBC Monitoring via Lexis-Nexis.
(6) Ibid.
(7) “Russian interior minister upbeat on Dagestan antiterrorist drive,” 20 Aug. 06, ITAR-TASS; BBC Monitoring via Lexis-Nexis.
(8) Ibid.
Newly Independent States: Caucasus

By Creelea Henderson

The UN bends an ear to the Caucasus

An item titled "on the protracted conflicts in GUAM (Georgia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan, Moldova) countries and their implications for international peace, security and development" has been added to the agenda of the 61st session of the UN General Assembly, much to the satisfaction of GUAM member states eager to draw the attention of the international community to their plight. Given the surplus of volatile issues currently under consideration by a beleaguered UN, that satisfaction may prove short-lived. Nevertheless, it is a timely announcement for a region where good news has been too scarce of late.

The decision to include the item on the agenda itself constituted a minor drama. On September 12, the UN General Committee, which is responsible for setting the working program of the General Assembly, voted 16-15 to table the issue, following a contentious debate in which the Russian delegation strongly protested international intervention in what it characterized as a domestic squabble. To that end, Mikhail Kamynin, spokesman of Russia’s Foreign Ministry, said in a press release “we have from the outset been against politicizing this issue and involving the General Assembly... Russia regards attempts to eliminate the existing mechanisms of resolving the Nagorno-Karabakh, Georgian-Abkhazian, Georgian-South Ossetian and Transdniestra conflicts as counter-productive.” (1) Given the acutely political nature of the

(10) Ibid.
(11) Ibid.
region’s conflicts, Russia's own intervention in Georgia's and Moldova's struggle against secessionism, and the sprung mechanisms of resolution that so far have failed to produce any lasting peace, Russia’s objections ring hollow at best.

A world divided
To the relief of GUAM member countries, the decision of the General Committee to reject the item was overturned the next day by the General Assembly. Still, a review of the voting record for and against inclusion reveals much about the lines that have been drawn in the geopolitical sands and the allies that GUAM will be turning to in the upcoming days.

With 65 abstentions, a tabulation of the remaining votes forks broadly and predictably into two camps: Russian versus American. Among those voting to exclude the item from consideration were nations snugly within Russia’s orbit of influence, including: Algeria, a traditional arms client; Cyprus, the government of which only this month has urged the abolition of entry visas for Russian citizens to the EU; and South Africa, with which Russia concluded several lucrative trade agreements in the preceding weeks. The Armenian representative, who naturally voted together with Russia and against Azerbaijan, reproached GUAM for attempting to force its "narrow" program on the UN. (2)

On the other end of the vote, America’s stalwart partners in foreign policy, Mexico, Canada, Australia and the United Kingdom, joined GUAM members Ukraine and Moldova to support inclusion of the item on the UN agenda. Such divided loyalties are a cogent indicator of developments to come on the floor of the General Assembly.

The reversal of the Committee’s vote on September 13 was a slender triumph for the countries of GUAM, where victories are few and far between. A tally of current news items presents a sobering picture of the bedeviling scope of issues that will be addressed in the days ahead at the UN. It would appear that the tide
of events has been flowing against the Caucasus’ sovereign nations in recent weeks. Emboldened, perhaps, by the fracas in the Middle East that has diverted the world’s attentions from lesser, contained conflicts, breakaway regions have seized the opportunity to take especially fractious steps away from their home countries. This fall, both Moldova’s Dnestr and Georgia’s South Ossetia have called for referenda to break free of their legally binding borders and join with their patron, Russia.

