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Russian Federation: Executive Branch

By Susan Cavan

PRESIDENCY

Maine dreaming: Succession and lasting legacies

The burden of Russian history, coupled with certain well-known group dynamics, does not bode well for President Putin or Russia over the course of the coming year. Given all the ink spilled and band width consumed over succession already, the fact that interest in the topic will only increase causes the mind to boggle, and yet it is clear that every facet of Russia’s approaching constitutionally-mandated transition is subject to microscopic examination: it ranges from the utterances of the president (are governors the new "it" successor group?) to the jostling of the primary tier of putative successors (would Medvedev or Ivanov be more inclined to broaden the re-nationalization process of key industries?) to the sheer (and exuberant) speculation of possible "dark horse" candidates. It is clear that Russia-watching and Kremlinology have become little more than an unblinking gaze off toward the horizon, waiting for the crown of the next Russian leader to cast its shadow as signal that the succession at last has begun. (1)

One fact is evident at this moment in the succession guessing game: Whatever direction Putin chooses, he could build support easily for his decision among both the general Russian population and the elite. Putin is on the cusp between the end of his constitutional administration and the start of another regime: His options are many, but time is not on his side. As the media focus on his successors, the spotlight is beginning to move away from Putin. If he is to take initiative either to solidify the governing system he has established or to upend that system, the window of opportunity is open for only a few months. For now,
Putin still commands the attention of the media (perhaps more literally than one would wish), and he appears to remain extremely popular. For months, if not years, Putin has been questioned on his choice of successor; perhaps this is a proper moment to expand on that theme and ask what kind of inheritance Putin hopes to leave for his successor.

Putin’s visit to the Bush compound in Maine would seem a logical time to reflect on his legacy. Perhaps Bush père could introduce a conversation on the difficult necessity of walking away when your time in office is up, and the equally difficult recognition that your advice is not always welcomed by your successors. Successors, no matter how close, will not always heed your admonitions or follow the path you cleared, nor should they. If Putin seriously was contemplating the so-called "placeholder" succession option, a frank conversation with the Bushes (or even a review of the problems of regency in Russian history) should disabuse him of that notion's allure. (2)

Perhaps a reflection on the importance of institutions and respect for established traditions in a mature democracy will prompt Putin to devise a means of inspiring Russia's citizenry to participate and trust in the governing system. As a starting point, Putin could use his last few months in office to tackle the negative aspects of the current Russian system, particularly the complicated and intertwined issues of bloated executive power, a weak judiciary and ill-defined legal code, as well as system-wide corruption. These are all issues Putin addressed earlier in his presidency through Dmitri Kozak. (3) Perhaps a renewed effort to follow through on the reforms, monitor implementation or take a new tack would signal a commitment to improving ordinary Russian lives, as well as Russia’s standing in the international community. Such efforts likely would prove far more inspiring than the chest thumping insistence on Russia's great power status at international gatherings, or a foreign policy that subsumes long range imperatives under an attempt to build "multi-polarity" in the short term.
Given the opportunity and willingness to expend his political capital, Putin also could make great strides in the development of viable political parties in Russia. While it might be preferable to see the grass roots development of parties, Russia has struggled with this aspect of democratic development. Perhaps Putin could support the consolidation and creation of two, or three, or even four genuine political parties with distinct credos and abdicate the choice of Kremlin successor to an electoral horse race among the candidates chosen by their parties. By establishing an electoral precedent for the transfer of executive power in Russia, Putin could begin to overcome a longstanding historical deficiency in Russian political progress. (4)

Russian politicians, perhaps most notably the "democrats" and "liberal reformers" of the 1990s frequently have cautioned against placing trust in the Russian electorate for fear of the rise of a chauvinistic, xenophobic, and violently nationalistic movement. While this scenario does represent a nightmare for Russia, and its neighbors in particular, the power of such a political bogeyman could be tempered by political reforms that reverse the trend toward the "power vertical" and force a balance between legislative and executive powers.

There is one overarching issue that Putin must address regardless of the approach he takes toward the end of his constitutional term: the status of the Kremlin apparatchiki and their entanglement with Russia's largest, and most profitable, corporations. There is but one question Putin needs to answer that will make clear whether Russia will progress along a course (perhaps even its own, "sovereign" path) of democratic development or be sucked into a sinkhole of corruption and oligarchic domination: Will the current Kremlin officeholders retain their positions on the boards of the major companies in the oil, gas, precious metals, arms sales, electricity and other industries? Will their positions pass ex officio to the next crop of Kremlin apparatchiki? Or will the last few months of Putin's constitutional presidency see the disentanglement of public officials from corporate positions?
It is in the interests of the vast Kremlin and wider government bureaucracy to militate for a continuation of the current system: The Yel'tsin to Putin transition saw oligarchs of the 1990s stripped of their holdings, forced into exile or jailed. A new transition poses considerable risks for the circles of advisors, allies, friends, associates and supporters around Putin; one way to mitigate the risk is to promote a continuation of Putin's regime by any means. If constitutional change is off the table, then the selection of a successor regime by the current regime presents current office holders with the least objectionable alternative – their challenge soon becomes simply to back the right horse in the race.

If Putin, with a little distance and enough consideration given to his legacy, can see beyond the Kremlin walls, perhaps Russia will find a more successful path to stability coupled with consolidation of its democratic development.

