Succession precedents, systemic change and a lame duck
Personnel shuffles, policy changes and even media coverage of particular political insiders have fed speculation about the 2008 presidential succession for over a year. It was inevitable that the amount of time spent in calculating the relative fortunes of various apparatchiki would detract from coverage of presidential initiatives and actions (except, inasmuch as those actions indicated a preferred successor). Putin has entered the lame duck phase of his presidency, and it seems unlikely that he will relish that role.

Clearly, the Russian experience with lame duck status will differ sharply from Western democracies, as has the Russian experiment with democracy in general. From 1996, almost immediately after the first round of voting in the presidential election that would give Boris Yel'tsin his second term, Russia experienced the beginning of its first fully post-Soviet succession as Yel'tsin became incapacitated with heart and other ailments and day-to-day operations in the Kremlin and beyond were left to Anatoli Chubais and other members of the Yel'tsin "Family." Viktor Chernomyrdin, then the Prime Minister, launched an indiscreetly early election campaign (complete with television ads of a "vigorous" Chernomyrdin riding a water jet-ski as Yel'tsin languished in hospital). (1) Chernomyrdin soon found himself maneuvered out of the Prime Minister's chair, and out of contention as successor as well.

The ensuing years saw a parade of potential heirs: some designated as such (e.g., Boris Nemtsov) (2); others, too clever by half, played the insider game crisply, and taking Stalin's adage that "cadres decide everything" to heart,
stocked key ministries and Kremlin jobs with loyal minions. Unfortunately for their ambitions, these putative successors didn't realize how profound an effect structural changes had had on the Russian political landscape and fell victim to Yel'tsin's super-presidential rule, and perhaps more pointedly, to the urgent concerns of his "Family" for their personal and financial security.

The climate in the late 1990s was significantly different from the current Russian political scene. The question for potential successors still rests however, in toeing the fine line between differentiating themselves from Putin and challenging his regime.

President Putin repeatedly affirms his intention to follow the constitutional prescription and step aside in 2008. His hints that his choice of successor will be a relative unknown may serve to cool the enthusiasm of the current succession favorites and temper their "campaign" fervor. However, media reports and analyses continue apace and, in some cases, are moving beyond the ranking of successors and onto more detailed discussions of the political system Putin has built and its implications for the coming succession.

The degree of state control over Russian media has been a disconcerting aspect of Putin's assertion of state authority; the willingness of analysts to cast a critical eye on his reign, a phenomenon currently on an upswing, suggests their willingness to reflect Putin in the rear view mirror and highlight his status as a lame duck—a perspective likely to spread, unless checked by the administration.

In one recent commentary, Putin's regime is compared to "Stalinism" and "Bonapartism," two strongly centralized forms of rule. The key contrast with "Putinism" being "the role and specific place which bureaucracy occupies," particularly "in the general structure of relations between political entities and actors." (3) In this analysis, bureaucracy, while representing different compositions and with different aims, served as the "collective Bonaparte" and
the "collective Stalin." The "collective Putin," on the other hand, is based on a more "narrow group and not a collective socio-political substratum or corporation." (4)

The system that Putin has developed rests in "confidence...not in the president's real policies but in the emotional image, in Putin as a person...." (5) In this aspect, Putin has continued the personalization of political power so evident during the Yeltsin era, which failed to build solid institutions as the basis of Russia's political democratic development.

According to this analysis, Putin's "personal departure means a withdrawal of the principle which ensures the stability of the system and opens a path to a worsening of the contradictions present in it." (6) In the end, after the rather unflattering comparisons and conclusions, this commentary considers the popularity of the idea of a third term for Putin, which reflects his personal popularity as well as a lack of confidence in the administration and the system, when considered separately from the president. The conclusion is less a rationalization for continuing the Putin presidency beyond its current constitutional term, than a premature post mortem on a political order likely to change significantly in coming years; as such, it may serve as a warning to current political elites.

The degree to which "Putinism" truly is a highly personalized regime, as opposed to a more entrenched corporate entity in which both powerful individuals and institutions have significant stakes, may be exposed as Putin and the Kremlin begin to grapple with the lame duck label. It is at such moments that assumptions about regimes, in this case the effective strength and organization of the siloviki, are confirmed or refuted.

Source Notes:
Russian Federation: Domestic Issues and Legislative Branch

By Robyn Angley

Regional Review: Central Federal District

Georgi Poltavchenko, the Presidential representative to the Central Federal District, is the only one of Putin’s presidential envoys actually to have been appointed during the Yeltsin era. Yeltsin named Poltavchenko his presidential envoy to the Leningrad region in July 1999, a month before Putin was named Prime Minister. In May 2000, when Putin announced his envoys to the seven federal districts, Poltavchenko was reassigned to his current post in a crucial region that includes Moscow and comprises one third of Russia’s population.

Like many of the individuals holding positions in Putin’s administration, Poltavchenko got his start in the KGB. As part of the Leningrad Oblast KGB Directorate, he oversaw the security aspect of the transportation system. (1) After eleven years in the KGB, Poltavchenko began serving in the Leningrad Oblast Soviet as a deputy in 1990. In October 1992, Poltavchenko became chief of Saint Petersburg’s Federal Tax Police Service Administration. (2) In that

---

(3) "Manual steering regime," by Sergei Chernyakhovsky, 5 Oct 06, Gazeta.ru; OSC Translated Text via World News Connection (WNC).
(4) Ibid.
(5) Ibid.
(6) Ibid.
capacity, he participated in the 1998 investigation of the television company Russkoye Video. (3) Evidence from this inquiry provided some of the grounds for the action against oligarch Vladimir Gusinsky’s Media Most Group in May 2000, which culminated with Gusinsky’s abrupt departure from Russia in December of that year. (4)

Poltavchenko’s appointment as presidential envoy to the Central Federal District was seen as a means of counterbalancing the influence of Moscow Mayor Yuri Luzhkov. Luzhkov was seen as fierce rival for Putin both in Moscow and in the presidential elections when Putin first came to power. Poltavchenko began contesting Luzhkov’s power base immediately. Within the first two months of his tenure, Poltavchenko threatened to take legal action against Luzkhov for failure to comply with federal laws prohibiting compulsory internal registration. (5) Poltavchenko reversed his position and supported Luzhkov’s mandatory registration requirements in the capital just three months later. (6) This turnabout was interpreted by some as a sign that Luzhkov had returned to favor with the Kremlin. (7)

Although Luzhkov took the lead in the pro-Putin United Russia’s electoral lists in the elections for the Moscow City Duma in November 2005, a move that might be interpreted as support for Putin, personnel changes orchestrated by the Kremlin have removed key elements of Luzhkov’s team over the last year. For instance, in August 2005, Putin selected Luzhkov’s deputy mayor, Valery Shantsev, to serve as the leader of the Nizhny Novgorod region. Until that point, Shantsev had been viewed as one of the most promising contenders to succeed Luzhkov when his term expires in 2007. (8) Luzhkov has announced that he will step down at the end of his term. In November 2005, another member of Luzhkov’s administration, Mikhail Men, was appointed by Putin (and with Poltavchenko's input) as governor of the Ivanovo region. (9) Now, with the end of Luzhkov’s term rapidly approaching, it is widely anticipated that Poltavchenko, in fact, may be the candidate to succeed him as Moscow's mayor.
Although relatively media shy on the domestic front, Poltavchenko has managed to increase his profile in foreign relations in the last few years and has assumed a fairly significant role in Russia’s relationship with the Balkan states. He and Luzhkov together have taken the lead in expanding Russia’s economic cooperation with Croatia. They have visited Croatia and hosted Croatian officials in Moscow, in order to discuss deepening economic ties in the areas of biotechnology, pharmacology and tourism. (10)

Poltavchenko has a particularly prominent role in Russia’s ties with Serbia-Montenegro. The administration has used Poltavchenko to make low-level statements about preserving the territorial integrity of Serbia with relation to both Montenegro and Kosovo. (11) In one such statement, Poltavchenko said that Russia was prepared to use its influence “to avert unilateral actions” of the international community in Kosovo. (12) While Luzhkov appears to be an integral player in the Russian-Croatian relationship, he seems absent from Serbian relations.