A referendum to sever ties with Moldova held in the rebellious Dnestr region on 17 September is a provocation likely to be echoed in South Ossetia on November 12, when that region will hold a referendum of its own to call for a break with Georgia. Although the Russian Foreign Ministry has called on the international community to recognize the plebiscites as a legitimate expression of public will, (3) the international community adamantly has refused to regard the vote as legal or binding. The U.S. State Department issued a statement following the September 17 referendum in Transdniestr, declaring, “as the international community has made clear, Transdniestrian efforts by the Transdniestrian regime should not be recognized as anything other than an attempt to destabilize Moldova.” (4) Regarding the upcoming referendum in South Ossetia, Peter Semneby, EU representative in the Caucasus, reiterated the stance of the international community when he stated that “such a referendum will not help resolve the conflict” between Georgia’s government and the breakaway region, adding that “the results of the referendum will have no importance for us.” (5)

Meanwhile, domestic developments in GUAM countries have taken an ominous turn this month, as the Georgian government confronts opposition elements charged with plotting a coup and Azerbaijan uses its newfound oil wealth flowing from the BTC pipeline to double military spending in an arms race against Russian-fortified Armenian forces.
**Window of opportunity narrowing**

With the cash cow BTC pipeline running under sensitive territory bordering Nagorno-Karabakh, it stands to reason that Ilham Aliyev, Azerbaijan’s president, will press for a controlling stake in the region, resorting to his cache of newly furnished military hardware if necessary. “Military rhetoric by Azerbaijan is, certainly, not welcomed by the EU, yet the EU is inclined to persuade, rather than compel,” admitted Peter Semnby in a statement made during a recent visit to Yerevan. (6) International efforts at facilitating a resolution to tensions simmering between Azerbaijan and Armenia have come to a complete standstill as neither country has yet responded to a set of principles put forward by mediators in the OSCE Minsk Group that are intended to lay the groundwork for negotiations. “Obviously, neither side agrees upon the basic principles. Both sides, or at least one of them, should state their full consent. However, no-one is willing to say ‘We agree upon these principles,’” said U.S. Ambassador and Co-Chairman of the OSCE Minsk Group Matthew Bryza. (7) He added that the window of opportunity for resolution will start narrowing with the opening of the electoral season in Armenia. With negotiations at a standstill and tensions fueled by petrowealth, the region can benefit only by turning to an outside mediator. The countries of GUAM may find their hopes in the UN’s ability to address their region’s conflicts disappointed. The UN General Assembly has its hands full at the moment and is in no hurry to pick up any more tinderboxes. Moreover, Russia is a prickly sometime consort that Western members of the international community will not be quick to antagonize. What the UN discussion will do, however, is to articulate the stakes of the region’s conflicts in the terms of fully fledged sovereign states, rather than former Soviet statelings under Russia’s wing.

Source Notes:

(1) Itar-Tass, 14 Sep 06; “RF against politicization of frozen conflicts problem in GUAM” via (www.itar-tass.com/eng).
Kyrgyz security services cooperate with Tashkent, but at what cost?
In the power vacuum left by the removal of the Akaev family and many of its allies, Kyrgyzstan has fallen victim to the effects of a power struggle between several political factions. This situation has been further exacerbated by President Kurmanbek Bakiev’s inability to reestablish the central government’s control over the country’s law enforcement and security service personnel, many of whom have allied themselves with local power brokers in their particular regions. In his most recent efforts to consolidate his power and re-impose order and stability in Kyrgyzstan, President Bakiev’s quest appears to have led him to look toward Uzbekistan’s President Islam Karimov for inspiration and aid.
The two leaders began discussing the possibility of greater cooperation between their state security and law enforcement services in mid-July, in response to a number of armed incursions onto Kyrgyz territory by alleged Islamic militants. (1) The first of these incidents occurred on 12 May, when a small group of men raided a border post in northern Tajikistan and then crossed into Kyrgyzstan’s Batken Province (oblast’), where they attacked a Kyrgyz customs post. Three Tajik and two Kyrgyz border guards were killed before the Kyrgyz military was able to mobilize its forces and subdue the insurgents, who managed to kill four soldiers in the ensuing gun battles. (2) The Kyrgyz military’s slow response to the incursion and the difficulties it experienced in tracking the armed group drew criticism from both military experts and NGO representatives. (3) Jerome Bouyjou, head of the OSCE’s Osh field office, commented that under the Bakiev-Kulov regime, border incidents have increased and that border controls are “ineffective.” On 23 May, responding to questions from Kyrgyz parliamentarians who were investigating the incident, General Mirzakan Subanov, who heads Kyrgyzstan’s border guard service, admitted that his agency has neither sufficient funds nor equipment to secure the country’s 4500 km border. (4) In an earlier press conference on 17 May, Colonel Alik Orozov, Deputy Secretary of the Security Council, blamed the delay in locating the insurgents on the fact that air support for the search had to be sent all the way from Bishkek. Col. Orozov recommended establishing a military base in southern Kyrgyzstan, so that air support for future operations would be immediately available. (5)

