2007-01-25

The ISCIP Analyst, Volume XIII, Issue 6

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http://hdl.handle.net/2144/11831

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Russian Federation: Executive Branch

By Susan Cavan

PRESIDENCY

Apparat take on Iranian arms

What a difference a year makes. Until this year, proposed Russian missile sales to Iran were raised in hush tones, even in Moscow, and American concerns about nuclear cooperation with Iran were "front burner" issues—the subject of secret agreements made at nearly the highest levels. But in January 2007, Russian Tor-M1 missiles bound for Iran are a rushed shipment, announced publicly by the Defense Ministry, albeit as "defensive" weapons, but sadly ignored in the American White House.

Many things have changed: Ask former Russian Prime Minister Yevgeni Primakov. His recent articles in Russian media outlets have trumpeted the many ways in which American concerns and interests in the Middle East have been circumvented, in order to create a "multi-polar world order" in which Russia once again assumes a role as power broker. (1) According to Primakov, the US, specifically the Bush Administration, occupied by an increasingly virulent sectarian clash in Iraq, refuses to heed the advice of wiser, cooler heads with regard to Middle East issues, and therefore is traveling further down the path of conflict escalation. Primakov posits Russia as a tour guide along that path, but in just what direction it would lead is unclear.

Primakov manages to gloat across a range of policy issues, including domestic policy, in which the stands of "dogmatic liberals" are defeated: "we finally…rejected the idea that we can get by without decisive state intervention in the economy." (2) He likewise takes swipes at the policies of specific individuals
within the Putin administration, such as: "the Finance Minister's [Kudrin's] opposition to establishing the Investment Fund; in other words, opposition to goal-directed state funding for the projects Russia needs." He also assails the danger of exacerbating "xenophobia-driven nationalist" activity by "claiming the Russia has its own unique kind of "sovereign democracy"." (3) (Kremlin Aide Vladislav Surkov was the ideological proponent behind the much-debated, and subsequently discarded, sovereign democracy debate.)

Primakov's crowing aside, the Bush White House has appeared preoccupied with events in Iraq to the detriment of other developments. White House Press Spokesman Tony Snow, when asked about the Russian Tor-M1 missile shipment to Iran, and the possibility of more such deals, fumbled, as if hearing the news for the first time: "I don't know where that report -- I'll get you some detail on it. I'm unaware." (4)

Aside from the qualitative change in the foreign policy environment, which Primakov so fondly describes, another issue lingers behind the Tor missile shipment and threatens to emerge as the dominant factor in Russian political developments this year: The Putin succession and its corresponding campaigns and backroom jockeying for position—all of which require large capital reserves for serious contenders.

Putative successors to Putin are blessed with a range of options to fund their campaigns, both public and private. The energy sector, transportation, import/export licenses, railways and construction all have potentially profitable (and siphonable) elements to recommend their use in creating slush funds. The Russian government's goal to strengthen the economy during the Putin era expanded the drive to attract foreign investment, which, in many instances, demanded greater transparency in transactions. Transparency is anathema to the caching of assets (monetary and otherwise) that are useful in a Russian succession struggle. While certain industries, most of which are controlled by an
arm of the Kremlin apparat or close kin, have managed to protect branches of their income stream from close scrutiny, there is one industry for which discretion and opacity are, in fact, its life blood—the arms trade.

The missile shipment to Iran provided many possible benefits to its Russian promoters, aside from the "Primakov effect" policy perks. Certainly, it brings in revenue to the defense sector, and its primary administrator, Defense Minister Sergei Ivanov. The "success" of the deal garners positive prestige for this alleged succession front-runner.

The unfriendly climate for arms trade with Iran that has existed previously may suggest that this missile deal had stronger, or perhaps broader, ties to the Kremlin. The Director of Rosoboroneksport, Sergei Chemezov, already one of Russia's wealthiest men, (5) and a colleague of Putin's from Germany in the 1980s, (6) certainly was key in shepherding the deal through the complex environment of sanctions against Iran, and his reputation, at the very least, likely increased significantly as a result.

A missile deal of this type with Iran would have been in clear violation of the once-secret agreement produced by the Gore-Chernomyrdin Commission in 1995. (7) Putin's new regime, stabilized by President Boris Yeltsin's New Year's Eve transition imprimatur, obviously was secure enough to set aside the "secret" agreement in 2000, and thus create the environment in which the Tor-M1 missile sale would be feasible. (8)

The producers of the missile, a defense contracting firm called Almaz-Antei Defense Company, was created in 2004 and approved by a direct presidential decree, which publicized a list of approved defense contractors. (9) Almaz-Antei's former General Director was Igor Klimov, who was appointed in February 2004 and murdered later the same year. (10) The head of the board and CEO of Almaz-Antei, who brought Klimov on board the Concern, is Viktor Ivanov. (11)
Ivanov, in addition to being a top Kremlin Aide, is reportedly Putin's original sponsor and patron in the Security Services. (12) Absent the publication of a thorough financial accounting of the incomes of Russian public officials (Is that Boris Nemtsov initiative still on the books?), it is, of course, impossible to trace with certainty the profit stream from the Tor missile shipment. Nor does the fact that so many of Putin's close associates stand to benefit from the deal mean that the profits flow upstream and that the president might profit financially.

It is interesting, nonetheless, to look beyond the bleak foreign policy implications and consider who benefits on the Russian domestic scene. When the succession campaign heats up and analysts gauge the status of contenders by the line outside their office door, it might do well to ask how much of that prestige was purchased…and follow the money.

Source Notes:

(1) Yevgeni Primakov, "2006: Successful, but Unbalanced; Problems to be solved in the year ahead," 16 Jan 07, Rossiiskaya gazeta; What the Papers Say (WPS) via Lexis-Nexis; and Yevgeni Primakov, U.S. Helpless In Regard to Iraq, Moscow News (Russia), 19 Jan 07 via Lexis-Nexis.
(2) Primakov, Rossiiskaya gazeta, Ibid.
(3) Ibid. Primakov's foray into domestic politics and his direct assaults on Kudrin and Surkov almost suggest a man with the Presidency in his scopes. While Primakov's age would seem to make a bid for the Kremlin unlikely, there are stranger things in Russian politics than are dreamt of here.
Russian Federation: Domestic Issues and Legislative Branch

By Robyn Angley

Beslan revisited
The Federation Council report concerning the 2004 Beslan terrorist attack was presented in parliament late last year by commission head Aleksandr Torshin. The report, presented quietly just before the break for the Christmas holidays, was anticipated because of the manner in which it might affect information released by commission member Yuri Savelyev, last August.
Savelyev is an expert in explosives, as well as a Duma deputy with the Rodina Party. He conducted a detailed study of the Beslan attack and examined several specific questions. An earlier report, produced by the North Ossetian parliament, had argued that three explosions occurred during the storming of the school, rather than one, as had previously been thought. (1) Agreeing with that analysis, Savelyev investigated the source of the explosions and concluded that the first explosions that went off during the siege were not detonated by the terrorists (as the theory advanced by state prosecutors holds), but rather came from another direction. In other words, they were fired by the security forces surrounding the building. (2) Another theory about the explosions, advanced by captured terrorist Nur-Pashi Kulayev, was that a sniper from the security forces shot the terrorist who had his foot on the pedal to set off the explosives and that once the explosives went off, all those surrounding the building, family members and security forces alike, stormed the school.