It is possible, unfortunately, that Putin's historic visit to the Bush compound in Maine will be characterized less by the quality of the conversation, than by the political show demonstrated by the consumption of Maine's finest lobsters and blueberry pie, and by Russian good will "earned" by US concessions, while the sale of Russian missiles continues to states that seek to destabilize their regions and threaten innocent lives.

Source Notes:

(1) There is a wide variety of articles on possible succession scenarios. See, for example, "Putin says 4-year Term is Too Short, The Moscow Times, 5 Jun 07; Independent Press via Lexis-Nexis Academic Universe; "Russian website hints at Governors likely to bid for presidency," Gazeta.ru; BBC Monitoring International Reports via Lexis-Nexis Academic Universe; "Putin Will be Silent," 14 Jun 07, Vedomosti; Agency What the Papers Say (WPS) via Lexis-Nexis Academic Universe.
Reemergence of the Democratic Party of Russia

For all its authoritarian behavior, there is no clearer illustration of the Putin government’s subversion of democracy than the revival of the long-defunct Democratic Party of Russia. While a rag-tag coalition of opposition parties was harassed and arrested at peaceful demonstrations on the streets of Moscow and St. Petersburg, President Putin addressed a cordial letter to the Democratic Party of Russia (DPR) in honor of Russian Independence Day, congratulating the party on its good work and wishing it continued success in the future. (1) In the face of real, if meager, opposition, the Kremlin has set about creating another puppet party under the banner of democracy that is likely to confuse voters and to strip support from authentically democratic competitors. In about eight months, Putin’s presidency will come to an end. The changes in Russia’s party system that have taken place under his administration will have profound and lasting implications for Russian politics.
The original DPR has a proud tradition dating back to 1990, when it was created as a force of opposition to the hegemonic Communist Party. The party was founded by Nikolai Travkin, a prominent democratic figure who later switched to Yabloko and is presently a member of Mikhail Kasyanov’s National Democratic Party. During the attempted coup of August 1991, members of DPR were among the crowd defending the Russian President against the putschists. Demonstrably strong and popular, the party won 14 seats in the first State Duma, where its leaders served to shape the new, post-Communist Russia. Economist Sergei Glaziev headed the committee on economic policy and lawyer Sergei Zapolsky authored the first Civil Code of Russia. (2) The party did not survive the upheaval of post-perestroika politics, and by the second round of Duma elections in 1996, the party was largely defunct.

Then, on May 14, 2007, the new leader of the DPR, Andrei Bogdanov, called a press conference to announce that his party was making a comeback with the goal of steering Russia into joining the European Union. (3) At a moment when relations between Russia and the West are fraught with tension, Bogdanov envisions a unification that will lead ultimately to Russia’s accession into NATO. Anton Goltsman, press secretary of the democratic opposition party Union of Right Forces (SPS), remarked upon the absurdity of the proposition, from a conventional Russian point of view: “The West is almost showering Russia with missiles fired from Poland and the Czech Republic, and they are saying, ‘Hey, let’s join them. Let’s join the enemy!’” (4) Bogdanov defends his plan by evoking nationalistic anxieties; joining NATO, he claims, is the only way that the country will be able to check an imminent Chinese invasion of Russia’s Far East. (5) His far-fetched international agenda is beside the point. Analysts suggest that the DPR is merely serving as a mouthpiece for the Kremlin, to convince Western powers that Russia is on their side, after all. (6) The press conference was a ploy to attract attention to the DPR and to broadcast the illusion that the party is a viable alternative to Russia’s beleaguered opposition forces.
The story of the reemergence of the DPR is a prosaic narrative of backroom deals leavened with hefty payoffs, but the Kremlin’s takeover of the party is largely a matter of luck and canny timing. After former Prime Minister Kasianov was relieved from office by Putin in 2004, he sought to revive his political career by pouring funds into the DPR, in order to remake the obsolete party into his personal political machine. As he prepared to assume the mantle of party leadership in December 2005, however, he found that he had been double-crossed: outbid by an outside donor, who offered DPR officials $10,000 each to reject Kasyanov and elect Bogdanov in his stead. (7) Kasyanov railed against the Kremlin for stealing his election, but the DPR party carried on without him as a political party devoid of its own agenda, though it counts 80,000 members. (8)

The DPR membership comes at the expense of the country’s genuinely democratic parties, SPS and Yabloko. The party’s website makes a point of its activities in regional elections, where support for democratic movements is significant. In 2006, SPS stood to gain 14% of the votes for the Kursk regional legislature, after 37% went to United Russia and 11% went to the Communist Party. Instead, DPR campaigned aggressively to split the vote in half – 7% to SPS, 7% to DPR. The battle for the regions continued in March 2007 in Krasnoyarsk, where SPS surprised pundits by winning a sizable 16% of the votes. The following month, DPR submitted false evidence accusing SPS of buying votes. The Interior Ministry raided the SPS Krasnoyarsk party headquarters, as a result of which the party suffered a severe loss of credibility within the local electorate.