A few months later on 9 July, a policeman was killed in Jalalabad by armed gunmen during a routine traffic stop and the following day during an Interior Ministry search and sweep operation, two officers were wounded when three residents fired at them. The suspects in both incidents escaped capture. (6) Kyrgyz officials blamed both incidents on “religious extremists,” based on the fact that weapons and religious extremist literature were found in the homes of a number of people allegedly connected to the shooters. (7) On 14 July, Kyrgyz National Security Service and Interior Ministry personnel launched a joint
operation to find and capture those responsible for the attacks on the policemen. As a result of this operation, five IMU (Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan) members were shot and killed in Jalalabad. Kyrgyz authorities announced that at least one of the IMU members had been involved in the 9 July shooting of the traffic policeman, that the entire group was responsible for bomb explosions in both Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan, and that they also had begun planning a new series of attacks in southern Kyrgyzstan, particularly in the Ferghana Valley, in an effort to ignite ethnic tensions there. (8)

The 14 July operation, which was apparently carried out with the close cooperation of Uzbek security services, seems to mark the start of what already has developed into a very cordial relationship between Kyrgyz and Uzbek law enforcement agencies. Following the operation, Presidents Bakiev and Karimov discussed the need to increase cooperation between their respective security organs even further via telephone and then again on the sidelines of the 21-22 July CIS summit in Moscow. (9) Their discussions culminated in a meeting between Kyrgyz National Security Service Chairman Busurmankul Tabaldiev (Mr. Tabaldiev has since resigned from his post) and his Uzbek counterpart, Rustam Inoyatov, on 25 July in Tashkent, where they signed an agreement to conduct joint counterterrorism operations and share intelligence on religious extremist and terrorist groups. (10)

The Kyrgyz border patrol’s self-admitted inability to guard the country’s perimeter and keep out militants and drug smugglers certainly provides a valid reason for the government’s desire to increase its cooperation with Uzbek security agencies. There are some who might consider such cooperation to be a natural progression of the two countries’ relationship, given the fact that Kyrgyzstan shares a long border with Uzbekistan and that so many violent incidents have occurred in the border regions. There are even those who might say that the recent Uzbek-Kyrgyz security agreement just legitimizes a phenomenon which has been occurring since at least 1999: raids conducted by Uzbek interior
ministry forces into Kyrgyzstan, where alleged “Wahhabis” wanted by the Uzbek government are kidnapped and transported back to Uzbekistan, presumably to be imprisoned and tried. (12) Now, these raids can be carried out with the full cooperation of the Kyrgyz government which then may benefit by gaining the use of Uzbek military equipment and manpower, thereby sparing its own budget the burden of additional military deployments.