Savelyev also looked into the presence of tanks and armored personnel carriers (APCs) during the siege. Although it had not been mentioned in any of the official reports, Savelyev found evidence that a tank had been used in the storming of the building. He analyzed tracks left by the tanks treads and also the rubble that had been hit by shots which based on the results, could only have been fired from a tank. (3) The number of terrorists involved in the attack also has been a matter of debate. The state originally claimed that 32 terrorists carried out the attack, of whom 31 died and one, Nur-Pashi Kulayev, was captured and sentenced to life in prison, last May. (Relatives of Beslan victims recently appealed the case to the Supreme Court, hoping that it would hand down a death sentence to the terrorist, even though capital punishment is illegal in Russia. The Supreme Court upheld the original ruling.) In contrast to the state’s estimate, Savelyev placed the number of terrorists involved in the attack at more than sixty. (4)
The Duma deputy published his report on the website of activist Marina Litvinovich. (5) Litvinovich works to call attention to issues related to both Beslan and the 2002 Nord-Ost terrorist attack.

The Beslan attack spawned several organizations, all of which have followed closely the investigations into the incident. Among them are the Mothers of Beslan and the Voice of Beslan. Both organizations are composed of relatives of victims of the attacks. Their efforts largely have been directed toward making sure that the special forces who responded to the terrorist attack—the security services, the Interior Ministry, and the army—have been held responsible for their failure to act effectively.

Despite the substantial doubts thrown on the state’s theories about the attack by Savelyev’s investigation, the commission report (or Torshin report) essentially toes the official line. It places responsibility for the explosions completely on the terrorists, rather than on any actions taken by government forces. (6) The report also claimed to have found no evidence of tank rounds having been fired during the spontaneous storming of the building. (7) It reasserts that there were 34 terrorists involved in Beslan, making only minimal adjustments for testimony from survivors that some of the terrorists got away. (8)

The report named Aslan Maskhadov, Shamil Basayev, Abu Dzeit, and Magomed Khashiyev as the masterminds behind the attack. All four have since been reported dead, with Russian security forces claiming responsibility for some of the deaths.

Torshin presented the report to the Federation Council on 22 December. That same day, the Council announced that the Commission’s work was finished. The report, however, drew considerable criticism from the Mothers of Beslan, Voice of Beslan and Yuri Savelyev. Savelyev has stated that he is in complete
disagreement with the report’s findings. The Prosecutor General’s Office has extended its own investigation of the Beslan incident to April 1.

The Torshin report underscores the impotence of the Russian legislature in exercising any sort of civilian control over the security forces. Despite the evidence demanding further investigation, the Torshin committee shied away from addressing any issues which could offend the FSB, the Interior Ministry or the armed forces.

The treatment by the media of each of the reports varied in interesting ways: Savelyev was interviewed at great length in August on an official Kremlin international news broadcast, even though his report contained damaging information on the security forces. The Torshin report, on the other hand, was covered rather summarily in ITAR-TASS, which reported that the commission had decided that "most issues have been cleared up." (9) Perhaps the murder of journalist Anna Politkovskaya last fall has resulted in an increased reluctance among the media to cover controversial topics.

Source Notes:

(3) Ibid.
(4) Ibid.
(5) Marina Litvinovich’s website is www.pravdabeslana.ru.
(9) Ibid.

Russian Federation: Security Services

By Fabian Adami

FSB "Annual Report"

On several occasions in mid-December 2006, FSB Director Nikolai Patrushev met with members of the Russian media. First, on 15 December, he participated in a one-on-one question and answer session with Izvestia Daily. Then, four days later, he met with a larger pool of journalists drawn from a variety of news outlets, including ITAR-TASS.

The question and answer session with Izvestia touched on a wide variety of subjects, including the national-regional command and control structure of the service; the situation in Chechnya; the improvement of Russia’s border fortifications and counter-espionage operations. (1)

According both to the one-on-one interview, as well as the broader press session, the FSB supposedly scored some remarkable successes in 2006. Specifically, Patrushev claimed that the agency had “neutralized” more than 40 separate Chechen “rebel bands,” (2) arrested some 27 foreign spies, (3) “prevented” 300 separate terror attacks on Russian soil, stopped hackers from obtaining access to National Security materials, and “verted” a 45 billion ruble loss due to economic crimes. (4)

Both of the press sessions were notable for the fact that no difficult questions were asked about the alleged Basayev “assassination,” or—more pertinently—the Politkovskaya and Litvinenko murders, both of which have brought suspicion
on the FSB. As such, the media opportunities could be described more reasonably as public-relations efforts, designed to portray the FSB as a productive and successful super-agency.

**Georgian provokatsia redux**

Late in November, Georgian police arrested four Russians, all apparently members of military intelligence (the GRU). According to Georgian Interior Minister Vano Merabishvili, the group had been active in the republic for some years, planning a major act of “provocation.” (5) That Russia had long been planning—and executing—action against Tbilisi was supported primarily by evidence that the Gori bombings of 2005 were perpetrated by the GRU. Additionally, within Russia, anti-Georgian rhetoric became increasingly shrill throughout 2006. Russian reaction to the arrests suggested that Moscow was seeking a casus belli; according to security expert Pavel Felgenhauer, a decision to ‘take down’ the Georgian regime was made during a Security Council meeting days after the arrests. (6)

If the decision to force regime-change was indeed taken, then President Mikhail Saakashvili’s response, namely to release the men to the OSCE—and thence into Moscow’s hands—threw a spanner into Moscow’s plans, removing the casus belli, at least temporarily. (7) But now it seems that Moscow has discovered another route by which it can keep the instability in the Caucasus brewing.

On 21 November 2006, the secessionist South Ossetia held two parallel presidential elections. In one poll held in Georgian-controlled areas, Dmitry Sanakoyev, a pro-Georgian politician was elected, while other areas of South-Ossetia voted for Eduard Kokoiti, a pro-Moscow official. (8)

Just before the election, Georgian counter-intelligence officers in South Ossetia arrested a local resident, Kaja Badayev, who was—according to the authorities—an agent of the FSB. According to the official press release following his arrest,
during interrogation Badayev confessed to receiving orders to arrange
Sanakoyev’s assassination. A tape of his apparent ‘confession’ was aired on
Georgian television news broadcasts. (9)

Badayev’s arrest, and the allegation that he was acting on the Kremlin’s orders
provoked a storm of counter-accusations from a variety of sources. The “South
Ossetian KGB” claimed that the assassination had in fact been planned by
Georgian Security agencies as a provokatsia designed to allow Tbilisi to pin the
blame on Tskhinvali, and to take action against the secessionists. This claim was
reiterated by a spokeswoman of the South Ossetian Information and Press
Committee, who claimed that “the statement on the arrest of some spy…is but
another provocation staged by Georgian secret services. They need it prior to
assassination of the so-called alternative president Sanakoyev.” (10)

A convoluted Tbilisi conspiracy to kill a South Ossetian politician loyal to Georgia,
in order to provide cause for action against the secessionists, seems far-fetched.
On the other hand Moscow’s recent history speaks for itself. As such, it seems
safe to conclude that Badayev’s arrest is evidence of just the latest in a long line
of Moscow-launched plots designed to destabilize the Caucasus republic and to
stymie Georgia’s legitimate aspirations to re-absorb secessionist areas.
Moreover, the fact that Russian agents have been caught red handed yet again,
does not speak highly of the competence of the relevant security agencies.