When it comes to dirty politics, the Kremlin already has secured notoriety for itself by quashing peaceful opposition rallies, beating demonstrators and jailing opponents. What is still more unseemly is the cynical propagation of puppet parties under the banner of democracy. How will Russian voters, already soured on the country’s experiment with democracy, have faith in the country’s political system when the very name “democracy” stands for nothing at all?
Source Notes:

(1) Letter from President Putin via (www.democrats.ru).
(3) “Russia's Democratic Party rebounds with EU goal,” Agence France Presse – English, 14 May 07 via Lexis-Nexis.
(5) DPR platform available via (www.democrats.ru).
(8) DPR data available via (www.democrats.ru).

Russian Federation: Security Services
By Fabian Adami

Did the SVR deliver General Djordjevic?
Vlastimir Djordjevic is a former Serbian Police General, who served in the separatist province of Kosovo. Since 1999, Djordjevic has remained on the “most wanted” list published by the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia. At time of the Kosovo crisis, he was Head of the RJP (Serbia’s Public Security Service) and Assistant Interior Minister. (1)

According to the Tribunal’s Indictment, Djordjevic is “criminally responsible under his de jure/and or de facto authority” for the crimes committed by his subordinates. These crimes constituted “operations targeting the Kosovo
Albanians with the objective of expelling a substantial portion of the Kosovo Albanian population from Kosovo in an effort to ensure continued Serbian control over the province.” (2) Djordjevic’s units allegedly were responsible for mass rapes, murder and the “destruction of ethnic Albanian and Muslim cultural and religious monuments” in Kosovo. His units supposedly caused some 800,000 civilians to flee the province. (3)

At the end of the NATO intervention, Djordjevic, along with a number of other Serbian military commanders wanted by the tribunal, went on the run. At various moments, Djordjevic was thought by Carla Del Ponte (the Tribunal’s Prosecutor), to be hiding in Russia (4) and in Budva, Montenegro. (5)

In mid-June, Sergei Lebedev, head of the SVR (Russia’s Foreign Intelligence Service) conducted an official visit to Montenegro –where he visited Budva. Within days of his visit, Djordjevic had been arrested, and handed over to the United Nations Tribunal. Although there is no official confirmation of his intervention, some reports have suggested that Lebedev’s visit and the arrest were connected. (6)

Both Russia and Serbia, its traditional ally, have maintained since 1999 that the Kosovo crisis constituted a purely internal matter, in which NATO had no legal right to intervene. As such, the legitimacy of the Hague Tribunal also has been called into question. (7) If these rumors are true, and Russian intelligence agencies facilitated the arrest, an interesting question arises; namely, what is Russia’s game?

Since the overthrow of President Slobodan Milosevic, and the subsequent elections, first of Pedrag Markovic and then Boris Tadic to the Presidency, Serbia has been attempting to gain entry to the European Union. In 2004, Belgrade was told that its chances hinged on the willingness to hand over to the UN those
wanted for war crimes, (8) a demand that apparently still stands. If that is the case, realpolitik may be at the heart of Moscow’s machinations.

Many of the newer members of the EU, including Poland, Hungary and the Baltic States, have—as a result of Soviet history, as well as recent provocative Russian actions—distanced themselves from Russia since the end of the Cold War. With the electoral defeat of Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder and the accession of the more critical Chancellor Angela Merkel, Russia’s list of allies in the EU is diminishing.

It is inconceivable that Djordjevic's whereabouts were revealed by the SVR without Putin’s knowledge. It is likely, therefore, that the General was handed over with a view to enhancing Serbia’s chances for EU entry. The Kremlin’s calculation likely was that if Serbia is eventually admitted, due to its cooperation with the Tribunal, Russia will once more have an ally—and therefore a voice and or a ‘vote’—at the “head table” in Brussels.

**FSB fears nuclear insecurity – or preempts a leak**

At the end of the Cold War, the United States in cooperation with countries of the former Soviet Union, launched the Nunn-Lugar Cooperative Threat Reduction Program. This was designed to assist in the dismantling and securing of NBC (Nuclear, Biological and Chemical) weapons and installations across the former Soviet sphere. The program has since shifted to the goal of preventing the theft and resale of fissile materiel to undesirable third parties.

According to a recent in-depth report in the British Independent, Russia’s nuclear dumps are in a state of such disrepair, that they pose a threat “worse than Chernobyl.” Andreeva Bay, a storage site near Murmansk—the Northern Fleet’s base—for example, contains some 20,000 decommissioned fuel rods from (both attack and strategic missile) nuclear submarines, which are fixed to the roofs of a number of storage tanks. These tanks are eroding, causing the rods to drop to
the tanks’ floors, where they are being corroded by seawater. This reaction might eventually release hydrogen, which could be ignited by any spark. The ensuing explosion would spread radioactive fallout over thousands of miles. (9)

The information sourced to The Independent comes from a top-secret report by ROSATOM (Russia’s Nuclear Agency), “obtained” by Bellona, a Norwegian environmental agency. The document indicates that nuclear waste is in some cases stored in outdoor barrels on the Kola Peninsula. The uranium stored at Andreeva is enriched to between 30 and 40%, making it a prime target for terrorists seeking dirty bomb materials. Security for these barrels is provided only by a “chain link fence and a couple of guards,” such that “anyone who wants to can just walk in.” (10)