However, increased cooperation between Uzbek and Kyrgyz security agencies poses serious risks for Kyrgyzstan’s already shaky political stability. Much of the country’s sizeable Uzbek minority resides in the southern provinces, where the most recent security operations against Islamic militants have taken place. There are many among Kyrgyzstan’s Uzbek minority who seem quite dissatisfied with the current government; additional search operations and arrests will only exacerbate existing tensions and could lead to violent protests against President Bakiev’s government. Unfortunately, the Kyrgyz president seems to be following the example set by his Uzbek counterpart, by targeting Islamic activists and opposition supporters in Kyrgyzstan’s section of the Ferghana Valley, which extends into the Jalalabad and Osh Provinces. In addition to providing a home to most of Kyrgyzstan’s Uzbek population, the Ferghana Valley is one of the most densely populated parts of Kyrgyzstan, as well as being one of the most fertile, but also most underdeveloped, parts of Central Asia. Perhaps President Bakiev’s government should consider pairing its anti-terrorist campaign in Osh and Jalalabad Provinces with a strategy of investment in the region’s infrastructure, in order to create more economic opportunities for local inhabitants. Such a strategy might help dispel the perception that authorities in Bishkek have little use for the country’s southern regions, other than to target their citizens as scapegoats for the instability and violence that plague President Bakiev’s regime.

Unfortunately, it may already be too late for President Bakiev to mend fences with his constituents in the southern regions. A scant twelve days after the new
security cooperation agreement was signed, Imam Muhammadrafik Kamalov was shot to death during a joint Uzbek-Kyrgyz anti-terrorist operation in the town of Karasuu, (13) which is located in Osh Province, not far from the Uzbek border. Imam Kamalov was the head of one of the largest and most popular mosques in Kyrgyzstan, drawing up to 6,000 worshippers for Friday prayer. (14) The imam was highly respected and known for his tolerance toward Muslim worshippers of all stripes, even permitting Hizb-ut-Tahrir members to attend his mosque, although he himself did not subscribe to their views. However, he was considered a suspicious figure by the government and his mosque had been under surveillance by both the Kyrgyz and Uzbek security services since at least 2004. Immediately following his death, Kyrgyz authorities branded him a terrorist and “active accomplice” of both the IMU and Hizb-ut-Tahrir. However, following enormous public outcry over his death and the accusations against him, authorities recanted and stated that he was simply an innocent victim who became caught in the crossfire when law enforcement personnel apprehended the car in which he was traveling with two alleged Tajik militants. National Security Service (NSS) officials speculated that the two militants had kidnapped the imam and were using him as a human shield. (15)

The NSS’s statements did not mollify the imam’s supporters and his death prompted both Kyrgyzstan’s Ombudsman, Tursunbai Bakir uulu, and parliamentary deputy Azimbek Beknazarov (leader of the opposition party Asaba and former Prosecutor General) to speak out against the new Uzbek-Kyrgyz security cooperation treaty. Mr. Beknazarov stated that as a result of Uzbek-Kyrgyz security cooperation, dozens of ethnic Uzbeks have been arrested in Kyrgyzstan, with little real evidence being presented against them. Mr. Bakir uulu’s comments were even more damming: “Recent events in south Kyrgyzstan make it easy to recognise the mark of the Uzbekistan special services: execution without a trial or investigation and the planting of weapons, drugs and religious literature on suspects.” (16)
President Bakiev and his new NSS chairman have their work cut out for them in Osh and Jalalabad Provinces. However, even if they choose to use less repressive tactics, Uzbekistan’s security services genie may have escaped so far from the bottle that it will be impossible to force it back down. The Uzbek government has shown remarkable zeal in tracking down opposition supporters who have fled abroad, forcing them to return home to stand trial, or as the case may be, simply to disappear. Opposition sympathizers who escaped to Kazakhstan, Russia, and Kyrgyzstan have been forcibly transported back to Uzbekistan and a number of refugees from Andijon who came to the US have been persuaded to go back, as well. The largest group of Andijon refugees by far, however, settled in Kyrgyzstan, where they were granted official refugee status by the UNHCR. The Uzbek government has exerted pressure on President Bakiev’s regime to send the refugees back, with varying degrees of success. The new Uzbek-Kyrgyz security cooperation treaty makes such tactics unnecessary – now, the Uzbek security services can simply go into Kyrgyzstan and bring the refugees back themselves. In fact, the treaty may present them with the opportunity to apprehend virtually anyone who is perceived as a threat to President Karimov’s regime, possibly even Kyrgyz citizens. It seems very unlikely that the Uzbek government will let this opportunity slip through its fingers. Thus, President Bakiev may have signed away control over the residents of his own country to his new allies in Tashkent.

