Putin redirects succession spotlight; One Ivanov appears to win
A change to the personnel composition of the Russian Government was an expected element of the upcoming presidential transition, but the timing and the apparent choice of prime minister nominee were not telegraphed by the Kremlin, and therefore represent an effort to keep the political establishment off kilter as the presidential succession unfolds.

At a clearly choreographed working meeting with Prime Minister Mikhail Fradkov during which Fradkov offered his resignation, President Vladimir Putin accepted the resignation and commented: "[W]e should all reflect now on how to organise the power and management structure in such a way as to best adapt it to the election campaign period and ensure it can prepare the country for the period after the parliamentary election and the presidential election in March 2008." (1)

The decision to accept the Prime Minister's resignation begins a process that likely will result in a much wider personnel shake-up in the government. However, the selection of a nominee for Prime Minister certainly permits the clearest glimpse to date into the president's plan for the 2008 succession. A broad assortment of political commentators greeted the news of the resignation of the Fradkov government with the prediction that First Deputy Prime Minister Sergei Ivanov would be tapped to head the new government in a clear signal of Putin's preference for successor. (2)

Oddly, President Putin did not choose to make his own public announcement of the nomination for two days after accepting Fradkov's resignation. The
announcement of Putin's choice of Viktor Zubkov to head the Russian government was left to Duma Speaker Boris Gryzlov, a longtime associate of the nominee and his onetime campaign manager (during an unsuccessful run for the Leningrad Oblast governor's seat in 1999).

Even more interestingly, Putin left the Kremlin after accepting Fradkov's resignation to accompany another of his much-ballyhooed successor candidates, Dmitri Medvedev, on a trip to Chuvashia and the Belgorod Region (perhaps to compensate for another trip with Sergei Ivanov, Medvedev's supposed competitor). (3)

While it has since become clear that the President has chosen Zubkov as the Prime Minister nominee (and Zubkov has won parliamentary support), the lack of presidential involvement in the announcement is confounding and brings into question Putin's commitment to his nominee.

It is possible that Putin hoped to gauge public response to Zubkov's nomination before appearing publicly with him and providing the presidential imprimatur on "his" nominee. However, Putin would have had to forward a formal letter to “Speaker” Gryzlov to begin Zubkov's confirmation process, thereby linking himself, at least officially, with the selection from the outset.

It also is possible that by not disrupting or making room in his schedule for a formal announcement or photo opportunities, Putin was able to keep the Zubkov nomination quiet even within his own administration. Certainly, Sergei Ivanov, who commented somewhat graciously on Zubkov's qualifications by describing him as "calm, restrained and absolutely adequate" also acknowledged that this nomination had not been raised in his conversations with Putin: "We did not discuss this with the president." (4)
Certainly, Putin's decision to nominate Zubkov has re-centered the succession debate around the president himself, rather than the putative successors. Any political or financial flow from Putin to the leading contenders, Ivanov and Medvedev, or even to the second tier candidates, such as Sergei Naryshkin or Sergei Sobyanin, surely will slow with this demonstration of presidential authority.

The president chose the Valdai Conference, a gathering of mostly foreign analysts, as the forum to discuss his PM nominee in some detail. (Over the past several years, Putin has chosen to provide previously unknown background or to break news at the Valdai Conference. His rationale is unclear.) When he finally did speak about Zubkov, Putin praised his accomplishments, his temperament, and his discretion:

"Why Viktor Zubkov? … [H]e's a true professional, an effective administrator with a nice personality…. Back in Soviet times, he managed to give a boost to one of the worst collective farms…. He made it the best in the Soviet Union. … He did almost no ideological work but was always interested in production. … In his department [Rosfinmonitoring] he has at his fingertips a massive amount of financial intelligence. … Not once, I would like to emphasise, did Viktor Zubkov abuse this trust." (5) Perhaps he should have added, "at least not yet."

An interesting development last month may shed light on the timing of the government's resignation: then Prime Minister Fradkov, apparently in an attempt to weaken the positions of the two "First Deputies" in his government, made amendments to the rules of government procedures that, in effect, placed all of the deputy prime ministers on the same footing and gave the Prime Minister the authority to assign their spheres of authority and specific functions (such as chairing government meetings in the PM's absence). (6) It is unlikely that such a change sat well with the First Deputies, or that it escaped the notice of the president.
The clearest indication of what prompted the Fradkov government's dismissal (er, resignation) should come later this week, when Zubkov and Putin unveil the latest incarnation of the Russian government. (7) When the list of new ministers is announced, it should become obvious just who Putin perceived as "easing off at work and beginning to think about the shape of their own destiny after the election." (8)

As for the new prime minister, Viktor Zubkov: He is an economist, specializing in agriculture, who worked with Putin in the St. Petersburg external relation's office. In the late 1990s, he worked at the St. Petersburg Tax Ministry, took a run at the Leningrad Oblast Governor's seat, and then landed in Moscow as deputy chief Tax Minister. In 2001, Putin named Zubkov to head the newly-created Federal Finance Monitoring Commission, where he oversaw the establishment of a "financial intelligence service." He is the father-in-law of Defense Minister Anatoli Serdyukov, and is said to be close with presidential adviser on personnel issues, Viktor Ivanov. (9) Despite repeated rumors of his resignation (he turns 66 later this month), Zubkov remained head of Rosfinmonitoring and has worked with Viktor Ivanov on a new anti-corruption investigative body established earlier this year. (The resignation rumors may have been wishful thinking by Finance Ministry colleagues.) From his recent activities, it is clear that Zubkov potentially has access to a wide range of possible kompromat.