On June 7th, FSB Director Nikolai Patrushev participated in the National Anti-Terrorist Committee’s meeting in Moscow. Patrushev directly addressed the issue of nuclear security, claiming that Russia faced a renewed threat from terrorists “striving to gain access to weapons of mass destruction and the technologies for producing them.” (11) Patrushev noted that the FSB—under the rubric of the NAC—would launch a renewed program to check and enhance the security levels at “crucial facilities managed by the Defence Ministry, ROSATOM, ROSPROM and ROSKOSMOS, and located within ZATOs (closed administrative territorial formations).” (12)

It is of course possible, that Patrushev’s statement and the leak of the ROSATOM document are coincidental. However, given the case of Aleksandr Nikitin – a former submarine officer charged with treason in 1996 for leaking documents about Russia’s nuclear sites to environmental organizations, (13) it is equally possible that the FSB discovered that the ROSATOM document had been leaked and sought to mitigate the public relations effect of its release by preemptively announcing a new security initiative. If the latter hypothesis is
correct, the FSB is likely already investigating yet another “espionage” incident – in which case, an arrest probably will soon occur.

Litvinenko case: FSB to investigate MI6 involvement

Aleksander Lugovoi, an ex KGB and FSB officer, is the chief suspect in the murder last fall of Aleksandr Litvinenko. On 22 May, the British government formally announced its intention to request Lugovoi’s extradition from Russia. The Kremlin’s response was to reject any such move as unconstitutional, and therefore impossible. (14)

Lugovoi has spoken publicly on two occasions since this announcement. On 31 May, he gave a press conference in Moscow, during which he alleged that Litvinenko was a Secret Intelligence Service (MI6) double-agent, and that the MI6 also had attempted to recruit Lugovoi himself. He claimed that Litvinenko had fallen out with his employers, had “slipped from their control, and they killed him.” (15)

Two weeks later, Lugovoi conducted a further interview with Komsomolskaya pravda, in which he alleged that Berezovsky was also an MI6 agent, and repeated the Kremlin’s allegations that the oligarch also was involved in Litvinenko’s death.

On June 18, the FSB announced that it would launch a major investigation into MI6 actions based almost entirely on Lugovoi’s information about “intelligence operations of British Special Services in the territory of Russia.” (16) British and Russian intelligence services undoubtedly have continued their operations against each other since the collapse of the USSR. Yet the current situation is something entirely different.
Moscow clearly views attack as the best form of defense. Litvinenko, according to the Kremlin’s theory, was little more than a pawn in a massive joint intelligence-political operation designed by MI6 to discredit and tar President Putin’s regime. (17) Russia meanwhile, continues to insist that Lugovoi will not be extradited, nor will a trial in a neutral country be allowed to occur. (18) Britain’s response to Lugovoi’s statements has been simply to reiterate that the Lugovoi case is a criminal, not an intelligence matter, and that an extradition is still required. (19)

Source Notes:

(2) Ibid.
(6) Ibid.
(8) “EU Entry Hinges on Generals' Capture,” The Times of London, 18 Jan 05, via www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/world/europe/article413829.ece.

(10) Ibid.

(11) “National Antiterrorist Committee Meeting Hears WMD Warning,” Gazeta, 6 Jun 07 via Lexis-Nexis.

(12) Ibid.

(13) “Despite the Court's rejection of the seventh indictment against him, Aleksandr Nikitin remains on trial,” Bellona Environmental Agency, 30 Oct 1998 via www.bellona.org/english_import_area/casefile/1140457712.06.

(14) See ISCIP Update, Volume 1, Number 3, 4 Jun 07.


(16) “Kremlin Determined to Tar MI6 in Litvinenko Cold War,” The Times of London, 16 Jun 07.


(18) “Russian Public Chamber Rules Out Lugovoi’s Trial In A Third Country,” Interfax News Agency, Moscow, in Russian, 10 Jun 07; BBC Monitoring via Lexis-Nexis.


Russian Federation: Foreign Relations

By Alexey Dynkin

Russia rejects Sarkozy plan for Kosovo
At a United Nations Security Council meeting on Wednesday, June 20, Russia rejected a recently proposed draft resolution of the Kosovo conflict. The draft was originally presented by France’s newly-elected president Nicholas Sarkozy as a compromise between the Serbian and Russian position, on one hand, and the Kosovo Albanian position, on the other, and has been accepted by the United States and the European Union. It allows for another four months of negotiations between the Belgrade and Pristina governments, after which, if an agreement cannot be reached, the plan initiated earlier this year by UN Special Envoy Martti Ahtisaari is to be implemented. Ahtisaari’s plan calls for Kosovo's independence under international supervision. (1) In addition, the draft contained several more provisions aimed at placating the Russian and Serbian side, such as the inclusion of a special envoy to oversee the return of ethnic Serbian refugees to Kosovo. (2) The supposed compromise, however, failed to change the Russian position. "We will not work on this draft," Russian UN Ambassador Vitali Churkin said. "We continue to maintain our position stated in the document that is sitting on the UN Security Council's table" – meaning, as Russian Emergency Minister Sergei Shoigu said two days later in a meeting with Serbian Foreign Minister Vuk Jeremic, that “this issue must be resolved in direct negotiations between Belgrade and Pristina." (3) "The new draft of the Kosovo resolution," said Churkin, “brings us no closer to a platform that could be used to reach an agreement [on Kosovo]." (4)