Poltavchenko drew the attention of some of the international press in October 2005, when he called for Lenin’s body to be removed from its Red Square mausoleum. "I do not think it is entirely correct that those who started these troubles should be located by the Kremlin, at the very centre of the state," he said. (13)

Given the rampant problem of corruption in Moscow and the regions, it is perhaps unsurprising that (the clearly ambitious) Poltavchenko also has jumped on the anti-corruption bandwagon. The presidential envoy explained (and seemed partly to excuse) its prevalence in the Central Federal District with his recent statement that “seventy to eighty percent of budget money circulates in the regions of the Central Federal District, especially the Moscow region." (14)
Poltavchenko's office is located just outside the Kremlin and he remains a personal friend of Putin's. According to one Moscow newspaper, he is famous with citizens for his reception offices, which are rarely open. (15) He may be close to the Kremlin, but will that be enough to propel him forward in 2007 and beyond?

Source Notes:
(1) "Putin's Central Federal District Representative Poltavchenko Profiled," Nezavisimaya Gazeta, 9 Oct 06; OSC Translated Text via WNC.
(2) Ibid.
(3) “Chubais linked to St. Petersburg corruption probe,” Moscow NTV in Russian 1900 GMT 27 Mar 98; FBIS-SOV-98-087 via ISCIDP Database.
(4) “Putin moves in mysterious ways,” Kommersant, 19 May 00; WPS via Lexis-Nexis.
(5) “Kremlin threatens Moscow mayor with legal action,” Agence France Presse, 20 Jul 00 via Lexis-Nexis.
(6) “Luzhkov’s regime survives,” Kommersant, 19 Oct 00; WPS via Lexis-Nexis.
(7) Ibid.
(8) “Experts: Kremlin takes edge off Moscow mayor’s team,” RIA NOVOSTI, 4 Aug 05 via Lexis-Nexis.
(9) “Mikhail Men: Not as much time for sport and music,” Izvestia, 24 Nov 05; WPS via Lexis-Nexis.
(10) “Russian officials meet Croatian prime minister to discuss economic cooperation,” ITAR-TASS, 24 Nov 04; FBIS Transcribed Text via WNC.
(11) “Serbia’s Kostunic talks to Putin’s envoy about furthering bilateral cooperation,” TANJUG, 16 Feb 05; FBIS Transcribed Text via WNC.
(12) “Putin envoy says Russia sees Serbia and Montenegro as strategic partner,” ITAR-TASS, 17 Feb 05; FBIS Transcribed Text via WNC.
(14) “A national project called ‘fighting corruption,’” Nezavisimaya gazeta, 18 Sep 06; WPS via Lexis-Nexis.
(15) “Russian paper rates efficiency of Putin’s representatives in federal districts,” Moskovskiy Komsomolets, 13 May 05; BBC Monitoring via Lexis-Nexis.

Russian Federation: Security Services

By Fabian Adami

Update: Borders: Russian-Kazakh border to be improved...

In May 2005, General Vladimir Pronichev, Commander of Russia’s Border Guards announced that R15 Billion of the Guards’ new budget would be dedicated to improving the country’s border fortifications, especially along the Georgian-Russian boundary. The aforementioned amount was to be allocated specifically for the procurement of new surveillance technologies and the construction of new border posts. (1)

The importance assigned to the Georgian-Russian border is emphasized by the number of visits paid to the area by senior Russian officials. Last May, FSB Director Nikolai Patrushev accompanied General Vladimir Pronichev to Kabardino-Balkaria (close to the Pankisi Gorge—a Georgian area that Russia keeps claiming has been used as a base by Chechen terrorists) on a “familiarization” trip, designed to demonstrate to the General the service conditions of the Guards. (2) Russia’s Georgian border has remained in the news as a result of the escalating Georgian-Russian crisis, and, in what might be viewed as a “warning” move, Patrushev announced on 1 September that 3 extra brigades (2 mountain troops, 1 interior ministry) of non Border Guard troops would be positioned near the Georgian border as soon as possible. (3) (It should be noted that the emphasis given to Russia’s border with Georgia by senior state officials has an additional purpose, namely to demonstrate to the world—and the International Olympic Committee—that Sochi, just north of Georgia's Abkhaz border (a city which is bidding for the 2014 Winter Games) is a secure city, and that Russia is capable of protecting foreign athletes.)
It has become increasingly evident that the border reform program is larger than it first appeared. Between May and June, Patrushev signed into law several pieces of legislation reorganizing Russia’s borders wholesale. The new laws increased from 5 Km-30 Km the size of border zones. At a stroke Russia has re-created Soviet style borders, down to large “closed areas” (such as the Vladivostok region—near a major Pacific naval base), where entry is only possible with prior FSB permission—subsequent, of course, to a detailed explanation of purpose of travel, productions of identification documents and proof of Russian citizenship. (4)

Then, on 4 October, after a meeting with Pyotr Sumov, Governor of Chelyabinsk, General Pronichev announced that Russia would undertake a major project to improve immediately the Kazakh section of Russia’s border. In this regard, $160 Million dollars has been allocated to the Border Services’ 2007 budget for the construction of 20 new border installations, including housing and administrative centers. (5) As yet, no indication has been given as to whether the Russian-Kazakh border will contain any “closed areas.”

Given the proximity of the Baikonaur space facility, and the proximity of many former Soviet or Russian nuclear facilities, it seems safe to predict that areas on the Kazakh border indeed will be sealed. Several issues need to be raised regarding Russia’s border operations: Expanded border zones along frontiers Russia is treating as “trouble spots,” such as Georgia's, were to be expected. However, is a 30 km zone being created along the border with a member of Russian-led organizations, such as Kazakhstan, in order to contain instability further south? The regressive border situation demonstrates that Russia has not moved far from its Soviet and Czarist imperial past.

German agreement to supplement those with Japan, Ukraine
On 6 October, General Vladimir Pronichev met with his German counterpart, Rudiger Kass, Head of the German Federal Border Service. The purpose of the meeting was to discuss bilateral operations against immigrant trafficking, organized crime and terrorism, as well as to arrange exchanges between the two services. A cooperation agreement is to be signed between the border services in 2007. (6) Russia has already signed cooperation agreements with the Ukrainian (7) and Japanese border services this year. (8)

**Spy fever**

Early in August, Russia’s courts sentenced Colonel Sergei Skripal, a former intelligence officer, to 13 years in a high security penal camp. Skripal allegedly had been working for Britain’s Secret Intelligence Service for nine years, and his case is only one of many such espionage investigations. (9) In the last two weeks, Russia’s "spy fever" seems to have reached new levels: On 3 October, the FSB announced that it had “thwarted” an attempt by “foreign” based hackers to access top-secret research from a Siberian institute. (10) Apparently the site specializes in "chemical" research (probably this means chemical weapons). Igor Akhrimeyev, the FSB’s spokesman claimed that the data supposedly sought by the hackers was worth $100 million, and that the United States and China had “displayed interest” (probably a euphemism for attempted espionage) in the institute’s work. (11)

A day after this announcement, FSB Director Patrushev conducted an interview with Argumenty i fakty, during which he revealed that yet more individuals, named as Zaporozhsky, Starina, Oyamae, Sypachev, and Vyalkov and A. Dumenkov “recently” had been convicted of treason. The only specifics given were that Dumenkov allegedly had passed laser technology to Germany and had been sentenced to twelve years' imprisonment. (12) Patrushev used the interview essentially to claim that Russia is being attacked on all sides by foreign agencies, citing the fact that the FSB had conducted some 60 espionage investigations in the last twelve months. (13) It still has not been revealed which
agencies employed these individuals. Were it the GRU or SVR, the FSB likely would be in full attack mode toward its inter-service rivals. Thus, it must be assumed that they are FSB officers.

The timing of the announcement concerning hacking, and of Patrushev's interview cannot be discounted, in light of the "purge" of the FSB which took place in his absence several weeks ago. (14) At this point, it seems safe to conclude that Patrushev's competence and leadership of the FSB are in question, and that the announced successes were designed first to solidify his position, and second to demonstrate to President Putin that he is the "right man" to lead the FSB, and finally, to "fight back" against his rivals in the Kremlin administration, such as Viktor Cherkesov. (15)

**Were the Security Services involved in Anna Politkovskaya murder?**

On Saturday 7 October, as she exited an elevator in her Moscow apartment building, Anna Politkovskaya was killed “execution-style,” by gunshot wounds to the head and chest. A pistol and four empty shell casings were found near her body. (16) Throughout her career, Politkovskaya had made a name for herself by writing about the Chechen war in highly critical, detailed reports, which were at odds with the official Kremlin line. According to her editor at Novaya gazeta, Politkovskaya recently had completed an investigation into torture by Russian forces and loyalists in Chechnya, and was preparing a report for publication. (17)

The investigation into Politkovskaya’s murder, which apparently has begun already, is to be headed directly by Prosecutor General Yuri Chaika. As yet, Chaika’s office has refused to comment on the case (save to say that the murder was well planned), including on the issue of surveillance tape of the murderer, and of an apparent female accomplice caught on camera following Politkovskaya as she shopped at Ramstore during her journey home. (18) Politkovskaya’s life had been threatened many times before: notably in 2001, when, as a result of her investigation into the disappearance of Zelimkhan Murdalov in Grozny, an
OMON soldier named Sergei Lapin threatened to assassinate her, (19) and when she was poisoned while en route to negotiate with the hostage takers at Beslan in 2004.