**Litvinenko Murder Update**

On November 1 2006, Alexander Litvinenko, an FSB defector to Britain, and
author of “Blowing Up Russia: Terror From Within,” met with an Italian contact in
London. The individual concerned—Mario Scaramella—was an Italian ‘security
expert,’ who allegedly wished to pass on to Litvinenko highly sensitive
information regarding the murder of Anna Politkovskaya, as well as details of a
“Kremlin hit-list,” which supposedly contained both of their names. On the same
day, Litvinenko conducted another meeting, this time with Andrei Lugovoi, a
former KGB and FSB agent, who now works as a security consultant in Moscow. A third unnamed individual also was present at this meeting. (11) Two days later, on 3 November, Litvinenko was checked into Barnet General Hospital, and from there was transferred to University College Hospital, where he died on 23 November with high levels of Polonium-210 in his system.

A number of theories emerged to ascribe responsibility in Litvinenko's murder. In the meantime, the British police was carrying out a murder investigation. On December 4, British detectives flew to Moscow to interview Andrei Lugovoi, and Dmitri Kovtun, another former KGB agent, who, it had emerged, met Litvinenko several times in October 2006—as well as on the day he fell ill. Kovtun is said currently to be in a Moscow hospital recovering from radiation poisoning, possibly connected to his meetings with Litvinenko. (2)

But British police immediately were faced with a problem: on 5 December, Prosecutor General Yuri Chaika informed the press that Scotland Yard detectives would face serious restrictions in their investigation. Chaika stated that Russia would permit no extraditions in the case (13), and that British police officers would participate in the investigation only “with our consent.” Chaika added that Russian authorities might “withhold” their permission. (14) Chaika’s warnings apparently were realized as the Scotland Yard team sent to Russia returned to London after experiencing “a fortnight of frustration and obstruction by Russian officials,” with permission to interview several people apparently denied. (15)

In spite of Russian obfuscation, Scotland Yard apparently has developed an important lead: using Litvinenko’s description of the “third man” who was present at his meeting with Lugovoi, an image has been captured from Heathrow airport security cameras, of a man—apparently of Central Asian descent—who, police suspect, may be Litvinenko’s killer. (16)
Russia has started its own inquiry into Litvinenko’s death, during the course of which both Lugovoi and Kovtun have been questioned. Indeed, in a move that can best be described as “chutzpa,” Moscow has requested that the British government allow it unrestricted access to more than 100 witnesses and “dozens” of locations in London, which apparently are vital to the investigation. (17)

Russia’s investigation is now apparently geared towards a specific suspect: Leonid Nevzlin, former Deputy to imprisoned Yukos boss Mikhail Khodorkovsky. Nevzlin has been directly accused of involvement in Litvinenko’s murder by Chaika, although the latter has not provided any indication of what the motive might have been. (18)

The allegations against Nevzlin must be taken with more than a grain of salt: many of the “suspects” Russian police wish to interview in London are former Yukos officials, who sought asylum in Britain when Khodorkovsky was arrested and Yukos taken over. Russia has, on numerous occasions, pressed for their extradition and been refused by Whitehall. (19) It seems likely that interviews would lead to the presentation of “irrefutable” evidence against these officials in the murder inquiry—and therefore to renewed extradition requests.

It is possible that Moscow is playing a game—‘we won’t allow extraditions’ unless you extradite former Yukos officials back to Russia. In this scenario, the Kremlin may hope that London caves in to its long-term requests for Boris Berezovsky’s extradition.

More likely however, is the conclusion that Scotland Yard officers are facing such difficulties because the authorities in Russia have something to hide in the Litvinenko inquiry.

Source Notes:
(5) See The ISCIP Analyst, Volume XIII, Number 4 (9 Nov 06).
(7) See The ISCIP Analyst, Volume XIII, Number 4 (9 Nov 06).
(10) Ibid.
(11) See The ISCIP Analyst, Volume XIII, Number 5 (7 December 06).
(13) “Moscow Restricts British Police Investigating Ex-Spy’s Death,” Washington Post, 5 Dec 06 via www.washingtonpost.com/wpdyn/content/article/2006/12/05/AR200612050039.
(14) Ibid.
Russian Federation: Armed Forces (Internal)

By Monty Perry

Social reforms for the Russian military
As abundant petrodollars continue to fuel Russia’s efforts to reemerge as a world player, the importance of a strong military has not been lost. “It is well known that President Vladimir Putin’s key objective of restoring the effectiveness of Russian state power is intimately connected with the restoration of Russia’s military might.” (1) After years of dwindling budgets, deteriorating weapons systems, and increasing corruption within the military, Russian military and government leaders are hanging their hopes for a positive turnaround on a broad series of sweeping reforms. While a major military reengineering might be expected to focus primarily on examining external security threats, Russia’s leadership realizes that it must get back to the basics. Strong militaries are built around dedicated, disciplined personnel…not corrupt leadership, or poorly equipped and homeless soldiers.

With bribery and bullying being acknowledged as routine behavior among soldiers, the primary ongoing reform efforts are centered on troop recruitment and treatment. In the wake of last year’s high profile criminal case, in which a conscript was brutally beaten, the military has introduced an unprecedented new program. “The first-ever parents’ committee in the Russian armed forces has been set up at the motorized rifle regiment of the Moscow Military District’s
training center in Korov, Vladimir Region." (2) Although completely voluntary for the parents, every military unit with soldiers serving on a conscription basis will have such a council in place by 15 February 2007. The stated purpose of this program is to "help the commanding officers of the military units to enhance military discipline and law and order, prevent offenses by personnel, build team spirit…and ensure safe conditions of military service." (3) As Deputy Defense Minister General Vladimir Isakov observed, "the eyes of parents are the best inspectors." (4) Of course, for years, unofficial groups of soldiers' mothers have tried to save their sons from brutal treatment and the new "parents' committees" may be intended to replace these fearless mothers with more tame organizations.

Another set of reform efforts acknowledges the problems associated with basing a large portion of the military on mandatory conscription. According to these initiatives, there will be a large shift to a professional volunteer force throughout all the military branches. "To date, 42 army formations and units comprising over 54,000 servicemen have been transferred to a contract basis." (5) According to Defense Minister Ivanov, "eighty-one formations and units will [ultimately] consist entirely of contract personnel. That's around 125,000 soldiers, sergeants, and sergeants-major." (6) By 2008, "seventy percent of military servicemen, including officers and warrant officers, will serve in the military on a contract basis," according to President Putin. (7) The highest priority front-line "permanent readiness units will only be manned by contract servicemen, whereas reduced-strength units will [still] be manned by draftees." (8) The transition to an all-volunteer force has been foreshadowed repeatedly over recent years.