Russia’s refusal to accept the Sarkozy-initiated “compromise” on Kosovo is predictable and, in a sense, justifiable. Explaining the Russian response, Churkin said that "this in my mind is not good enough, because such kind of formula is not going to provide sufficient incentive for the two parties to negotiate seriously." (5) In other words, giving Belgrade and Pristina another four months to negotiate, but then saying that if negotiations fail than Pristina will gain independence anyway, is hardly a compromise – it is, rather, a way of putting pressure on one side only, while giving the other no reason to negotiate at all, and allowing it simply to wait until the issue is resolved in its favor by external forces. Given its
rather obvious nature, it is unlikely that Sarkozy did not understand this fact when he proposed the idea, which suggests that his primary motive was finding a formula for the Russians to save face, while acceding to a UN-mandated solution to the Kosovo conflict. If that is the case, then this first attempt of the new French president to engage Russia demonstrates a lack of appreciation on his part for the reality of Russian foreign policy under Putin.

Sarkozy’s stance is certainly understandable. Speaking from a European position, he appears to be working from the specifically European assumption that it is in everyone’s interest to resolve the Kosovo impasse as soon as possible; that, in the words of Ahtisaari, “Kosovo’s current state of limbo cannot continue…” because “…denying or delaying resolution of Kosovo’s status risks challenging not only its own stability but the peace and stability of the region as a whole.” (6) This is hardly surprising, given that the bulk of the peacekeeping task in Kosovo is currently undertaken by member states of the European Union (the total number of US military personnel deployed in Kosovo in September 2006 was only 1,721 out of a total of 16,000 NATO troops under KFOR (7), while the Russian peacekeeping contingent has been withdrawn altogether), and given that the EU long term goal is a unified Europe, which eventually would include such former trouble spots as the Balkans. It is not, however, an assumption that is necessarily shared by Russia. On the contrary, several factors make a hasty permanent solution to the Kosovo problem undesirable from the perspective of current Russian foreign policy.

The most important of these considerations is the fact that the present status of Kosovo, with its so-called impasse, was brought about without Russia’s participation, indeed against Russia’s vehement objections, as a result of a military intervention by NATO, led by the United States. During that time, those who saw a need for an external military intervention in the Kosovo conflict were able to bypass Russian opposition by carrying out the military action without UN authorization, which would have been impossible due to Russia’s permanent
membership on the Security Council and its inevitable veto. The fact that the United States and its European allies were able to do this and that Russia was powerless to prevent it caused bitter resentment within the Russian political leadership, particularly among those who still envision a global role for Russia. But, military action is one thing; recognition of an independent country is a different matter, and more difficult outside the UN framework. While it is possible for the United States, along with the EU and other countries, to recognize Kosovo unilaterally as an independent state, Russia's objection would ensure that it could never become a UN member state: membership in the UN requires approval of the General Assembly, upon recommendation by the Security Council. (8)

Moreover, the refusal of Russia and other countries such as China—not to mention Serbia itself—to recognize an independent Kosovo would prolong the region’s “in limbo” status. And, from the perspective of the European Union, creating an independent country without UN approval would be highly problematic – as columnist Fyodor Lukyanov points out, the EU is an organization that can function only under the auspices of international law and legitimacy, which in this case requires a UN-approved settlement of the Kosovo problem. (9) All of these factors give Russia significantly more leverage than it had when NATO launched its military intervention. This means that Russia is more likely to delay any settlement and prolong a situation in which its voice counts, rather than contribute to a resolution which would put an end to its opportunity for leverage, and to which Russia has been opposed all along – that is, the separation of Kosovo from Serbia in some form, without Serbia’s approval.

There is also the question of precedent: throughout the discussion on the future status of Kosovo, there has been the fear that if Kosovo does become independent, Russia will use it as a precedent to declare independent the separatist regions that it supports—Abkhazia and South Ossetia in Georgia, Transdniestr in Moldova—and then perhaps incorporate them into its own territory. Such a fear was recently raised by Assistant Secretary of State for
European and Eurasian Affairs Daniel Fried before the US Senate Foreign Relations Committee Washington, (10) as well as at a recent US-Russia conference chaired by head of the Duma committee for international affairs, Konstantin Kosachev, and House Committee on Foreign Affairs chairman, Rep. Tom Lantos. (11) According to Lukyanov, however, these fears are unfounded because it is not in the Kremlin’s interest at the moment (with other things to worry about, such as the upcoming elections) to create a situation where pressure would be put on Moscow from the leaders of the separatist regions to recognize their independence. (12) Moreover, the precedent could prove a very dangerous one for multi-ethnic Russia itself, in the long term. Kadyrov’s Chechnya may appear relatively stable at the moment, but there is no guarantee that his loyalty to Moscow will remain consistent with the growth of his power – or that Islamist separatism now active in Dagestan will not grow and spread throughout neighboring regions of the North Caucasus. It is more likely, then, that Russia’s preferred state of affairs is to maintain an impasse on the status of Kosovo, Abkhazia, South Ossetia, and Transdniestra – a state of affairs that gives Russia maximum leverage without being forced to make decisions that may result in a new international crisis.