The manner of the investigation into her murder is suspicious. First, her computer, which contained the torture story and its photos, has been impounded, as have her cameras, notebooks, and “other evidence.” Politkovskaya’s phone calls also will be played back, a tacit acknowledgement, by prosecutors, that they were tapped. (20)

Politkovskaya’s assassination was carried out—not without symbolism—on President Putin’s birthday, and shortly before Chechen President Ramzan Kadyrov’s 30th birthday. (21) Given the facts as known: namely the acknowledgement that the killing was professional, the seizure and therefore likely non-publication of a story damaging to the regimes, both in Moscow and in Grozny, it seems safe to conclude her death was "ordered."

Source Notes:

(1) See The ISCIIP Analyst, Volume XII, Number 4 (15 Jun 06)
(2) Ibid.
(3) See The ISCIIP Analyst, Volume XIII, Number 2 (5 Oct 06).
(6) “Chiefs of Russia, Germany Border Services Discuss Fight Against Crime,” ITAR-TASS, 6 October; BBC Monitoring via Lexis-Nexis.
Why the doctrine denial?
Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia has struggled in developing its military doctrine. In its true meaning, a doctrine is the representation of a set of
concrete beliefs. In today’s Russia, what is being touted as doctrine would be described better as a sort of national security strategy. Regardless of what they’re calling it, there is no doubt the changing global and domestic environments demand that a security strategy must flex to keep up with an ever-changing world.

The first non-Soviet doctrine was signed into effect by Boris Yeltsin in 1993. It was titled “Main Provisions of the Military Doctrine” and was written to lay a new military footing for Russia and establish a stance with regard to the use of nuclear weapons. (1) Throughout the mid and late 1990s, discussions about the need for a revision of the doctrine were a recurrent theme. In April 2000, on the heels of NATO operations in Kosovo, President Putin approved the next edition of the military doctrine. (2)

Now, there appears to be some disagreement as to the existence of yet another new draft military doctrine. In numerous media reports released on 20 September, the draft of a new doctrine, described in convincing detail, “has been prepared by an expert group of the Defense Ministry.” (3) If not for the fact that the document reportedly names the United States and NATO as key potential enemies, this news likely would not have garnered much attention. (4) In fact, with no new doctrine or strategy issued post-9/11, it could be said that an update was overdue. In May of this year, following President Putin’s address to the Federal Assembly, discussions in the Security Council, the General Staff, and the Defense Ministry commenced regarding the need to revise the military’s doctrine again. (5) Nonetheless, the day after the media unexpectedly reported news of this draft, the Russian Defense Ministry refuted the reports: Deputy Prime Minister and Defense Minister Sergei Ivanov said “I know nothing about that. I haven’t received any instructions to prepare a new military doctrine.” (6)

So, why did the Defense Ministry deny that the draft exists? Madina Shavlokhova, the Gazeta journalist who broke the story, provided two
explanations: Either the Defense Ministry experts who drafted the document were working directly for Putin, against the wishes of Ivanov, or government leadership is acting to avoid premature publicity about the doctrine. (7) An additional reason comes to mind: First, the language in the doctrine naming the United States and NATO as enemies may have required further review by the political leadership before the draft was leaked. The Kremlin also might have preferred to control the timing of the release of the doctrine in the hopes of minimizing the response to it. Then again, with the increasingly harsh stance towards Georgia, Russia may not want to commit to any policy that could limit its options in dealing with the conflict. Regardless of the reason, don’t be surprised to see an "approved" version of the doctrine released once an acceptable rebound period has elapsed.

**Russian troop withdrawal from Georgia**

In Russia’s continuing effort to punish Georgia for arresting four GRU members last month, anything and everything seems to be fair game…including the issue of withdrawing Russian troops from Georgia. So far, Russian leaders have debated between halting the process altogether, continuing the withdrawal on schedule, and accelerating the troop movements. While each of these options has earned media comment, none have seemed to raise a reaction from Georgian leaders.

Following the Rose Revolution, President Saakashvili immediately established two primary objectives (he’s still working on both): First, he vowed to regain control in the breakaway regions of Adjaria, South Ossetia and Abkhazia. In addition, he made it a goal to develop relations with the West and gain eventual NATO membership for Georgia. (8) Because NATO membership wouldn’t be considered until Russian troops were out of Georgia, this too became a high priority. (9)
During initial negotiations, once the withdrawal was agreed upon in principle, Moscow insisted it would take eleven years to complete the process of closing the Soviet-era military bases at Akhalkalaki and Batumi. Military analyst Pavel Felgenhauer wrote in a Moscow Times commentary that “Russia’s strategy is to stall in the hopes that political circumstances more favorable to Russia will arise in Georgia in the future. It’s hoped that in 10 years, a pro-Moscow government may be installed in Tbilisi…; or that Georgia will disintegrate and semi-independent pro-Moscow fiefdoms will be created….” (10) However, as recently as March of this year, and after much gnashing of teeth, officials from both countries agreed on a timeline that would have the last Russian base closed and troops departed by late 2008. The timeline established that “the Akhalkalaki base is to be emptied of most of its heavy equipment during 2006 and to be completely closed by October 1, 2007, with a possible extension until December 31, 2007, subject to weather conditions. The Batumi base is to ship out most of its heavy equipment during 2007 and to be completely closed before the end of 2008.” (11) Additionally, the Tbilisi headquarters of the Russian Group of Forces in the Transcaucasus (GRVZ) were to remain open to supervise activities and then close in conjunction with the base at Batumi. (12)

Until the arrests last month, progress on the project had been moving along in a timely manner. In fact, Russia noted that all requirements for 2006 had been satisfied early. (13) Now however, Moscow seems to be using the arrest of the GRU officers to cloud the withdrawal issue, although they were handed to Russia almost immediately. Senior officials though, appear to be having difficulty coordinating their plan. First, there was the GRVZ commander, Major General Andrei Popov, who threatened on 29 September that “Further hostile actions and the use of force by the Georgian side…may not only complicate but also slow down the withdrawal process.” (14) Following up on the threat, the process was indeed halted for a short time. Then on 1 October, in the midst of evacuating Russian citizens and suspending all transportation and postal services to and from Georgia, President Putin ordered the Defense Ministry to resume troop and
equipment withdrawal operations according to the plan. (15) Finally, in a television interview on 8 October, Defense Minister Ivanov had yet another opinion on the matter. When anchorman Sergei Brilyov raised a question about claims of speeding up the withdrawal effort, Ivanov said “It’s simple: our military, at least in Tbilisi, are in the position of hostages and the sooner we rescue them from there the more comfortable I will feel.” (16)

Despite forces being placed on higher than normal alert status, all has remained peaceful, if tense. Following a brief interruption, lessons have resumed for some of the children at the Russian Defense Ministry’s secondary schools, where children of Russian servicemen represent sixty-six percent of the student population. (17) The other thirty-four percent are mostly Georgian children. Now however, in accordance with a decision made by the Defense Ministry, "children of Georgian citizens will be deprived of the opportunity to study at any of the three...schools...in Tbilisi, Batumi, and Akhalkalaki." (18) Taken together with the recent endeavor to oust children with Georgian surnames from Moscow area schools, this move is reminiscent of racial segregation or Nazi exclusionary policies and stains Russia's reputation internationally.

Only time will tell, but right now both President Putin and Saakashvili state adamantly that going to war is not in their best interests. If such an armed conflict were to combust, the most likely spark would ignite in South Ossetia and Abkhazia. However, keep an eye on the Russian troop withdrawal process as another potential trigger point.