For conscripts, one of the benefits to be gained from increasing the size of the volunteer force is that conscription terms would decrease from two years to just 12 months. As recruitment offices completed their 2006 autumn call-up campaign, they also marked the last group of recruits who would serve two-year conscriptions. Draftees brought into service in 2007 are to serve for eighteen
months, and in 2008 the term of service is to decrease to just one year. (9) During a 15 January 2007 meeting with government members, President Putin expressed concern that “during one year of military service problems will definitely arise with working military hardware which is becoming increasingly complicated.” (10) Therefore, even though the conscription period would be reduced to only one year, most draftees are to be required to complete a course of pre-call up training to maximize their effectiveness and efficiency.

Despite these announced changes, the conscription process remains fraught with violence and corruption. Just last month, St. Petersburg police arrested a senior recruitment official on sexual harassment charges. “It emerged that [29-year-old Aleksey Ivanov] had made appointments with young men to allegedly help them receive a deferment from conscription. In the hallway of a block of flats [where the appointments were made] the officer would seduce his victims to having sex with him.” (11) In another situation, Moscow police resorted to violence and beat the entire family of 20-year-old Andrei Zuyev, who had not appeared for draft processing, when the family refused to turn the young man over to them. The family claimed that their son was exempt from military service. It was later discovered “that the conscription office had not in fact been looking for Andrei Zuyev but for another man with the same surname.” (12)

A contract force is planned to produce a much more effective military force, but government leaders must realize that living conditions have to be improved significantly if they expect to be able to attract sufficient volunteer soldiers. Two issues desperately needing attention are salary levels and the availability of adequate housing. In fact, “lack of housing and low wages are preventing many junior officers in the Russian army from starting families.” (13) The birthrate is declining continuously among officers in the Moscow Military District. "There are on average [only] seven children per 10 families.” (14) Though a large pay gap still exists between military members and their civilian counterparts, attempts have been made to reduce the disparity. In a 9 January 2007 press release, the
government announced the signing of a resolution increasing the “money and allowances of military servicemen and employees of some federal executive bodies” by 10 percent, effective 1 January 2007. (15) Additionally, “Pay for military service personnel and pensions of citizens discharged from military service will be increased…15% on November 1, 2007, and 15% on September 1, 2008.” (16)

On the issue of housing, as of last autumn, there were approximately 400,000 homeless servicemen. In an attempt to address this problem, President Putin directed the allocation of 30 billion rubles in treasury funds over and above the regular military budget. (17) Unfortunately, when additional money was allocated for housing previously, an interesting result was noted: “The more money…security agencies receive for housing construction the faster the luxurious dachas of state officials are growing around the big cities.” (18) However, with the implementation of a new federally-subsidized mortgage program, officials are optimistic these instances of corruption can be avoided. At a recent ceremony in Moscow where 200 military families received new flats, Defense Minister Ivanov said "the problem of housing for the military would soon be resolved." (19) “As the military would say, we have turned on the afterburners, and by 2010 we should finally close the issue of housing for the military…” (20)

The Russian military remains undisciplined, underpaid, and filled with abusive and corrupt leadership. However, a renewed and, more critically, sustained effort at social reforms could set them on an improved course. Time will tell how effective the changes prove to be. But “given the drastic decline of Russian military power in the 1990s and early 2000s,” even the most modest improvements can represent important reform. (21)

Source Notes:
(3) “Russian Servicemen’s Parents to get Better Access to Son’s Units,” 28 Dec, 06, RIA Novosti, Moscow, BBC monitoring via Lexis-Nexis.
(6) Leonova, Elena, “Defense Minister: We No Longer Have Any Hot-Spots,” 27 Dec, 06, Izvestia via Lexis-Nexis.
(7) “Putin Orders Strategic Weapons For Armed Forces,” 16 Nov, 06, RIA Novosti via Lexis-Nexis.
(9) “Moscow Contributes 4,000 Conscripts to Army,” 17 Jan, 07, Interfax-AVN military news agency, BBC monitoring via Lexis-Nexis.
(10) “Russian President Calls For Proper Pre-Army Training,” 15 Jan, 07, Channel One Worldwide (for Europe), Moscow, BBC monitoring via Lexis-Nexis.
(11) “Officer at Russian Military Recruitment Office Detained on Sex Charges,” 18 Dec, 06, Centre TV, Moscow, BBC monitoring via Lexis-Nexis.
(14) Ibid.
(15) “Russian Servicemen’s Salaries Increased by 10 Percent,” 9 Jan, 07, ITAR-TASS news agency, Moscow, BBC monitoring via Lexis-Nexis.
Russian Federation: Armed Forces (External)

By Daniel DeBree

The unfriendly skies
Russia currently is in the process of establishing a sophisticated air defense buffer zone around its western and southern flanks by negotiating and developing command and control arrangements with its CIS neighbors. Already poised to begin operations is the United Air Defense sector comprising Belarus and Western Russia. Russia has plans for similar agreements in the Caucasus and Central Asia, to be implemented at a later date.

Although political and economic relations between Belarus and Russia have been anything but harmonious recently, military leaders from both countries claim that disagreements over money will not “affect military to military cooperation or military-technical cooperation.” (1) While Russian Defense Minister Sergei Ivanov was quick to stress cooperation, not long after his remarks Belarus demanded increased compensation for Russian military facilities in their country.
(2) Apparently, the politicians and businessmen were not in agreement with their military counterparts.

At issue are two Russian military facilities: the Russian space radar station at Baranavich and a naval command and control center at Vileyka (in land-locked Belarus). Although both of these facilities are important parts of the Russian defense network, the space radar station probably is the most critical, as it is also a part of the impending agreement for the joint air defense network. This facility is based around relatively sophisticated Volga radar, which was designed to detect ballistic missile attacks. Having a nominal detection range of more than 1000 kilometers and an azimuth sweep of 120 degrees, the radar guards more than 1M square kilometers of airspace on Russia's western border—its loss would represent a significant degradation in capability. (3)

Considering the current situation, the radar site itself has an interesting history. The USSR originally started construction on this facility in 1979, but then quickly suspended work. Deemed redundant, it was not until 1999 when a similar site in Skrunda, Latvia was lost that Russia continued the unfinished business at the Baranavich site. (4) Fully operational since 2003, this facility has been an integral part of the Russian defense against ballistic missiles. Ivanov played down this importance, however, in the wake of the acrimony over oil. (5) Stating that the facility “was not critical,” he reiterated that the “security of the Russian Federation” would not be compromised even if the facility were to close. (6) This claim rings hollow, however, when one looks at the details. The Belarus radar was finished specifically to cover the gap left by the loss of the Latvian site, although it could not quite cover the entire area. Although the St. Petersburg radar, which was just switched on in December of 2006, goes a long way toward closing that gap, obviously it could not do so if its counterpart to the Southwest also were to close. Rough calculations show that this would reduce coverage by a minimum of 600 kilometers. Although it is not a catastrophic problem (Russia operated with a gap from 1999 until 2003), and, historically, Russian doctrine has
not called for 100% coverage, it still would require some capital and effort to rectify the less than optimal arrangement. The good news for Russia is that newer technology allowed it to build a more reliable and more sophisticated system in eighteen months, rather than the five years or so it took to complete the Volga radar. (7)