In the meantime, however, it appears that Putin’s new Russia, the energy superpower, is already exploring alternative routes into its former Balkan sphere of influence. On Sunday, June 24, Putin attended a conference in Zagreb, Croatia, where energy cooperation among the countries of southeastern Europe was discussed. "Russia, as a global leader in oil and natural gas production is ready to do everything possible to resolve energy problems in the [Balkan] region," declared the Russian president at the summit, voicing support for the construction of a new oil pipeline under the Black Sea from Russia to Bulgaria and Greece and proposing Russian assistance for the construction of nuclear power plants in several Balkan states. (13) Perhaps whatever influence Russia can no longer maintain either with tanks or through the UN, it can reassert with its oil and gas. If that is the case, then the status of Kosovo, and, more broadly,
the idea of national sovereignty, may gradually lose their importance for Russia. Until then, however, Russia can be expected to delay a permanent settlement for Kosovo for as long as possible. Being in limbo, as Ahtisaari puts it, serves Russia just fine.

Source Notes:

(4) RIA Novosti, 20 Jun 07, Ibid.
(5) The Los Angeles Times, 21 Jun 07, Ibid.
(6) Text of Ahtisaari’s report, 26 Mar 07, Ibid.
(10) US State Department, text of televised remarks by Daniel Fried, Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs before the US Senate Foreign Relations Committee Washington, “Russia and US-Russia Relations,” 21 Jun 07 via Johnson’s Russia List (JRL).
Newly Independent States: Central Asia
By Monika Shepherd

Gates and Boucher visits to Kyrgyzstan produce muted reaction
Following a visit to Afghanistan, US Defense Secretary Robert Gates stopped in Bishkek on 5 June, in order to meet with Kyrgyz Defense Minister Ismail Isakov and President Kurmanbek Bakiev, as well as to visit the US-leased Manas air base. The defense secretary’s main objective for the visit was to bolster Kyrgyz-US ties by reaffirming US support for Kyrgyzstan in the NATO-led effort to stabilize Afghanistan, as well as in global endeavors to rein in terrorist networks. During a joint press conference with Gen. Lt. Isakov, Gates stated “I think what is important for the people of Kyrgyzstan to understand is that our use of Manas is in support of a larger war on terror in which Kyrgyzstan is an ally of virtually every other nation on earth.” (1) He did not provide many details about his discussions with the Kyrgyz defense minister, other than to say, “We discussed our bilateral military relations and our opportunities for expanding that relationship.” Gates told journalists that US relations with Kyrgyzstan were positive, while Isakov simply stated that their discussion had been very successful. Gates’ sole comment regarding the US Air Force’s lease agreement for the Manas base was succinct, but pointed: “The arrangements that we have at Manas are similar to those that other nations have who have military forces here in Kyrgyzstan, I think that seems appropriate.” (2) Currently, Russia is the only “other nation” that maintains a military base on Kyrgyz territory.

Kyrgyz criticism of the US military presence at the Manas base has been fierce in recent months, assailing the air force personnel’s immunity from criminal prosecution by the Kyrgyz courts and the environmental damage caused by alleged incidents of jet fuel dumping. (3) Assertions by Kyrgyz MP Rashid Tagaev that a US air strike against Iran will be launched from Manas, thereby making Kyrgyzstan vulnerable to a counterattack added more fuel to the fire of anti-US sentiment, (4) not to mention media pundit Leonid Bondarets’ comments that the base could attract terrorist attacks and that US servicemen are involved in narcotics trafficking. (5) Even the payment terms contained in the new lease agreement (which was renegotiated in summer 2006) have become a point of controversy, with a number of Kyrgyz officials claiming that no payments have been received, (6) despite Finance Minister Akylbek Japarov’s report to parliament on 22 January that US$4.35 million had been received in December 2006 as part of the new contract. (7)

Gates’ visit seems to have done little to win over the US critics within the Kyrgyz government – the anti-US rhetoric seems to have abated somewhat, but there are few new signs of support for the US air base. President Bakiev’s reaction to the defense secretary’s visit seemed lukewarm and his comments at the press conference following their meeting could hardly be considered effusive. On the topic of the US air base at Manas, he stated: “Kyrgyzstan is strictly adhering to the obligations it has taken on within the framework of the efforts of the international counter-terrorism coalition…The two countries' cooperation is based on principles of mutual respect and fulfillment of the obligations the two sides have undertaken. Without doubt, Kyrgyzstan has made a significant contribution to the task of stabilizing the situation in Afghanistan.” (8) He did not address the issue of whether or not the lease agreement for the base will be renewed a second time, or even whether he supports parliament’s demand that the agreement be reviewed.
US Assistant Secretary of State for South and Central Asia Richard Boucher’s visit to Bishkek just two days later was only a little more successful than the defense secretary’s trip. In fact, Boucher’s presence drew a small anti-US demonstration of roughly 15-20 persons, all members of a recently organized movement advocating the expulsion of the US air base from Kyrgyz territory. (9) During his meeting with President Bakiyev, Boucher discussed further expanding US-Kyrgyz cooperation in a number of areas, including security, the economy, and political reform, (10) all fairly standard and predictable topics of conversation. However, when asked about Russian efforts to compel Kyrgyzstan to close the Manas air base at a press conference later that day, the Ass’t. Secretary of State did not mince his words: “One must ask, in the first place, the Russian side about this. We are constantly holding dialogue with the Russian side on the need to cooperate and to make efforts in order to ensure stability in the region and in Afghanistan in particular. They say time and again that they (Russia) want stability in Afghanistan. Therefore, I do not see any reason for Russia to try to stop our activities in Kyrgyzstan, in Germany, France or in other countries.” He further stated: “The region’s countries are deciding on their own what contribution they want to make to the stabilization of the situation, be it in the area of security, economics or politics….In view of this, Kyrgyzstan’s independence consists in using all these opportunities and preventing a particular country, a trade partner or other external factors from establishing superiority over the country.” (11)