Source Notes:
2. bid.
7. Ibid.
10. Ibid.
12. Ibid.
Military exercises

Ostensibly, military exercises serve the sole purpose of training and evaluating a state’s military machine. Whether assessing the command and control, coordinating between different types of arms (or even between the armed forces of different nations) or executing a particular type of mission, military exercises serve a very useful purpose. They also have a deeper meaning, however, in that military exercises tend to follow their political leaders, and these military muscle movements also change the political landscape. Recent exercises conducted in Russia and across the former Soviet Union speak volumes about both military and political issues.

Exercises that tend to create the biggest splash are those that either are overtly or covertly intended as a show of force, with the motive of changing another state’s behavior. Russia has conducted at least two of this type in order to intimidate Georgia. First, in February, the 58th Army Group exercised near the Georgian border in North Ossetia. Using large scale maneuvers, the 58th exercised their ability quickly to mobilize a brigade-size unit in the capital of North Ossetia and force march it to the Transcaucasus Highway, which is the main line of communication leading to Tbilisi. Simultaneously, they mobilized small, “tactical” groups via air in the mountains near the border with Georgia and South Ossetia. In addition, the Russian peacekeepers in South Ossetia, who are personnel drawn from one of the 58th Army Group’s mechanized brigades, went on “high alert” during the exercise. Although the Russian military leadership claimed that the brigade was not part of this exercise, the extremely coincidental timing indicates some level of coordination. (1)
This summer, as Georgia sent security forces into the Kodori Gorge, Russia exercised the 58th Army Group on an even larger scale. The Russian leadership made no bones about the purpose of the exercise, with Defense Minister Sergei Ivanov explaining that it was intended to “help peacekeeping forces defend unrecognized republics, if needed.” The 58th again went through its paces, this time with several thousand troops, aircraft, helicopters, and armored vehicles on four ranges close to the Georgian border. (2) This exercise was significantly more complex than its predecessor, including the use and transfer of the Pskov Airborne Force and Caspian Flotilla marine units. (3) Called “Caucasus Frontier 2006,” the exercise’s stated military intent was to fight “extremists, saboteurs, and terrorists.” (4) The true purpose, however, undoubtedly was to send an unambiguous shot across the Georgian bow.

Russia also conducted some very large scale exercises of a different nature with Belarus in June. Called “Shield of the Union 2006,” this exercise simulated a large-scale conventional attack on the 20th Army of the Moscow Military District. (5) Consisting of several thousand Russian and Belarussian troops, 180 armored fighting vehicles and 23 aircraft, it also served as the Russian military’s unveiling of the new MI-28N attack helicopter, which participated for the first time. Although it served primarily as a ground attack exercise, Shield of the Union also assessed the effectiveness of the joint air defense system that the two countries have deployed in the region. (6) More than 2,000 Belarussian reserves were called up to participate, which tested mobilization plans and implementation. (7)

Again, there was more than a military impetus to an exercise of this size. In fact, Belarussian President Alexander Lukashenko, who attended part of the exercise, expected that it would “evoke a major political response.” (8) But from whom? Russian Defense Secretary Ivanov was very careful to point out that the exercise was not “aimed against anyone,” although Lukashenko seemed to contradict this sentiment less than two days later when he pointedly stated that NATO had moved significantly closer to the Western border of both countries. (9)
rhetoric left any room for doubt, the construct of the exercise should serve to erase it—only NATO is a force large and powerful enough to even contemplate a conventional attack on the Moscow Military district.

Ukraine also learned about the political implications of military exercises this year, but in a much different manner. The sixth “Sea Breeze” joint military exercise between the United States and Ukraine was scheduled for June of this year, but did not go off quite as planned. Conducted in the Crimea, the first five of these annual exercises went off as scheduled with very little fanfare. This year, however, the exercise coincided with the electoral victory of the pro-Russian party, changing the scenario considerably. The first threads began to unravel when a US ship called on the Ukrainian port of Feodosiya prior to the start of the exercise. This sparked anti-NATO protests and civil disobedience that mounted as time went on. Motor coaches carrying 259 US Marines were stoned by mobs of protestors, although no one was hurt. (10) Propaganda was even more shrill, with some Ukrainian TV stations claiming that this small number of Marines had captured the city of Sochi and simultaneously shipped in toxic waste to ruin the environment. The Russian-dominated Crimean parliament took a hand in the matter, passing its own resolution to “outlaw” foreign troops on its territory. In the end, the protests were successful, and the exercise was cancelled. (11)

This unanticipated turn of events caused severe problems for Ukraine. At a minimum, the civil disobedience and anti-NATO tenor of the protest is an embarrassment for a country that, until recently, had stated aspirations for membership in NATO. Ukrainian Defense Minister Anatoliy Hrytsenko attributed all of this to “certain forces” in Russia meddling in Ukrainian affairs. (12) Of course, the bitterness involved in efforts to form a coalition government at this time of pro-Western and pro-Russian parties clearly spilled over to fuel the protests, but the lesson learned in the West may have been just how deep the Russia-West divide is among Ukraine's population. More than 60% of the
population opposes joining NATO, making this point the most unpopular initiative of President Yushchenko. Even in western Ukraine, only 38% of the populace supports NATO membership. (13) In the end, although the exercise was never carried out, it still served a political purpose, albeit one neither the Ukrainian military or political leadership intended—to air Ukraine’s “dirty laundry.”

**Building bridges**

Russian soldiers have set foot in Lebanon for the first time since the 18th century to assist that country in rebuilding its infrastructure after the 34-day Hezbollah war with Israel this summer. A single battalion of Russian engineers consisting of 307 men and 47 officers was dispatched on October 1st to repair a total of six bridges that are needed to connect the northern half of Lebanon with the devastated South. They are based in the town of Sadya, which is about 50 kilometers south of Beirut and about 10 kilometers north of the area controlled by UN peacekeeping forces. Although there is a security contingent equipped with small arms, the unit did not take any heavy weapons. (14) The Lebanese government agreed to provide security for the sappers as they transit from their field encampment to their work sites and at the sites themselves. Russia, in return, has provided all of the equipment and supplies for building this infrastructure. Work has begun already on two bridges, with their completion expected by the end of this week. This entire operation is expected to cost Russian $500M rubles and last until the end of November. (15)

From the very beginning of this enterprise, the Russian leadership has been careful to point out that this is a bilateral agreement between the countries of Lebanon and Russia and that these troops are not peacekeeping forces. When questioned, Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov explicitly stated that Russia would not consider sending forces to the UN Peacekeeping Mission, but that he would only discuss directly with the Lebanese Government what assistance could be rendered. (16) In fact, President Putin also was very careful to request a letter of need from the Lebanese before agreeing to the deployment. (17) Lebanon
responded by sending back a “note stating that it fully agrees with the Russian
government's proposals on the duration and conditions of the presence of
Russian military servicemen in the country,” and this seems to have fit the bill.
(18)

Source Notes:

(1) Nezavisimaya gazeta, Monday, 20 Feb 06 T15:12:19Z; OSC translated text via WNC.
(2) Nezavisimaya gazeta, Monday, 24 Jul 06 T14:01:28Z; OSC translated text via WNC.
(3) Interfax, Friday, 14 Jul 06 T16:36:27Z; OSC transcribed text via WNC.
(4) Agentstvo Voyennykh Novostey, Monday, 24 Jul 06 T08:15:27Z; OSC transcribed text via WNC.
(5) ITAR-TASS, Saturday, 24 Jun 06 T13:16:10Z; OSC transcribed text via WNC.
(6) ITAR-TASS, Saturday, 17 Jun 06 T08:30:35Z; OSC transcribed text via WNC.
(7) Belapan, Tuesday, 13 Jun 06 T18:14:26Z; OSC report via WNC.
(8) ITAR-TASS, Saturday, 24 Jun 06 T13:16:10Z; OSC transcribed text via WNC.
(9) Ibid.
(10) The Independent, Tuesday, 6 Jun 06 via Lexis-Nexis.
(11) One Plus One TV, 1700 GMT, 6 Jun 06; BBC Monitoring via Lexis-Nexis.
(12) Ibid.
(14) ITAR-TASS, Monday, 25 Sep 06 T09:21:09Z; OSC transcribed text via WNC.
(15) Agentstvo voyennykh novostey, Monday, 25 Sep 06 T11:18:08Z; OSC transcribed text via WNC.
(16) Defense and Security (Russia), 13 Sep 2006; via Lexis Nexis.
(17) Nezavisimaya Gazeta, Monday, 12 Sep 2006 T13:54:28Z; OSC translated text via WNC.
Russia and the benefits of North Korean nukes
Russia has long had an affair with what much of the West, including the United States, considers rogue regimes. From inviting Hamas to the Kremlin to engaging in various arms deals with Syria, Iran and others, Russia has put itself in the international spotlight. Although the Kremlin hopes to be seen as a “pragmatic” diplomatic conduit, its actions suggest otherwise. One need only look at the situation regarding North Korea as a current example.