Even if Belarus does not compel Russia to close down the radar site, the question of compensation remains. Although it appears that the Russians are not required to pay “rent” for their two military facilities in Belarus, closer inspection reveals a type of barter system. Since 1995, the Belarusians have been allowed free time on the Russian military test and instrumentation ranges, which they have used almost annually to test-fire their surface to air missile systems. (8) It seems that this arrangement is no longer acceptable and that the Belarusians are not only demanding rent for the facilities, but also compensation for their perceived protection of Russian airspace, to the tune of US $40-60M per year. (9)

Perhaps this tiny tripping point will be worked out in the Russian-Belarussian United Air Defense System, the agreement for which reportedly will be signed by the end of January. The details that are available show that this will be a significant step in military cooperation for both countries. The entire Belarusian Air Force will be a part of the agreement, while only the Russian Sixth Army of the Air Force and Air Defense Forces will be subject to its provisions. Perhaps the most important stipulation, however, is the command and control arrangement, whereby all of the above-named troops can be commanded by either a Belarussian or Russian commander. (10) This is of some significance, since it is very difficult to work out such an arrangement between military organizations of two different countries. Although the agreement has not been finalized, Russia already has provided four S-300PS surface to air missile systems to the Belarussian 115th Air Defense Missile Brigade, which is now deployed around Brest and Grodno. (11)
So, will the bonds “between two brother people” be strong enough to see these military preparations through the storm of economic and political wrangling, as is claimed by Sergei Ivanov? Many analysts see Belarus leaning toward the West these days and note the purported animosity between Presidents Putin and Lukashenka. (12) In fact, Putin announced earlier this month that Belarus should be prepared for “significantly reduced” support in the future, which does not bode well for the joint military commanders. (13) In either case, one will not have long to wait, as the air defense agreement is slated to be signed by the end of January.

Regardless of the situation in the West, Russia also is planning to shore up its defenses in other areas. Plans for a united air defense of the Caucasus and Central Asia will be revealed at a meeting of defense ministers, scheduled for the middle of next month in Yerevan. Reportedly, plans are to establish a system much like the Belarus arrangement, first in the Caucasus, and then much later in Central Asia. (14)

Already well established in the Caucasus, Russia has two significant Air Defense facilities in Armenia, the 102nd Base and an airfield at Erebuni. Both of these facilities house state of the art equipment, with the 102nd employing S-300 missiles and MiG-29 fighters flying out of Erebuni. In addition, the Russians have spent a significant amount of capital over the past year modernizing and training the Armenian Air Force. In fact, they have trained the Armenians to operate their S-300s. Significant improvements also were completed on Armenian command and control facilities. (15)

Much like Armenia, the command and control equipment in Tajikistan is due for an overhaul, which the Russians gladly are supplying. According to the Deputy Commander of the Russian Air Force, Lieutenant General Aitech Bizhev, the country now is fitted with the latest Russian equipment and will be able to receive
a comprehensive air picture no later than the middle of 2007. The Tajiks also are scheduled to receive some navigation equipment, in addition to the command and control infrastructure. (16)

Kazakhstan is a different story, however, as it is making a concerted effort to remain independent from Russia with respect to military hardware and communications equipment. The Kazakhs are pursuing contracts with other countries actively, which would significantly complicate compatibility issues in any type of combined air defense network. Nevertheless, Kazakhstan has some of the highest readiness rates for its aircraft of any country in that region, and it also is experiencing an economic boom that will allow it to be choosy in its military procurement. Russia, for its part, will stress economy of scale and the added efficiency and lethality to be gained by participating in an integrated air defense network of several countries. (17)

If this comprehensive air defense plan comes to fruition, Russia will have significantly pushed out its air defense “borders,” allowing it to react to real or perceived threats more quickly, and more importantly, before they ever enter Russian airspace.

Source Notes:

(1) “Russia’s Ivanov Upbeat on Military Ties With Belarus Despite Trade Rows,” Interfax, 15:59 GMT, 6 Jan 07; BBC Monitoring via Lexis-Nexis Academic Universe.
(2) “All Bombs Will Come to Us,” Moskovsky komsomolets, 9 Jan 07, p. 2; WPS via Lexis-Nexis Academic Universe.
(3) Ibid.
(5) “Russia’s Ivanov Upbeat on Military Ties With Belarus Despite Trade Rows,” Interfax, 15:59 GMT, 6 Jan 07; BBC Monitoring via Lexis-Nexis Academic Universe.

(6) “Russia’s Security Will Not Be Affected,” Izvestia, 11 Jan 07, p. 3; WPS via Lexis-Nexis Academic Universe.


(8) “All Bombs Will Come to Us,” Moskovsky komsomolets, 9 Jan 07, p. 2; WPS via Lexis-Nexis Academic Universe.

(9) “Russia’s Security Will Not Be Affected,” Izvestia, 11 Jan 07, p. 3; WPS via Lexis-Nexis Academic Universe.

(10) “Defending Our Sky,” 23 Dec 06, Krasnaya zvezda, p. 3; WPS via Lexis Nexus Academic Universe.

(11) Belarussian television, Minsk, 07:10:00GMT, 14 Jan 07; BBC Monitoring via Lexis-Nexis Academic Universe.

(12) “Oil Crisis Over, but Trouble Ahead for Belarus-Russian Ties,” Agence France Presse, 12:43:00GMT, 13 Jan 07 via Lexis-Nexis Academic Universe.

(13) “Russia to Cut Back Help for Belarus After Oil Row,” Agence France Presse, 17:04:00GMT, 15 Jan 07 via Lexis-Nexis Academic Universe.


(16) “Defending Our Sky,” 23 Dec 06, Krasnaya zvezda, p. 3; WPS via Lexis Nexus Academic Universe.

(17) Ibid.

Russian Federation: Foreign Relations
By Alexey Dynkin
A change of course in energy?
The recent energy dispute between Russia and Belarus has brought back memories of past crises, such as the one that took place a year ago involving Ukraine, during which millions across Europe saw their gas deliveries shut down for four days in the dead of winter. This particular dispute, however, has a somewhat different dynamic than others, due to the very peculiar nature of the Russo-Belarusian relationship, and, for that reason, may have a more lasting effect on the future conduct of Russian energy policy with its neighboring states.