Source Notes:

(2) Bakhtiyor Valiev and Cholpon Orozobekova, “Kyrgyz-Tajik Border Raid Stokes Fears,” IWPR (Institute for War and Peace Reporting), RCA No. 448, 19 May 06 via www.iwpr.net.
(3) Erica Marat, “Kyrgyzstan Fights One-Day War with Unknown Bandits,” Eurasia Daily Monitor, Volume 3, No. 100, 23 May 06. (Jamestown Foundation)


(6) “Kyrgyz police officer killed, two others injured in south,” Kabar via BBC Monitoring, 10 Jul 06 via Lexis-Nexis Academic Universe.


(10) “Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan agreed to strengthen cooperation in fighting terrorists and extremists,” The Times of Central Asia, 27 Jul 06 via Lexis-Nexis Academic Universe.


(15) “Kyrgyzstan: Fury Over Imam Death,” IWPR, Reporting Central Asia, No. 461, 18 Aug 06.

(16) Ibid.
Newly Independent States: Western Region

By Tammy Lynch

UKRAINE

Yanukovich heads to Brussels; Yushchenko stays home

On 14 September, Ukraine’s President Viktor Yushchenko and Prime Minister Viktor Yanukovich faced their first real open disagreement over policy, as they clashed publicly over whether Ukraine will continue on its path toward NATO. The disagreement underscores the lack of clarity in the country over separation of powers and responsibilities, and makes it clear that the prime minister will not be content simply to follow the president’s orders.

On 2 August 2006, Yushchenko, Yanukovich and the leaders of the Communist Party, Socialist Party and Our Ukraine Bloc, signed a “Declaration of National Unity.” The five-page document was said to provide the foundation for all future policy decisions in the country. “The basics of the definition of Ukraine's domestic and foreign policy, of its continuity, have been completed,” Yushchenko said at the time. “I am convinced that in Ukraine’s political practice, at any rate among the signatories, there will be no more … discussions and misinterpretations.” (1) Those discussions, of course, had been based on the fact that Yanukovich leaned toward a Russo-centric foreign policy while Yushchenko was committed to a West-leaning policy.

Following the signing of the declaration (called a “Universal” in Ukraine), and buoyed by his apparent belief that all questions of Ukrainian’s future policy direction had been answered, Yushchenko nominated Yanukovich to become the country’s new prime minister. When questioned by the media about differences that seemed to exist between the two men, – particularly about the country’s general foreign policy and its specific goal of joining NATO – Yushchenko seemed calm. Directing foreign policy, he said, was a right granted to the
president constitutionally, and "I am pursuing the policy toward [NATO] integration without adding anything else to it." (2)

Yanukovich's interpretation of the declaration apparently was a bit different. On September 14, speaking in Brussels following a meeting with NATO Secretary General Jaap De Hoop Scheffer, Yanukovich announced “a pause” in the country’s movement toward fulfilling its NATO Membership Action Plan (MAP). “We explained that given the political situation in Ukraine,” he said, “it would be better to take a pause [in the integration process].” (3) He pointed to the low level of support for NATO integration among the public as evidence that Ukraine was not ready to join the alliance.