After withdrawing from the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty in 2003 and announcing that it had acquired nuclear weapons in Feb. of 2005, North Korea boasted on October 9, that it had tested a nuclear weapon: “The field of scientific research in the DPRK successfully conducted an underground nuclear test under secure conditions on October 9, 2006, at a stirring time when all the people of the country are making a great leap forward in the building of a great, prosperous, powerful socialist nation,” declared an official statement from the Korean Central News Agency. (1)

Upon hearing of Pyongyang’s announcement, many governments quickly began to denounce the North Korean decision. At a meeting with the Ministerial Cabinet, Vladimir Putin declared that the nuclear test was a “huge blow to the non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction in the world.” (2) Putin also discussed the matter with U.S. President George Bush. In the conversation, which was initiated by the United States, the two presidents agreed for the need “to coordinate efforts to resolve the problem.” (3)
However, “coordinating efforts” is often easier said than done between the United States and Russia, whose state of relations has come under question in both American and Russian media. One of the continuing points of contention between the two regarding the resolution of nuclear issues has been the imposition of sanctions. The case of Iran seems to have set a precedent – Russia is against any really painful sanctions. The latest disagreement regarding Iran came in early October when Russian denounced a proposal offered by the United States that would impose sanctions against states maintaining energy- and/or weapons-related ties to Iran. (4)

In dealing with the developments in North Korea, once again, the main point of contention is meaningful sanctions. While the United States, Japan and other countries called for sanctions against North Korea, Russia initially denounced the idea. Putin said, “We need to move from talk of ultimatums and sanctions towards seeing international law prevail in international matters.” (5)

In a blatant step to defy calls for sanctions, Russia delivered food under the guise of the United Nations World Food program to the Communist state just two days after the nuclear test. Perhaps, anticipating anger from both Japan and the West, Yuri Brazhnikov, the head of the international department at the Russian Emergency Situations Ministry, defended his country’s aid of 12,800 tons of Russian grain to North Korea: “We should ignore the political background [around North Korea]. These are targeted food supplies to those who really need help.” (6)

Ignoring the political background of North Korea, however, is nearly impossible as would be shown through the other point of contention surrounding the nuclear test – whether or not North Korea even succeeded in testing its weapon. The day after the alleged test, the White House issued a statement claiming that it was possible that the seismic action resulting from the test could have been the result
of something else and that there was a “possibility that [U.S. scientists] will never be able to say to a complete certainty exactly what did occur.” (7) (Subsequently, the US concurred that a nuclear test had taken place.)

Russia has stuck with its original claim that North Korea had, indeed, tested a nuclear weapon of 5 to 15 kilotons at exactly 5:35 a.m. Moscow time near the border of North Korea and Russia’s Primorye Region on October 9. (8). After hearing of the White House’s statement, the Kremlin, through Defense Minister Sergei Ivanov, put out a statement of its own:

Our estimates have remained absolutely unchanged…The discrepancy in the estimates can be explained by two reasons. The first is purely political … somebody wants it to be more powerful, somebody less [powerful], but I am not responsible for that…The second aspect is purely technical. Whose national technical devices do you think are closest to the site of the explosion? That is the answer to your question. (9)

Clearly, Ivanov made it seem that Russia stands outside any political aspect surrounding the issue. However, by alluding to possible political motivations for the questioning of the North Korean blast, as well as dismissing any opposing views, Ivanov was demonstrating just how important the politics surrounding a nuclear-armed Pyongyang are to Moscow.

There exist two major political benefits for Russian foreign policy in making sure the world believes that North Korea definitely tested a nuclear bomb, and for the first, one need not look much further than just beyond Russia’s borders.

Reason 1: A nuclear-armed North Korea further clouds the international community’s vision so that Russia may continue to pursue unjust and often illegal (by the standards of international law) policies toward the countries in its Near
Abroad, including Georgia, which continues to be the object of Russian bullying. North Korea is also a leverage tool.

The last few weeks have seen the continued deterioration of Russian-Georgian relations. At the end of September, Georgia arrested five Russian servicemen, including four GRU (Russian Military Intelligence) officers, amid accusations of espionage. Russia responded by shutting down its embassy in Tbilisi, temporarily stopping its scheduled military withdrawal from Georgian bases, and threatening military activity (10). Georgia quickly gave in to Russian demands and returned the accused officers to Moscow, but Russia did not rescind on its activity. Instead, it only intensified the matter by imposing blanket sanctions on Georgia, a country that depends on Russian trade and supplies for the majority of its livelihood, including most of its energy supply.

Fearing third-party involvement, particularly from the United States, which has maintained close ties to Georgia since its Rose Revolution, Putin warned, “I would not advise anyone to talk with Russia in the language of provocation and blackmail.” (11)

The international community has largely heeded to Putin’s warning. At the time of writing, not a single state had stepped up to criticize Russia’s rather unbalanced reaction to Georgia’s arresting of the officers. In fact, on October 16, the United States adopted a resolution essentially as drafted by Russia. Sergei Markov, the director of Russia’s Institute for Political Research, predicted that a deal would be brokered between Russia and the United States. He explained that in exchange for Russian support for a North Korean resolution, which Russia eventually signed on October 16 despite its original opposition, the United States would sign a resolution on Georgia that it originally opposed. (12) The difference between the resolutions, however, is enormous – the North Korean resolution will likely do little to deter North Korea from pursuing its nuclear ambitions, while the Georgian
resolution gives Russia unprecedented ability to enforce its will on another sovereign state.

Similarly, the European Union also has also flailed in taking a stance on events in Georgia. Last week, the EU debated a resolution that was supposed to criticize sharply the Kremlin’s actions in Georgia. According to EU sources, this resolution comes at the initiative of the Czech Republic, but has been largely pushed through by Swedish Foreign Minister Carl Bildt, who took part in past conflict resolution in the Balkans and the former Soviet Union. (13)

The EU’s Nordic, Baltic and Central European States backed the original text, however, by the time the resolution was to be adapted, it had been toned down. At the insistence of France and the United Kingdom, two countries that, like the United States, also belong to the UN SC and counted on Russian support for a North Korean resolution, the final text targeted both Russia and Georgia. Not only did it express "its grave concern at the measures adopted by the Russian Federation against Georgia and at their economic, political and humanitarian consequences," but it also stated, "The Georgian leadership should avoid any action that could heighten the tensions." (14)

Perhaps an unfortunate omen for the resolution's outcome, EU diplomats were already making excuses for why they would not pass a stronger resolution criticizing Russia. One who spoke to RFE/RL claimed that Georgia will often “overplay its hand, making it difficult for its friends to help it.” (15).

Reason 2: A nuclear-armed North Korea takes pressure off of Russia’s increasingly controversial dealings with Iran.

It has been no secret that Russia has come under increasing scrutiny in the past few months regarding its intentions with Iran. While Russia continues to back Iran’s claims that it is pursuing nuclear technology for peaceful energy needs,
some analysts have begun to suspect the Kremlin of essentially stalling for time while Iran accumulates the know-how to build a nuclear weapon. Adding to this controversy was a contentious weapons deal last February, in which Moscow sold to Iran $700 million worth of anti-air missiles that have the capability to defend a nuclear arsenal. (16)

Today, the situation, as far as resolving the policy differences between the United States and Russia regarding Iran, is at a complete standstill. As of October 11, agreements about sanctions could still not be reached and the matter would be turned over to the UN Security Council (17), where Russia has threatened to use its veto power numerous times if the UNSC were to propose sanctions.

With the United States already preoccupied with the growing strife in Iraq, Russia has been able to maintain its position regarding Iran with little consequence. Now, with the trouble in North Korea, Russia has increased its political leverage regarding Iran while Pyongyang demands immediate attention from Washington. While Russia may be willing to soften its stance on North Korea in exchange for the West's softer stance on Georgia, it will not do the same regarding Iran. Markov notes, “Iran is somewhat different.” (18) He is right. The big difference pertains to Russia’s direct involvement with each country. Unlike its policy with Iran, where Russia has significant economic interests including lucrative arms deals and business pertaining to nuclear technology, Russia’s economic ties to North Korea totaled only $115 million in 2002 (19) – a fraction of its investment with Iran.