Boucher also met with one of the US air base’s most vocal critics, Parliament Speaker Marat Sultanov, who, in deference to the Ass’t Secretary of State, modified his rhetoric just slightly, declaring that the US Air Force must abide by all of the lease agreement’s terms and limits, rather than repeating his previous demand that the contract be reevaluated with a view toward the base’s closure. Sultanov also emphasized that the base can not be used in any US military operations against Iran and that parliament will be considering the issue of the base’s existence at a later date.(12) Boucher, for his part, agreed that the issue should be decided by Kyrgyzstan’s government, but that it has no place on the
agenda of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) summit: “The issue of the US air base in Kyrgyzstan should not be discussed at a SCO summit since the base is a component of cooperation between the USA and Kyrgyzstan, which is supported by the relevant agreement. There is no need for a third side to intervene in the issue.” (13)

Both Gates and Boucher defended US interests in Kyrgyzstan without making any concessions to the Kyrgyz government regarding US use of the Manas air base. Gates attempted a slightly more conciliatory tone than Boucher used, by repeatedly stressing the positive aspects of Kyrgyz-US military cooperation, but neither he nor Boucher was able to elicit much enthusiasm from the Kyrgyz government, much less any concrete promises regarding the Manas base or Kyrgyz-US cooperation. The only official who seemed genuinely interested in strengthening relations with the US was Prime Minister Almaz Atambaev, who sought Boucher’s help in gaining access to the Afghani trade market, as well as to international tenders for the rebuilding of Afghanistan’s infrastructure. Atambaev requested US aid in exporting surplus electricity to Afghanistan and also asked that his country be included in the Millennium Challenges program. He even appealed to the US government for assistance with the further development of Kyrgyzstan’s domestic politics, requesting that the US review President Bakiev’s recently submitted constitutional amendments, in order to ensure that they are in line with the process of democratic reform. (14) Should Atambaev manage to retain his post as prime minister after the conclusion of the SCO summit in mid-August, his overtures to Boucher may provide at least a small ray of hope for future US-Kyrgyz relations. At the moment, however, he appears to be one of a very small number of Kyrgyz politicians who supports the expansion of relations with the US. It is not likely that President Bakiev’s true intentions vis à vis the US, Russia and China will be revealed until after the summit. Both the Russian and Chinese governments have indicated interest in widening their ties with Kyrgyzstan on a number of levels, but the SCO summit may prove to be the real litmus test of their promises and kind words to Bakiev.
On the other hand, if Atambaev remains in power, the US may have one last chance to improve its track record in Central Asia, by allowing Kyrgyzstan to play a greater role in the rebuilding of Afghanistan, a move which could benefit to the region as a whole, creating new trade markets and revenue and perhaps even furthering the cause of Afghani political stability as a by-product.

Source Notes:

(2) “Gates seeks ways to expand military ties with Kyrgyzstan,” 5 Jun 07, Xinhua General News Service via Lexis-Nexis Academic Universe.
(3) “Anti-US sentiment on the rise in Kyrgyzstan,” The ISCI Analyst, Volume XIII Number 13 (7 June 2007).
(4) “Kyrgyz MP Says Has "No Doubt" USA Will Use Kyrgyz Base If Attacks Iran,” 11 May 07, 24.kg; BBC Monitoring International Reports via Lexis-Nexis Academic Universe.
(7) “USA Pays 435m Dollars For Kyrgyz Air Base In December – Minister,” 22 Jan 07, AKIpress; BBC Monitoring International Reports via Lexis-Nexis Academic Universe.
(8) "US' Gates discusses expanding military ties with Kyrgyzstan," 5 Jun 07, AFX – Asia via Lexis-Nexis Academic Universe.
Is Ukraine's Opposition Truly United?

In recent days, there have been several troubling signs about the long-term “unity” of Ukraine's pro-presidential opposition forces, the Our Ukraine and Yulia Tymoshenko Blocs. Despite an agreement concluded months ago that the two blocs would work together and coordinate their actions, Ukraine’s media have printed several unattributed statements from supposed members of both forces suggesting that, after the election, all bets are off.
The root of the problem may be continuing disagreements within President Yushchenko’s Our Ukraine over the direction of the bloc. In particular, tension appears to remain in the bloc between those few members who are working toward an agreement with Prime Minister Viktor Yanukovych’s Party of Regions in order to facilitate business interests, and the majority of members who view any agreement with this party as a betrayal of the voters. This tension repeatedly has paralyzed the party in the past, and it is essential that it not occur again.