A short while before he became president of Russia, Vladimir Putin reportedly wrote a policy paper in which he outlined ways in which Russia could regain its superpower status. “Russia's natural resource potential,” wrote Putin, “defines its special place among industrialized countries.” (1) One of the main ways in which Russian natural resources are used as an instrument of foreign policy has been the export of crude oil and natural gas to members of the Commonwealth of Independent States at prices below market value. In the case of Belarus, which since 1999 has been bound, at least on paper, with Russia via the Union Treaty—this price has been fixed for some time at US $47 per 1000 cubic meters of gas and US $27 per barrel of oil. For 2006, these prices, when compared to the estimated market value for oil and gas, amounted to a subsidy of about $6.6 billion. (2) That amount, however, is equal to approximately 23% of Belarus' GDP during the same year. (3) Since all energy enterprises in Belarus are state-owned, this subsidy may be termed foreign aid—an instrument of foreign policy that is by no means new or unique. By comparison, Israel—the largest recipient of US economic aid—received a total of $240 million, which amounts to about .02% of Israel's GDP. (4) In other words, Russia’s use of economic assistance as an instrument of foreign policy in the case of its relationship with Belarus is on a completely different scale than what is typically practiced between donors and their recipients, even in cases where the partnership is extremely important, both strategically and symbolically.
What, then, has been the benefit to Russia (after all, a country rife with its own economic problems) from such a massive investment in this rather small, seemingly insignificant country that has the status of a pariah state? To continue the example of Israel, it is interesting to note that Lukashenko’s Belarus is, in a peculiar way, analogous to the former, except in reverse: whereas Israel is the only fully democratic state in the Middle East, Belarus has the distinction of being the only remaining fully authoritarian state in Europe, since the ousting of Serbia’s former president Slobodan Milosevic in 2000. Since Lukashenko’s election in 1994, Belarus has essentially retained the old Soviet economic and political system; therefore, it has had a very different experience than Russia during the immediate post-Soviet epoch. Not all the differences, incidentally, have been negative—for example, Belarus was able to avoid major crises such as the 1998 default, and did not experience the same economic disparity between different segments of the population that accompanied privatization in Russia during the 1990s. The point is that, while culturally very similar, Russia and Belarus are in fact qualitatively different enough that their relationship is not simply a matter of ideological affinity. There have been, of course, some concrete benefits for Russia as well—for example, one of the favors that Russia received in return for the subsidies was essentially unrestricted transit across Belarus to countries of the European Union. From a purely economic standpoint this is not very significant, since the costs associated with transit that Russia otherwise would have had to pay are insignificant compared to the total amount of subsidies. (5) More significant from a geopolitical perspective, is that this unrestricted access meant that Russia essentially had a border with the EU, at least as far as oil and gas deliveries were concerned. For a country aspiring to attain a “special place among the industrial countries” such direct access allowed Russia to use resources as political leverage with the EU, without having to consider the transfer country, and helped re-create the image of an empire, projecting its power beyond its official borders.
All this means that the recent crisis cannot be dismissed as simply a routine economic dispute, but, rather, it represents a significant shift in Russia’s conduct of foreign policy in the Near Abroad. On November 3, Gazprom announced that it would raise the price of gas to $200 per 1000 cubic meters (four times the present cost!) by the start of 2007. Then, on December 8, Gazprom declared that it would move toward delivering oil and gas to CIS member states at market prices, a position it repeated December 19 at an official meeting. If Gazprom moves ahead with this plan, Russia, as a result, voluntarily will give up one of its hitherto principal methods of projecting its influence. Additionally, the move already has damaged Russia's image as a reliable partner in energy delivery abroad, together with the use of the "energy weapon" against Georgia.

The energy crisis has caused serious concern in the EU over the reliability of Russia as a natural resource supplier. Meeting with Putin in Sochi on January 21, German Chancellor Angela Merkel expressed disapproval over the fact that Russia had halted oil deliveries via the Friendship pipeline without informing its recipients first. (Transneft closed the pipeline on January 8, in response to an imposition by Belarus of a $45 per ton tax for transit of oil through its territory—itself a response to Gazprom’s price increase and to Russia’s imposition of an import levy—and to allegations that Belarus had siphoned off oil from the pipeline as payment in kind for the levy). On the surface then, it appears that Russia may have suffered yet another PR loss. However, the crisis has highlighted a fact that Merkel and other leaders of the EU probably are reluctant to admit—namely, that if they want reliable supplies of Russian oil and gas, it is in their interest to preserve the “special” Russo-Belarusian relationship, whatever the nature of the political regimes. If Putin’s main concern regarding Belarus is to avoid a “color” revolution in Minsk along the lines of Ukraine and Georgia, the crisis actually may have reduced the chances of this happening—ironically, with Europe’s backing.

New inroads in the Middle East?
2007 brings a whole set of developments in the Middle East. The combination of the increasingly provocative and assertive behavior of Iran—whose power may increase dramatically if the Hezbollah-led opposition succeeds in toppling the current Lebanese government—with the continuing commitment of the United States to remain in the region (as signaled by President Bush’s “surge” in Iraq and the naval buildup in the Persian Gulf) raises the possibility of a serious confrontation between the global superpower and the rising regional power. Up until now, it seems, Russia had been content to sell arms (most recently, the Tor-M1 surface-to-air missile system) to Iran, under the assumption that it would help maintain a sort of balance of power in the region against American influence. As of yet, there have not been signs of major changes in Russia’s position; on January 16, Defense Minister Sergei Ivanov said that "If the Iranian leadership has a desire to purchase more defensive weapons, we would do that." (10) Nor has the passing of UN Resolution No. 1737 on December 23 had any effect on these sales, since the sanctions imposed by the resolution involve only materials that can be used either for uranium enrichment or for the construction of heavy water reactors or heavy water processing plants; it does not mention conventional weapons at all. (11) It appears, then, that the Russian position on Iran’s nuclear ambitions can be summarized as follows: Russia will not actively support Iran’s acquisition of nuclear weapons, but neither will it actively oppose it; and in the meantime, it will gladly supply Iran’s conventional arsenal.

Meanwhile, an editorial in a Lebanon daily that supports the “March 14 Forces” (those who supported the expulsion of Syrian troops after the assassination of former Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri and who support the current Prime Minister Fuad Seniora) suggested after Seniora’s meeting with Putin in the Kremlin on December 15 that “Moscow wants points of entry to the Middle East not only through the Syrian gate.” (12) There may be some truth to this, since this was not the first time Putin expressed interest in Lebanon. Several months earlier, following the war between Israel and Hezbollah, Russia offered assistance (which was accepted) in the reconstruction of bridges damaged by Israeli bombs.
during the war. An engineering unit from Chechnya was deployed beginning in August, consisting entirely of local (Muslim) soldiers—a fact that Putin made a point to emphasize during Seniora’s visit. (13) He then went on, reportedly, to urge Seniora to try to settle the present crisis “in a bilateral fashion, without relying on outside forces,” and “not to provoke the opposition by approving the [international] tribunal, explaining that as Russia sees it, this tribunal is not intended to discover the murderers of Prime Minister Rafiq Al-Hariri but is [merely] an American instrument for exerting pressure on Syria and its allies.” (14) Such a formulation casts doubt on whether, indeed, Russia really seeks to open a “Lebanese gate” into the Middle East, suggesting instead that Russian activities in Beirut are more of an attempt to keep the Syrian gate opened. Either way, at the present moment, it appears that Russia’s disputes with her neighbors over oil and gas prices are of more immediate concern than the situation in the Middle East.