There is a third reason, which may explain best why Russia benefits from North Korea becoming a nuclear power – it boosts Russia’s image as a resurging superpower in the world by making Russia the spoiler. The international community needs Russia to agree with a resolution. It makes one wonder, however, whether the Kremlin cares at all about the long-term. Is getting the
international spotlight in the short-term really as important as deterring North Korea, a country that shares its border, from developing a large nuclear arsenal?

Source Notes:

2. “Russia absolutely condemns the nuclear test carried out in North Korea,” 9 Oct 06, President of Russia, http://kremlin.ru.
3. “President Vladimir Putin had a telephone conversation with U.S. President George W. Bush,” 9 Oct 06, President of Russia via http://kremlin.ru.
12. “Russia, USA do deal on North Korea, Georgia resolutions at UN – analyst,” 13 Oct. 06, Interfax-AVN via Johnson’s Russia List (JRL) #231.
For “Georgian” read “criminal”

Russian law enforcement has shown an extraordinary surge in efficiency in the month of October. Tax evasion, sanitary violations and illegal immigration no longer are being tolerated in the Russian capital, and the wave of crackdowns has begun to reach further into outlying regions as well. These measures, far from being a laudable move to strengthen civil order, constitute, in fact, a sinister signal of encroaching extremist nationalism and anti-Georgian sentiment expressed at the highest levels. As tensions between Russia and its Caucasian neighbor escalate following the arrest of four Russian intelligence officers in Tbilisi last month (and their immediate release by Georgia), authorities in
Moscow are doing their part to bring the war home by making daily life intolerable for Georgians living in the Russian capital.

The key to overcoming the gross ineptitude and complaisance that long hampered law enforcement efforts in the country has turned on a simple, chauvinistic tactic of tracking down ethnic Georgians living in Russia. Current criminal investigations appear to be following the retrograde rationale of ethnic profiling, wherein ethnic Georgians, (including school children), are first identified, then vetted for legal violations. By criminalizing Georgian residents, Moscow authorities have found a convenient expedient for cleaning up crime in the city, so the logic goes.

**From friend to public enemy**

From a historical perspective, the decision to criminalize Georgians constitutes a strange and unprecedented move. The two nations have been close allies since the rise of Muscovy during the sixteenth century, when, in 1586, an Orthodox Georgian Kingdom, beset by Muslims, asked to be accepted as a vassal state by the Russian tsar. Georgia became part of the Tsarist Empire early in the 19th century. The two nations share a common Orthodox faith and a history of economic and cultural partnership. At a recent Kremlin gala, Marlen Khutsiyev, a film director, said “I have two homelands—Georgia and Russia. My heart belongs to them both. I am confident that all this will pass and common sense will prevail.

Our relations bound by many years of history, a common faith and a huge interconnection between our cultures can never be broken.”(1) That camaraderie has dissolved as Russia has impinged on Georgian sovereignty and encouraged separatist leaders, as Georgia moves toward Europe and as Georgian residents in Moscow find their daily movements hampered by authorities.

**Criminals among us**

Russia is host to an estimated one million Georgians, or one fifth of the Caucasus country’s population, and a deputy speaker of the Duma suggested
that at least 300,000 are residing in the country illegally. (2) Their legal standing is likely to become ever more unsure as Putin has urged the government to toughen visa regulation and introduce quotas on the foreign labor force by November 15. His statements were made to the National Priority Projects Council, where he said, "I instruct the government to make immediate decisions regulating trade at retail and wholesale markets."(3) While his orders ostensibly were aimed at bolstering Russian agriculture and employment opportunities for Russian citizens, his message to the foreigners from the Caucasus who dominate Moscow’s food and retail markets was clear. A foreigner’s country of origin will be one of the leading criteria for receiving a work and residence permit according to the new system of quotas, drawing domestic policy into the arena of Russian international goals. The ability to work legally in Russia itself may become a moot issue, following the State Duma’s decision to suspend money transfers between Russia and Georgia, leaving foreign workers unable to send their earnings home.

Laundry list of infractions
Under the guise of a public morality campaign, Moscow police has shut down five of the city’s major casinos which are said to be controlled by the Georgian mafia. Tax code violations were cited as the reason for the inspections by Anzhela Kastoyeva, a spokesperson for the Interior Ministry. While the gambling industry has well-documented ties to organized crime, casinos are not the only targets of the Interior Ministry’s crackdown. Popular Georgian restaurants have closed their doors following armed raids by tax police and health inspectors, and markets in the city’s outskirts have been locked up for “sanitary treatment.”(4) Such vigilance on the part of tax police and health inspectors is a rare phenomenon in Russia and in itself is grounds for suspicion, which the following statement by the Moscow police only serves to confirm: "I cannot say that we are deliberately checking facilities belonging to Georgian citizens, but most of the establishments that will be checked tomorrow do have Georgian owners."(5)
Nor are high profile Georgian figures exempt from official scrutiny. “I never thought that in Russia I’d live to see the day there was ethnic cleansing in the country,” said one of Russia’s most popular novelists, Georgian-born Grigory Chkhartishvili, who writes under the pen name Boris Akunin. He has been the subject of a tax probe together with the Georgian-born president of the Russian Academy of Arts, sculptor Zurab Tserteli. (6)

In an atmosphere fraught with racial tension, auto accidents are turning into public relations nightmares for Georgian authorities, who are being called upon to answer for negligent Georgian drivers. On 5 October, a Zhiguli crashed into a car belonging to the presidential envoy to the State Duma. The police report stressed that the driver's name was Khiladze and that he was born in Tbilisi. (7) A second, absurdly inopportune collision, dominated the theme of a radio interview with Georgian ambassador Irakly Chubinishvili, who was asked to comment on the allegation that an embassy employee hit an ambulance while driving drunk in central Moscow. His response, “I believe that under normal conditions this road accident would not have been discussed so widely,” was followed by a scolding from the Ekho Moskvy anchor who said, “when that escalation started in Russian-Georgian relations so much discussed today, have not any special instructions been issued that your employees should be more cautious, should try to avoid any slightest incidents?” (8)

No provocation was needed, however, for authorities to strike a blow at the Georgian embassy itself. A Georgian government guesthouse located behind its Moscow embassy was seized by Interior Ministry policemen, who pried the nameplate off the door, claiming that the building had been occupied illegally. The rightful owner found himself in possession of the building only last summer, and said that he had been notified of the property transfer only a few days before. (9)

**Vetting the streets**
As of October 12, 480 Georgians already have been deported for document infringements, according to the Moscow Bureau of Human Rights. (10) Ordinary Georgian citizens residing in Russia are finding their daily routines hampered by regular document checks on the streets both in Moscow and beyond, as ethnic profiling has taken on unconscionable proportions. The Moscow Times reported that in St. Petersburg, a senior city police official instructed officers to redouble their efforts to deport illegal migrants, and in the city of Kaluga, police have received orders to run checks on citizens with names ending in “idze” and “shvili.”(11) The Guardian quoted a priest at St. George Cathedral in central Moscow as saying that worshippers had been detained at a weekend service; “it interfered with a funeral service and was very humiliating.”(12)

A government that has shown itself so insensitive historically as to evoke the grim figures of Beria and Stalin in order to whip up ethnic tensions currently is resorting to dubious measures that echo the acts of the twentieth century’s fascist regimes. The hunt for ethnic Georgians has taken police officials into grade schools. Regional police departments sent telegrams to Moscow schools, asking them to provide lists of pupils with Georgian last names. Because all children are entitled to education regardless of registration, authorities have found that the easiest way to find Georgians is through their children. Kommersant reported that the initiative came directly from the Internal Affairs Ministry. Their source reported that “police officers were supposed to come to schools and talk to principals. However, minor police departments flaked out and only sent telegrams to schools, due to which the story became public.” (13)

Let no one say that the Russian authorities are inefficient when faced with a national project. Chauvinism is proving to be a remarkably potent motivation.