The latest sign that all disagreements have not been resolved within Our Ukraine came less than two weeks ago. Yuriy Lutsenko, former Interior Minister and now head of the People’s Self-Defense organization, claimed that negotiations with Our Ukraine to create a coalition for contesting the upcoming parliamentary elections are stalled. Lutsenko counts on the support of about five percent of voters and months ago announced his intention to unite with Our Ukraine.

Lutsenko suggested that People’s Self-Defense may enter discussions with “our potential parliamentary ally, The Yulia Tymoshenko Bloc (BYUT),” should negotiations with Our Ukraine fail. Specifically, he is pushing for an agreement on candidacies for the posts of parliamentary speaker, prime minister and the security ministries in any future government involving PSD. “Voters should know that when voting for a certain political force they choose a definite speaker and prime minister,” he said. (1)

Defense Minister Anatoliy Hrytsenko, slated to be among the top five of Our Ukraine’s electoral list, responded quickly. He urged Lutsenko to “step back from the language of ultimatums.” (2)

To be sure, Lutsenko is adept at creating what Ukrainians call “media sensations,” and his statements must be viewed within the prism of the ongoing negotiations process. However, Hrytsenko’s response sounded worryingl
similar to language used in the past by Our Ukraine when the bloc’s internal divisions kept it from coming to terms with potential allies.

Most recently, this occurred following parliamentary elections in 2006 when the bloc’s business members opposed the idea of any type of coalition with Yulia Tymoshenko.

At that time, BYUT, Our Ukraine and their then-ally Socialist Party had won 129 seats, 80 seats and 33 seats in the 450 seat assembly, respectively. This coalition should have allowed the long-time partners to form a government.

But when Tymoshenko attempted to assert her right to the premiership, based on her bloc’s first place finish in the coalition, she was admonished for issuing “ultimatums.” “The talks will realistically not begin until the ultimatums stop,” said then-Our Ukraine leader Yuriy Yekhanurov. In the end, delays in reaching an agreement allowed Yanukovych to gain the upper hand. (3)

In fact, in Ukraine, whenever the term “ultimatum” has been applied by political parties, it has signaled a lack of support for a stated position. Lutsenko, seeing Hrytsenko’s comment, must understand this, even though the well-respected, reformist head of Our Ukraine, Vyacheslav Kyrylenko, continues to work hard for an agreement.

The bigger question raised by these developments is their implication for a long-term coalition between Our Ukraine and the Yulia Tymoshenko Bloc. Are the lengthy negotiations with Lutsenko simply the result of problems peculiar to that situation? Lutsenko’s electoral support appears to be half of Our Ukraine’s. Perhaps he is asking too much? Or are his positions on the need to implement significant reforms too much for some? If the latter, this does not bode well for cooperation with Tymoshenko, whose positions are similar to Lutsenko’s in this regard.
With the defection of the Party of Industrialists and Entrepreneurs from Our Ukraine to Yanukovych, it had been hoped that the tension between the “business wing” and what has become known as the “democratic wing” would be resolved. However, an inability to come to an agreement with Lutsenko would suggest it hasn’t.

Most recently, one of Ukraine’s most democratic, professional and least personally ambitious politicians, Mykola Katerynchuk, expressed his concern that Our Ukraine may choose in the end to form a coalition with the Party of Regions. Katerynchuk left Our Ukraine in August 2006, after President Yushchenko nominated Yanukovych for the premiership and a number of Our Ukraine members voted to confirm the nomination. He is now a member of People’s Self-Defense.

The possibility that People’s Self-Defense will go to the elections separately is significant. Either way, Lutsenko’s forces look to be able to enter parliament. But for the possibility of a renewed “orange” government, three forces running separately may lead to defeat in the end.

Some advocates for keeping Lutsenko out of their Our Ukraine suggest that he may pull votes from BYUT, lessening its expected margin of victory over Our Ukraine. This seems unlikely.

To date, opinion polls show little movement from BYUT to Lutsenko. Additionally, there has been little negative response to Tymoshenko’s decision to run separately, perhaps because Our Ukraine has failed to keep agreements with her in the past. Her force’s base appears strong and consistent. In essence, she won’t lose from campaigning independently and she won’t gain from taking on a partner. She seems to have earned the luxury to simply sit back and watch the Our Ukraine-Lutsenko drama unfold.
But Our Ukraine – which has been fighting to maintain its voter base – will suffer should an agreement with Lutsenko fail. With Lutsenko, the bloc may reach 18-20%. Without him, it may not even match the 14% of 2006. This loss in votes would need to be overcome by BYUT and PSD. In an election where the majority may be formed by a difference of 1-2%, and where voter apathy will be high, this is a very tall order.

This is a key moment for the president’s party. Some of the country’s most dedicated reformers remain in the bloc, and the next few weeks will determine whether they have successfully rid the party of those opposed to reform. It is also a key moment for Lutsenko. His ambition must not stop him from creating the best foundation possible for winning a majority.

Failure to reach an agreement would signal problems for a potentially new “orange” government, following the election. How will Our Ukraine and Lutsenko agree to form a coalition with Tymoshenko – should they be given that opportunity by voters – if they can’t complete their own negotiations successfully?

Negotiators have given 1 July as a deadline to complete their discussions. It is in the interest of both sides to succeed.

Source Notes:

(3) Eastbusiness.org, 0913 CET, 10 Apr 07 via Lexis-Nexis.