Yushchenko and his allies in the government reacted with indignation. Their irritation seemed to stem mainly from the fact that Yanukovich made such a major policy announcement without consulting Yushchenko. “This step was unfounded and illogical and even, in my view, mistaken,” said Defense Minister Anatoliy Hrytsenko. (4) The president accused Yanukovich of making statements that “breach the Universal of National Unity and constitutional accords.” (5) And Foreign Minister Boris Tarasyuk said, “If we read the Constitution closely … we don’t find these kinds of authorities granted to the government.” (6)

But that isn’t entirely accurate, particularly since new Constitutional amendments give the parliament increased power to control the government. A close reading of the constitution finds that both the president and the parliament have some level of authority over foreign policy. Since the prime minister is nominated by, and answerable to, the parliament, this technically provides Yanukovich with the legal – if not political – right to direct the NATO debate.

Article 106, Point 3 of the Constitution states that the President of Ukraine “represents the state in international relations, administers the foreign political
activity of the State, conducts negotiations and concludes international treaties of Ukraine …”

Meanwhile, Article 85, point 5 notes that the authority of the parliament includes “determining the principles of domestic and foreign policy …”

Additionally, Article 114 notes, “The Minister of Defense and the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine are appointed by the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine upon the submission by the President of Ukraine.” This provides the right for the president to choose these ministers, but may or may not guarantee their approval by the parliament. (7)

Therefore, it would seem that President Yushchenko is depending primarily on the historical right of Ukrainian presidents to control foreign and defense policy, and the agreement of the prime minister to divide authority along domestic and foreign policy lines. The comments in Brussels suggest that Prime Minister Yanukovich may not be willing to maintain this division. And unfortunately for Yushchenko, since the Declaration of National Unity is not legally binding, it will provide him with little recourse.

Yanukovich’s comments also suggest that President Yushchenko needs to do a better job at protecting what he sees as his “turf.” Yushchenko chose to remain in Ukraine and allow Yanukovich to conduct meetings not only with the NATO Secretary General, but also EU representatives. At those meetings, the Prime Minister publicly reiterated Ukraine’s commitment to Euro-integration in Brussels, but his reception, to say the least, was cool. “The future is not prejudged,” External Relations Commissioner Benita Ferrero-Waldner said, “but at this moment, clearly, there is no membership perspective.” (7)

Yushchenko could have traveled either to Brussels with Yanukovich or made the trip himself. During the Yulia Tymoshenko and Yuriy Yekhanurov governments,
he did just that. But, he has chosen to allow his current prime minister far more leeway and to accept a far larger role for Sanukovich in foreign policy. He has not explained his reasoning, except to underscore the need for unity and teamwork.

Regardless, the result has been to confirm the concerns of some Western officials that Ukraine’s Western trajectory is shifting, and that alliances recently built will suffer. Will Ukraine continue to support the EU’s border control provisions regarding Transnistria? Will it continue to join the EU in criticizing many of Belarusian President Aleksandr Lukashenko’s policies? Will it continue to join in the fight against trafficking and arms smuggling? In short, will the country continue to act as a reliable foreign policy ally to the West?

President Yushchenko’s decision to allow Prime Minister Yanukovich to speak for him and the country in Brussels did little to answer those questions. Instead, it may have caused Western officials to wonder just who is controlling the country’s foreign policy decisions now.

MOLDOVA

Voting for Russia

On 17 September, Transnistria held what it termed a referendum on the future of the territory. Voters were asked to answer the following question: “Do you support the course of independence for the Transdniestrian Moldavian Republic and the subsequent free joining of Transdniestria to the Russian Federation?”

According to official results, 97% voted in favor. These results were immediately recognized by Russia, with Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov announcing that the vote had met democratic standards. “It was supervised by hundreds of observers from the CIS and Europe,” he said. “They could see for themselves what Transdniestrians want.” (9)
While this statement of support was expected from Russia, it was not entirely accurate. Several countries from the CIS, including Russia and Belarus, in fact did, send election observers. But, the OSCE, EU, US and Ukraine all refused to do so, suggesting that the environment within the region precluded a democratic election. Following the election, all also have refused to recognize the stated referendum results. Ukraine’s position was one of the firmest. “The Ukrainian position on this issue is widely known. Ukraine believes that the referendum and its results have been illegal and it will not recognize them," the Foreign Ministry press service said. (10)

Transnistria has no free media. There were no groups or individuals advocating for the “no” position, even though almost 40% of the population in the region is made up of ethnic Moldovans and up to 30% is comprised of ethnic Ukrainians. Opponents of self-styled president Igor Smirnov are regularly arrested or harassed into silence, while the government controls all industry, providing it with enormous levers of pressure.