Source Notes:

(1) Excerpt from report by Russian Centre TV, 6 Oct 06 via Lexis-Nexis.
(2) RIA Novosti, 6 Oct 06, “Russia deports Georgians as casino crackdown continues” via Lexis-Nexis.
(3) Ibid.
(6) As reported in Moscow Times, 12 Oct 06, “Georgians Watch Their Future Vanish in Court” via www.themoscowtimes.com.
(7) BBC Excerpt from report by Russian Centre TV on 6 Oct 06 via Lexis-Nexis.
(8) Ekho Moskvy, Radio Interview with Georgian Ambassador Irakly Chubinishvili, 10 Oct 06, 4:35 PM via www.echo.msk.ru.
(10) Moscow Bureau for Human Rights web site via www.antirasizm.ru/english.
(11) As reported in Moscow Times, 12 Oct 06, “Georgians Watch Their Future Vanish in Court” via www.themoscowtimes.com.
(13) Kommersant, 6 Oct 06, “The war has a child’s face” via Lexis-Nexis.

Newly Independent States: Central Asia
By Monika Shepherd

TAJIKISTAN
Going through the motions: Presidential elections in Tajikistan
In just a few weeks, Tajikistan will hold its third presidential election since becoming an independent republic in 1991. President Emomali Rahmonov once again will run as the candidate for the People's Democratic Party (PDP), and it
seems almost certain that he will win, extending his rule until at least 2013, when he will have the option of standing for re-election one last time, according to the terms of Tajikistan’s current constitution. (1) As a fourteen-year incumbent with virtually unlimited access to the media, there is little doubt that President Rahmonov will win another term, whether or not the election is conducted in a free and open manner.

None of the four other parties (the Communist Party, the Party of Economic Reforms, the Agrarian Party, and the Socialist Party) which are fielding candidates in the election, (2) poses a serious threat to President Rahmonov. Those opposition parties which could have presented at least a minor challenge to the president have chosen not to participate in these elections. The four parties that have decided to sit out the elections are: the main branch of the Democratic Party of Tajikistan (the DPT, chaired by Mahmudruzi Iskandarov, who is serving a prison sentence), one branch of the Socialist Party (chaired by Mirhusein Nazriev), the Social Democratic Party (chaired by Rahmatullo Zoirov) and the Islamic Renaissance party of Tajikistan (the IRPT, chaired by Muhiddin Kabiri). The DPT, Socialist Party and Social Democratic Party have decided to boycott the elections altogether, due to their conviction that the upcoming vote will be neither fair nor democratic, because of shortcomings in Tajikistan’s electoral laws. The IRPT – chaired by Muhiddin Kabiri), which is arguably the strongest member of the opposition and perhaps the only party which could present a serious challenge to Rahmonov’s candidacy, has decided not to nominate a candidate, but will send observers to monitor voting procedures (3) and is encouraging its members to exercise their right to vote. (4)

Surprisingly, although the IRPT is also concerned about the insufficiencies in the country’s election laws, (5) Chairman Muhiddin Kabiri announced that his party’s primary reason for not fielding its own presidential candidate is the international community’s concern about Islamic activism in Tajikistan. Mr. Kabiri told the press that “an important element in our decision” is “the unsuitability of the
international situation and the reservations about Islamic political forces. There is also a lack of mutual trust between us and the international community. We didn't want to put Tajikistan in an awkward position. In other words, we didn't want to place our country and our party at the front line of criticism that Islamic movements are very active here. We have once again sacrificed our rights so as not to block possible aid to Tajikistan.” (6)

The opposition’s concerns that the upcoming elections will be rife with procedural irregularities and outright violations of electoral law are certainly legitimate – thus far, none of the presidential or parliamentary elections which have taken place in post-Soviet Tajikistan have been completely free or fair. In addition to ballot box-stuffing and measures taken to keep voters in certain districts away from the polls, Central Election Commission (CEC) officials also have been very successful at keeping popular opposition candidates off the ballots altogether, by refusing to register their parties. It is therefore not surprising that many opposition leaders have become so frustrated with the election system that they would rather not participate in it at all. However, it is unlikely that a three-party boycott of the 2006 presidential elections will bring about any change in the CEC’s conduct, much less in the election laws. The CEC has successfully managed to keep opposition representatives out of its ranks and Tajikistan’s current parliament is overwhelmingly pro-Rahmonov and therefore can not be expected to undertake any legislation that is not in the President’s favor. Given the current political situation, the opposition’s best hope for bringing about change in Tajikistan’s electoral system might be to make a point of participating in each election, in order to continue testing the system, while simultaneously lobbying to reform it. Opposition party leaders need to maintain pressure on the CEC at both the national and local levels to diversify its membership, as well as carefully monitoring pre-election procedures and the polling process itself and then presenting a list of violations to both the president and the legislature, as further evidence that the election laws need to be reformed.
Such efforts would require a united opposition movement, whose leaders were able to set aside their personal ambitions and petty quarrels, in order to work together. Unfortunately, Tajikistan’s opposition increasingly has become divided since the civil war ended; in fact, two of the parties which are boycotting the elections (the Democratic Party and the Socialist Party) have splintered into competing factions. (7) The Democratic Party's splinter group, which calls itself Vatan (Fatherland), suddenly received official recognition from the Justice Ministry in late September (8) and attempted to register a candidate in the presidential race, but was unable to gather enough signatures. (9) Both wings of the Socialist Party nominated presidential candidates, but only the faction headed by Abduhalim Ghafforov was granted official recognition by the Justice Ministry, thereby keeping the second faction’s candidate (Mirhusein Nazriev) off the ballot. (10) These internal divisions, which no doubt were further exacerbated by the Justice Ministry’s clear attempt to play one group off against the other, no doubt also provided a strong incentive for Democratic and Socialist Party supporters to boycott the elections.

The IRPT is not suffering from internal divisions, but from the death of its long-time leader and former head of the United Tajik Opposition (UTO), Said Abdullo Nuri, who died of cancer in August of this year. Mr. Nuri was elected chairman of the IRPT on 18 September 1999 (11) and prior to that served first as the leader of the Tajik opposition during the civil war (1992-1997) and then as leader of the National Reconciliation Commission during the peace process. Mr. Nuri’s death was a serious blow to the IRPT leadership, especially occurring so soon before the presidential elections and has left the party little time to regroup and unite behind its new chairman, Muhiddin Kabiri. Due to his long involvement with the Tajik opposition and the significant role he played in ending the civil war, Mr. Nuri was a well-known figure, who, over the years, had received considerable media coverage. Mr. Kabiri has had little time to introduce himself to his own constituency, much less to the rest of Tajikistan’s voters. At age forty, he is a relatively young man, whose education and experience have been largely
secular – he received a university degree in Oriental Studies and has not had the religious training for which his predecessor was known and widely revered. (12) His lack of religious training may prove to be a significant hindrance, if he is unable to persuade the more devout elements of the IRPT’s constituency of his competence to interpret and rule on Muslim spiritual matters. On the other hand, the fact that he has had a mainly secular education may appeal to the less religious members of the party, as well as to the rest of Tajikistan’s voters. If he were to run in the upcoming presidential election, it might help him gauge the scope of his support among the population.

One can only hope that by the time of the next presidential election in 2013, the opposition parties will have managed to overcome their internal divisions and will participate in the election to the fullest extent, in order to provide Tajikistan’s voters with a genuine and varied choice of candidates. It is also to be hoped that by 2013, the opposition and the government will have succeeded in creating an electoral system that allows for real competition among both presidential and parliamentary candidates.

Source Notes:

(4) “Tajik Islamic opposition party leader says quit election race for sake of peace,” Avesta website via BBC Monitoring Central Asia Unit, 26 Sep 06 via Lexis-Nexis Academic Universe.
(5) “Tajik Islamic opposition party leader says quit election race for sake of peace,” Avesta website via BBC Monitoring Central Asia Unit, 26 Sep 06 via Lexis-Nexis Academic Universe

(6) “Main Tajik Opposition Party To Boycott Election,” The Times of Central Asia, 26 Sep 06 via Lexis-Nexis Academic Universe.


(9) “Tajik electoral commission registers two more presidential hopefuls,” Asia-Plus via BBC Monitoring Central Asia Unit, 11 Oct 06 via Lexis-Nexis Academic Universe.

(10) “Tajik socialist party barred from presidential poll,” Asia-Plus via BBC Monitoring Central Asia Unit, 22 Sep 06 via Lexis-Nexis Academic Universe.