Source Notes:

(1) “Energy of the state Gazprom, often seen as a proxy for the Kremlin, is worrying investors and foreign leaders, writes Arkady Ostrovsky,” by Arkady Ostrovsky, 15 Dec 06, Financial Times via Lexis-Nexis.
(2) “Belarus: Controls, Subsidies, And Cheap Gas,” by Siarhej Karol, 15 Mar 06, RFE/RL via http://www.rferl.org/featuresarticle/2006/03/b36695f2-6a0f-4b00-bd58-5f5c06b98584.html.
(5) Ibid, “Belarus: Controls, Subsidies, And Cheap Gas.”
(6) “Russia sets 2007 gas price for Belarus at $200 per 1,000 cu m,” RIA Novosti, 3 Nov 06 via http://en.rian.ru/russia/20061103/55362782.html.
Newly Independent States: Caucasus

By Creelea Henderson

GEORGIA

Volte-face? Russian embassy open for business in Tbilisi

On Thursday, 18 January, President Putin summoned Russia’s ambassador to Georgia, Alexander Kovalenko, to the Kremlin to inform him that he would be returning to work in Tbilisi the following Monday. After four months of deadlock exacerbated by a series of sanctions and punitive measures representing a
sustained attempt by Moscow to beggar its neighbor, the Kremlin’s move to restore diplomatic ties with Tbilisi is the sort of abrupt volte-face that gives foreign policy analysts a case of whiplash.

**What happened?**

In September of last year the Russian ambassador in Tbilisi, together with his staff, was recalled to Moscow together following Georgia’s arrest of four Russian intelligence officers on spying charges. The move effectively to cut diplomatic ties between the two countries presaged an escalation in tensions aggravated by Moscow’s punitive embargo on Georgian wine, mineral water and produce, a ban on travel visas, postal service and money transfers between the two countries, and the mistreatment of Georgian nationals living and working in Russia, over a thousand of whom suffered unwarranted deportation. The Kremlin’s recent decision to resume diplomatic operations in Tbilisi is a positive indication that channels of communication will be reopened between the two countries. Whether it marks a substantive change in Kremlin policy toward Georgia, however, remains to be seen.

The most jarring element in the story is the sunny rhetoric with which Putin announced the reinstatement of the Russian resident ambassador in Tbilisi. Ambassador Alexander Kovalenko, he said, “heads for a country that can claim not only special relations but good-neighborliness and friendship with Russia.” (1)

In light of recent events, his congenial words had a discordant ring. A caller to a Russian Razvorot radio program commented on the president’s distorted notion of friendship, adding that, “had someone been a friend to me like we are friends to Georgia, Moldova, Ukraine, Belarus [and] the Baltics, I would have tried to keep as far away from such friends as possible.” (2) Friendship was certainly not in evidence at the November meeting of the two countries’ presidents in the corridor of the CIS summit held in Minsk. The meeting reportedly amounted to
little more than an exchange of mutual reproach after which, in response to
questions from journalists, Putin tersely replied that he and Saakashvili had met,
and that was the end of it. (3) For his part, Saakashvili left the encounter
resolved that, “it is time for us, Georgians, to understand that it won't have any
decisive importance for us what Russia will think, say or do in respect to
Georgia.” (4)

Good-neighborliness could not be said to characterize the relationship between
the two countries at the close of last year, as Georgia faced uncertainty over
natural gas supplies and the prospect of paying the “political price” of $235 per
1,000 cubic meters of gas as charged by Gazprom. Tbilisi’s bid for diversification
of energy supplies fell apart in late December after technical problems in the
Shah-Deniz gas fields scuttled the tentative deals forged by Georgia’s energy
ministry with Turkey and Azerbaijan, forcing Georgia’s domestic energy
companies to sign independent deals with Gazprom, a cause for some
embarrassment to the Saakashvili government.

Relations were strained further by attacks that occurred in late December and
early January in the Gali district of Abkhazia that left police officers dead on both
the Georgian and Abkhazian sides. A statement appearing on the website of the
Georgian Ministry of Foreign Affairs called the attacks “a carefully planned and
deliberate provocation aimed at further escalating the tension in the conflict zone
that, there is much likelihood, may lead to irreparable consequences.” (5) The
statement goes on to lay the blame for the attacks squarely on the gross
negligence of Russian peacekeepers who failed to act on their mandate to
defuse tensions in the security zone.

The new year opened with further deterioration in neighborly goodwill as
Georgian truck drivers blockaded the Transcaucasian highway by parking their
rigs loaded with tangerines at the border with Russia (i.e. North Ossetia) in
protest over the Russian ban on Georgian citrus imports. The latest incident (on
11 January), in which Georgian officials seized a Russian fishing vessel off the coast of Abkhazia for allegedly trespassing into Georgian territorial waters, points to a growing assertiveness on the part of Georgians chafing at Russia’s infringement upon Georgian sovereign interests. Their cause is being taken up by a delegation of Georgian lawmakers in Strasbourg who are lobbying the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) to hold a debate on Russian sanctions and human rights violations against Georgian citizens. The hearing is unlikely to take place, however, following the reinstatement of the Russian ambassador to Tbilisi. As the chairman of the Russian Federation Council’s Committee on Foreign Affairs, Mikhail Margelov, remarked on 19 January, “if the normalization process has started, what is there to debate?” (6)

**Why now?**

Why has Putin decided that it is in Russia’s best interest to normalize relations with Georgia now, after months of blatant disregard for diplomatic protocol from the Kremlin? Surely Moscow is under no real threat of censure from PACE, or any other body within the international community, given that they have failed time and again to deliver substantive resolutions in Georgia’s defense. The Russian ambassador’s return to Tbilisi may rather be read in two ways: 1) as a gesture of goodwill on the part of a primary energy supplier toward a client state; 2) as an attempt to draw a member of the CIS in the apogee of its orbit away from Moscow back into Russia’s gravitational sphere. The first argument was put forward by Putin in a statement that “the first significant step [toward the resumption of diplomatic relations] was made last December, when we signed an agreement on Russian gas supplies to Georgia. It is important that these supplies will be made according to the market principles.” He stressed that “the sides assumed some commitments, and Russia will fulfill them,” making the move toward diplomacy a supposed model of honest dealing in supplier-client relations that Russia may use to reassure apprehensive European parties in upcoming energy deals. (7) More immediately, if the Kremlin hopes to keep Georgia as a gas consumer paying premium market value for Russian
commodities, it had best maintain a veneer of civility. The second argument is somewhat more elliptical, though several recent developments offer evidence to substantiate the claim that Russia has need of Georgian cooperation. In charging Ambassador Kovalenko with his renewed responsibilities, Putin named settlement of regional frozen conflicts as “one of the most important directions of our activities.” (8) With the Kosovo question at the top of the Russian agenda, the claims of breakaway provinces is indeed a two-edged sword for the Kremlin.