The European Union has identified the region as a haven for smuggling and has instituted a new program on Ukraine’s borders to limit illicit contraband reaching EU territory. (11) Furthermore, those in the region have little access to information about the world around them, and no access to objective discussions about their situation. This allows the government to manipulate public opinion easily. Loss of power, a lack of hot water, the absence of food and other commodities can be easily blamed by Transnistrian officials on Moldova. If the region joins Russia, they are told, these hardships will end.

“Moldova has given us nothing,” Valentina Starkova told a journalist as she went to vote. A 65-year old woman named Galina agreed. (12) “We’re fed up with living in this hole,” she said. “We want to be recognized. I can’t see me brother in Russia. We have no work. We have nothing.” (13)
The reason they “have nothing,” is not, of course, solely Moldova’s responsibility. Smirnov has ruled Transnistria for over a decade. The economic situation has worsened steadily throughout these years, as reforms have been eschewed, and as the regions largest corporations refuse to conform to Moldova’s customs regulations.

The most immediate result of the referendum will be to provide Smirnov and Russia with a pretext of support for previously stated intentions to follow the Montenegro example. After the Montenegrán referendum, pro-Russian separatist leaders, including Smirnov, Sergei Bagapsh (Abkhazia) and Eduard Kokoity (South Ossetia) met in Russia and adopted a joint statement calling for their "independence" to be recognized. They suggested “the completion of the political and legal formalization of the breakup of the USSR through the recognition of the Republic of Abkhazia, the Dniester Moldovan Republic and the Republic of South Ossetia as entities subject to the operation of international law.” (14)

President Putin quickly supported their aspirations. "Whatever we may decide to begin with, if we are to make decisions in a democratic fashion, the opinion of the people must be studied first thing,” he said in June. (15) The statement followed his earlier connection of the independence aspirations of the separatist republics with the Kosovo example. “If someone considers that Kosovo can be given full state independence,” he said, “then why must we refuse this to the Abkhazians or the South Ossetians?” (16)

Thanks to the Transnistria referendum, Putin now has a new argument.

Source Notes:

(1) UT1-TV, 2253 GMT, 2 Aug 06; BBC Monitoring International Reports, via Lexis-Nexis.
(2) RIA Novosti, 7 Aug 06; via Lexis-Nexis.
(3) Agence France Presse, 1129 GMT, 14 Sep 06; via Lexis-Nexis.
(4) ITAR-TASS, 1639 EST, 17 Sep 06; via Lexis-Nexis.
(5) ITAR-TASS, 1407 EST, 15 Sep 06; via Lexis-Nexis.
(6) ITAR-TASS, 1639 EST, 17 Sep 06; via Lexis-Nexis.
(8) Euronews-English, 14 Sep 06; via Lexis-Nexis.
(9) Interfax, 1149 MSK, 19 Sep 06; via Lexis-Nexis.
(10) UNIAN, 0726 GMT, 19 Sep 06; BBC Monitoring via Lexis-Nexis.
(11) See "Wine, whine and Mother Russia in Moldova," The ISCIP Analyst, Volume XII Number 4 (20 April 2006) for more on the smuggling issue.
(12) Associated Press, 18 Sep 06; via Yahoo! News.
(13) Agence France Presse, 1647 EST, 17 Sep 06; via Yahoo! News.
(14) ITAR-TASS, 1121 EST, 15 Jun 06 via Lexis-Nexis.
(15) Ibid.

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