Newly Independent States: Western Region

By Tammy Lynch

UKRAINE

To be or not to be ... an opposition

On Tuesday, the pro-presidential political bloc Our Ukraine (OU) registered as an opposition party in Ukraine’s parliament. (1) President Viktor Yushchenko’s bloc officially pulled out of previous agreements with Prime Minister Viktor Yanukovich’s ruling Party of Regions and suggested that its ministers would be withdrawn from the cabinet.
If this occurs, it would leave President Yushchenko with little real representation in the cabinet, where all domestic (and some foreign) policy is controlled. It could also add to the strength of the current parliamentary opposition, led by former Prime Minister Yulia Tymoshenko. The “opposition” is still an evolving concept in Ukraine, but already plays a crucial role in a country still grappling with questions of government accountability and rule of law.

Given Our Ukraine’s history of vacillation between political partners and political positions, however, the eventual outcome of this latest twist is difficult to predict. At a minimum, Our Ukraine’s switch to opposition means that the bloc, at least temporarily, has halted lengthy, laborious negotiations with Party of Regions representatives over a legal coalition agreement. Beyond this, however, much remains to be seen.

Our Ukraine and the majority of its membership historically have rejected opposition-oriented alliances, preferring instead to be as near to “the power” as possible. Indeed, the bloc’s halting of negotiations this month seems to have had more to do with the inability of its leadership to secure satisfactory levels of power-sharing than disagreements over policy.

Despite recent assertions by Our Ukraine that Yanukovich’s policies have led to the “demolition of Ukraine’s internal and external course,” (2) the Prime Minister’s policies have not shifted significantly since President Yushchenko and Our Ukraine signed a “Declaration of National Unity” with him on 2 August as a condition of his nomination as prime minister. This agreement listed Ukraine’s domestic and foreign policy objectives and was hailed by Yushchenko both as a starting point for coalition negotiations between OU and Regions, and as a guarantee that Yanukovich would follow the president’s policy objectives.
In reality, the document was vague, lacked enforcement mechanisms and provided Yanukovich with significant room to maneuver within (or slightly outside of) the agreement’s stipulations. He has done so skillfully, while simultaneously spurning suggestions from Our Ukraine that the bloc is needed within the governing coalition. The ruling coalition unites Regions with the Socialists and the Communists, providing a majority of about 242 out of 450 without Our Ukraine. Despite some tension among the participants, the coalition agreement has held well since its creation. This has allowed Yanukovich to challenge the president’s authority – exploiting constitutional inconsistencies over spheres of control.

On 17 October, OU leader Roman Bezsmertny suggested that, under the Yanukovich government, "Ukraine's process of integration into the WTO is being wrecked, the program of Ukraine's accession to the EU has been basically stopped and there has been a fundamental block on Ukraine's entry into NATO.” (3) It is true that Yanukovich and his coalition have halted preparations for NATO entry, slowed preparation for the WTO and paid little attention to EU reforms. But, given Yanukovich’s previous anti-NATO rhetoric and his consistent caution towards the WTO and the EU, this should be of little surprise.

In fact, the “Declaration of National Unity” provides no timetable for NATO and EU preparation – Yanukovich refused to sign it if it did. And, although the document states that the Yanukovich government and parliamentary majority will enact reforms “necessary for entering the World Trade Organization by the end of 2006,” the coalition partner Communist Party always refused to endorse this particular article of the agreement, immediately calling it into question. (4)

Therefore, Our Ukraine could not, or should not, have expected any behavior other than that which is being exhibited currently by the Yanukovich government. Upon signing the “Declaration,” perhaps they had hoped to be able to influence Yanukovich more heavily, or perhaps they had expected to be given greater
control over government and parliamentary activities. Neither of these things happened.

Nevertheless, some members of Our Ukraine remain hesitant to make the transition to the opposition.

Cabinet ministers nominated on the personal quota of President Yushchenko – who remains the honorary leader of Our Ukraine – have expressed reluctance to resign. A spokesman for Foreign Minister Borys Tarasyuk suggested, "A decision on his resignation is for the president to make." (5) Tarasyuk is the leader of one of the largest parties in the Our Ukraine bloc – a party whose ruling council supported the call for all Our Ukraine ministers to leave the cabinet and join the opposition. Interior Minister Yuriy Lutsenko, Defense Minister Anatoliy Hrytsenko and Justice Minister Roman Zvarych also have so far rejected the call to resign, while most Our Ukraine-nominated ministers have remained silent.

President Yushchenko himself initially objected to the idea of his party going into opposition, despite Yanukovich’s attempts to assert his control over what have historically been presidential matters. On 11 October, Yushchenko urged a resumption of negotiations between Our Ukraine and the Party of Regions. “I feel most of the participants of the talks think the negotiations are incomplete and that there is still some chance to compromise,” he said. (6)

In a clear rebuke – the first of its kind from his party – this idea was immediately rejected by Our Ukraine. But at the same time, Bezsmertny provided confusing answers regarding the type of opposition Our Ukraine will mount. His most concrete suggestion has been that his bloc will not work closely with the bloc of former Prime Minister Yulia Tymoshenko, which declared its “radical opposition” status on 3 August, immediately after Yanukovich’s nomination. Tymoshenko is widely viewed as the country’s primary opposition leader, and attempted last month to form an inter-party opposition. Our Ukraine quickly rejected that idea.
“Our Ukraine does not conduct any negotiations,” Bezsmertny said. “If Yuliya Volodymyrivna [Tymoshenko] makes relevant proposals, we are ready to renew a dialogue,” he added. (7) But they will not approach her, he underscored, while suggesting that there should be only one opposition bloc.

The remark is reminiscent of Bezsmertny’s comments in 2002 in advance of the second round of the so-called “Rise Up! Ukraine” protests against then-President Leonid Kuchma. Tymoshenko, the Socialists and the Communists had been leading protests for months, while Our Ukraine’s leadership had declined to endorse the original protests. Then, in a change of course at the end of 2002, Bezsmertny suggested that Our Ukraine “should be the leader of the protests rather than follow Tymoshenko or anyone else.” (8) This thought process seems still to be prevalent in Our Ukraine in 2006.

To underscore their point, this week, Our Ukraine hosted a meeting of potential opposition partners to create what it calls a “constructive opposition.” Nine parties or blocs were invited to the meeting. The Bloc of Yulia Tymoshenko – already in opposition – was not. The omission underscores the animosity between Tymoshenko and certain members of Our Ukraine; the former prime minister earlier accused several leaders of the bloc of improperly profiting from their government connections. They denied these charges.

The omission also underscores the difficulty Ukrainian politicians will have in pursuing a unified program. In recent days, votes in the parliament have shown serious division between Tymoshenko and Our Ukraine, with both blocs sometimes voting with the majority, but rarely with each other. This could have serious, negative consequences for the country’s course to Europe, which is already endangered, and for President Yushchenko’s agenda.
Yushchenko, Tymoshenko and Our Ukraine’s various leaders have all denounced the 2007 budget proposal from Yanukovich’s government, suggesting it is backtracks on previous reforms. The document is said not to use accepted IMF macro-economic standards for evaluating revenues and expenditures. It reportedly cuts funds from social programs championed by Yushchenko, alters the tax system to provide significant breaks for large businesses that may be associated with government ministers, and funds regional budgets based on an arbitrary system that gives regions supporting Yanukovich a much bigger piece of the pie. Yushchenko has already stated that he will not sign it if passed as is – setting up the first real power struggle between the two men.

Yushchenko’s Our Ukraine likely will need the help of Tymoshenko to alter the budget on behalf of the president. Bezsmertny’s party holds 79 seats, while Tymoshenko controls 122. The apparent attempt to marginalize Tymoshenko could lead to the failure of Our Ukraine’s legislative proposals.

This is, of course, if Our Ukraine chooses to remain in the opposition. On 18 October, Our Ukraine’s Minister for Sport, Family and Youth Yuriy Pavlenko, suggested that his party may return to the bargaining table with Yanukovich. (9) At the same time, though, Pavlenko suggested that he is prepared to resign, while Yushchenko urged Our Ukraine’s ministers to implement the will of their party. (10)

Source Notes:

(1) “Our Ukraine officially joins opposition (Part 2),” Interfax, 0854 GMT, 17 Oct 06 via (www.interfax.com)
(2) Agence France Presse, 1309 GMT, 17 Oct 06 via Lexis-Nexis.
(3) Ibid.


(9) "Our Ukraine already negotiates with Yanukovich about a coalition?" Ukrayinska Pravda, 18 Oct 06 via (www.pravda.com.ua).


Copyright Boston University Trustees 2006

Unless otherwise indicated, all articles appearing in this journal were written especially for Analyst. This article was originally published at http://www.bu.edu/iscip/digest/vol13/ed1303.html.