**Is it over?**

Points of contention remain fixed between the two governments, including the fundamental question of how to resolve the issue of autonomy in the breakaway provinces of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. While the Kremlin has pledged to resume travel and postal links between Russia and Georgia, the ban on Georgian wine and produce remains in place for the time being and no new Russian visas will be issued to Georgian citizens in the near future, according to Moscow. (9)

Tbilisi has been at pains to modulate its rhetoric and avoid bellicose language so as not to offend Moscow or its allies in the international community, most notably by removing the hawkish defense minister Okruashvili from office, who fanned the flames when he announced that he would celebrate New Year’s 2007 in Tskhinvali, capital of the breakaway Georgian region of South Ossetia. His reappointment to the economic ministry in November was received in Moscow with evident satisfaction. For its part, Russia continues tardily to withdraw its troops from Georgian territory. And perhaps the most emollient balm of all, Georgia is again an energy client to Russia, albeit reluctantly.

**Who won?**

The Independent crows that Moscow “blinked first” in its four month spat with Georgia. (10) That assertion, while not wholly untrue, is misleading. Moscow is not a capital that concedes defeat, particularly when it comes to relations with the
The Kremlin is cannier than that, and perhaps another agenda in Moscow is well served now that relations with Tbilisi have been normalized. The Kremlin’s priorities have been and remain: dominance in the former Soviet republics and on the world energy market. And now the question of autonomy for Kosovo, a decision by which Moscow is weighing its influence on the international stage, and a case that will have huge consequences for breakaway provinces in the CIS either way the issue ultimately is decided.

The restoration of diplomatic recognition of Tbilisi may be the result of energy politics or it may represent an opportunity to keep a closer watch on a neighbor in anticipation of interesting times to come. Or, perhaps Moscow did recognize that its policies were producing a stronger, more assertive and independent Georgia. In that case, they had nothing left to lose there.

Source Notes:

(2) Interview With Federation Council Committee For Foreign Affairs Chair Mikhail Margelov, Ekho Moskvy Radio, 19 Jan 07 via (http://echo.msk.ru/).
(4) Ibid.
(6) Interview With Federation Council Committee For Foreign Affairs Chair Mikhail Margelov, Ekho Moskvy Radio, 19 Jan 07 via (http://echo.msk.ru/).
(7) “Russian envoy to return to Tbilisi,” TASS, 21 Jan 07 via Georgia News Digest.
(8) Ibid.
Kyrgyz president, parliament begin 2007 with renewed confrontation

After seeming to resolve the bulk of their differences through constitutional reform in November 2006, President Kurmanbek Bakiev and the Jogorku Kengesh are once again at loggerheads and the parliament itself is divided on how to proceed. Their truce, shaky at best, began crumbling in mid-December, when Prime Minister Feliks Kulov and his cabinet offered their resignations to President Bakiev, in a move designed to force new parliamentary elections (1). Prime Minister Kulov announced that he and his cabinet ministers had resigned in compliance with the new constitution, (2) which grants whatever party holds a parliamentary majority the authority to choose the prime minister. (3) The fact that at present there is no majority party in the Jogorku Kengesh poses a major stumbling block in this process and casts doubt as to whether or not the current parliament can act legally in any capacity. The new constitution also increased the number of seats in parliament from 75 to 90 and stipulates that half of the MPs should be elected on party slates. (4) Thus, it would seem perfectly logical for the government to resign and for new parliamentary elections to take place, except for the fact that when the new constitution was adopted in November, the president and parliament agreed that the reforms would not take effect until 2010, a solution which left both sides dissatisfied. (5)

Faced with the threat of parliament’s dissolution and new elections which could cost them their seats, 55 Jogorku Kengesh deputies issued a signed appeal to
the president to begin a review of the constitution, in order to reconcile any contradictions in its language and more clearly delineate the division of power between the executive and the legislature. (6) President Bakiev responded by requesting that parliament restore a number of his powers that were eliminated by the constitutional reform in November: the authority to appoint local administration chiefs and regional governors; the authority to recommend candidates for the Supreme Court and for local judgeships to parliament; and that the Interior Ministry, National Security Service, and Emergencies Ministry be transferred back to presidential control. In return for the restoration of these powers, the president pledged to refrain from calling for the parliament’s dissolution. (7) President Bakiev’s office then submitted a new draft constitution for legislative review which included the above-mentioned changes, as well as a note regarding two “discrepancies” found in the new constitution, which he asked parliament to resolve: the total number of parliamentary seats (75 in the old constitution, 90 in the new one) and the right to nominate a candidate for the office of prime minister (according to the old constitution, the president has this right; the new constitution transferred this power to the legislature). (8) 

Following much wrangling between various members of parliament and the president, threats by opposition members to impeach the president (9) or to call for a presidential election in March 2007 (three years early) (10), parliament’s rejection of the first draft of the newly reformed constitution, (11) and the proposal by a small group of MPs to dissolve the Jogorku Kengesh and hold new elections (12) a new edition of the constitution was finally adopted on 30 December. The latest version of the constitution restores those powers which the president had requested (see above), as well as granting him the right to form a government until 2010, during the “transitional period.” (13) The Jogorku Kengesh’s actions were promptly denounced by the head of Kyrgyzstan’s Human Rights Commission, Tursunbek Akun, who declared parliament had violated the rights of his country’s citizens by amending the constitution due to coercion by the presidential administration. (14) Nonetheless, President Bakiev signed the
amended constitution into law on 15 January (15) and the following day proceeded to nominate Feliks Kulov for the post of prime minister, leading to a new showdown with parliament. (16)

As of 23 January, the president has nominated Mr. Kulov twice, only to have the Jogorku Kengesh reject his candidacy on both occasions. With their latest rejection of Mr. Kulov’s nomination, the MPs also informed the president that by nominating the same candidate twice, he has violated the constitution and that he is obliged to submit a new name. The president’s legislative liaison, Myrza Kaparov, disputes this statement, claiming that the present constitution allows Bakiev to nominate the same candidate up to three times (17). According to the president’s interpretation of the constitution, if his nominee for prime minister is rejected three times, he has the authority to dissolve parliament (18). Unless at least one side is willing to compromise, President Bakiev and the Jogorku Kengesh deputies seem destined for a head-on confrontation within the next few days. MPs are considering a draft resolution which orders the president to stop nominating Feliks Kulov for reappointment as prime minister. The resolution will be put to a vote on 25 January. (19)

Both the Kyrgyz president and parliament seem to have painted themselves into opposing corners, with neither side willing to yield so much as an inch. It is difficult to envision a positive outcome from the present situation; in fact, it is difficult to envision anything other than the government’s collapse. Perhaps this is precisely the goal that one or both sides are working to achieve, in the hope that it will force another regime change.

Source Notes:


(3) “Kyrgyz MPs On Cabinet Resignation,” 19 Dec 06, 24.kg website; BBC Monitoring International Reports via Lexis-Nexis Academic Universe.

(4) “Kyrgyz president accepts parliament's resignation,” 19 Dec 06, Deutsche Presse-Agentur via Lexis-Nexis Academic Universe.

(5) See The ISCIP Analyst, Volume XIII, Number 5 (7 Dec 06).


(9) “Kyrgyz Opposition MP Moots Impeachment Move Against President,” 22 Dec 06, 24.kg website; BBC Monitoring International Reports via Lexis-Nexis Academic Universe.


(16) “Kyrgyz President Nominates Kulov For Prime Minister’s Post,” 16 Jan 07, 24.kg website; BBC Monitoring International Reports via Lexis-Nexis Academic Universe.


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