While some commentators have claimed that Zubkov is not a "chekist" and has no gaps in his resume that suggest a security services career, it is unlikely that Zubkov, judging by the company he keeps, is without connection to the sword and shield. (10) As Putin's choice early in his administration not only to head, but to create from the ground up a Russian financial intelligence service, it is likely that Zubkov had experience somewhat more relevant than that which he garnered on the collective farm.
Viktor Ivanov seems to cast a long shadow over this move in the succession match. Some commentators, notably Vladimir Pribylovsky, saw the ascendancy of this line connected through Viktor Ivanov to Putin as early as last February, when Anatoli Serdyukov was named Defense Minister: "Serdyukov is a man of Viktor Ivanov. He has close links…with the head of the Federal Financial Monitoring Service, Viktor Zubkov…. Zubkov, in his turn, is linked to Gryzlov and Viktor Ivanov. But, more importantly, Zubkov is rather close to Putin."

Pribylovsky went on to suggest, in February, that Zubkov might be Putin's chosen successor. (11)

The Zubkov nomination elicits an assumption that the "caretaker" government scenario, (which would allow Putin to return to office in 2012) is considered viable in Kremlin circles. This option would be a very naïve choice for Putin, even with a significantly older, trusted associate as seat warmer, and when it comes to power politics, Putin does not seem the least bit naïve.

The status of the main contenders to succeed Putin has been shaken by the dismissal of the government. With so many commentators jumping to the conclusion that Sergei Ivanov would be nominated to be Prime Minister by Putin, Ivanov's cache both rose and sank: it was buoyed by the breadth of consonance on his ascendance among political analysts but rapidly deflated as Zubkov's name was called, and it became clear that Sergei Ivanov was not entirely in the loop on this nomination. However, a rapprochement noted this summer might yet prove to be Sergei Ivanov's wild card in the presidential race. Despite a deficit of information about splits in the Kremlin ranks, Viktor and Sergei Ivanov apparently have been in hot competition for military-linked assets, and according to a report by Aleksandr Birman, Sergei Ivanov recently ceded some of his control to Anatoli Serdyukov, Viktor Ivanov's (and the new PM's) protégé. In return, Sergei Ivanov is said to be relying on Viktor Ivanov's access to significant assets through Gazprom and Sberbank. (12) Of course, in light of the Zubkov
appointment, what is seen as Sergei Ivanov's quid pro quo concession to Viktor Ivanov in fact might have been a less mutually beneficial transfer.

On 19 September, Defense Minister Anatoli Serdyukov resigned his post as Defense Minister because, as the new PM Zubkov claimed, "he is a close relative." (13) A Kremlin spokesman, Dmitri Peskov, claimed that "according to the law, [Serdyukov] had to resign for ethical reasons." (14) An interesting development, but it is unclear exactly what Russian law forbids in-laws from working within the same government.

It is more likely that Serdyukov's position as Defense Minister, along with the access to administrative and financial resources that it provides, gave the new Prime Minister a far more powerful brief than the president had intended. It follows that at least one of the possible successors probably approached Putin with this argument against Serdyukov, hence the announcement of his resignation. Without any intervention, Serdyukov simply could have been shuffled out of the defense post when the new government composition is announced on Friday.

As for the military's position on a possible new Defense Minister, General Staff Chief Yuri Baluyevsky expressed the opinion not only that the post will go to a civilian ("Colleagues in the government will heed opinions of such a minister better"), but that he does "not rule out the possibility that a woman could be our minister." (15)

Baluyevsky further highlighted the bottom line responsibilities for a defense minister: "The minister's main responsibility is that a soldier should not feel hungry and should have a new tank." (16) With elections and a presidential succession in the works, the new defense minister may address his position with a very different set of priorities.
Source Notes:
(1) "Beginning of Working Meeting with Prime Minister Mikhail Fradkov" via http://www.kremlin.ru/eng/speeches/2007/09/12/1707_type82912type82913_143736.shtml
(2) The list of analysts and insiders (Boris Nemtsov, Vitali Tretyakov, Gleb Pavlovsky, Yevgeni Kiselev, among many others) who predicted the selection of Sergei Ivanov may reflect the power of official press in Russia. Clearly, Sergei Ivanov has been portrayed as the leading successor candidate. See Eurasia Daily Monitor, Volume 4, No. 169, 13 September 07 for a more comprehensive list of individuals and sources that predicted Ivanov's nomination.
(3) Russia & CIS General Newswire, 12 Sep 07, Wednesday 7:26 PM MSK via Lexis-Nexis Academic.
(4) "Ivanov says Fradkov Government did a good job," Itar-Tass, 12 Sep 07, 0926 EST via Lexis-Nexis Academic.
(6) New Russian government rules give equal status to deputy premiers," Kommersant, 7 Aug 07; BBS Worldwide Monitoring via Lexis-Nexis Academic. Previously, the rules only mentioned a single deputy chairman. In the rewrite, deputy chairmen with specific spheres of authority are included. However, nowhere do the rules (old or new) make a distinction for First Deputies. This maneuver had the effect of putting Fradkov's men, Aleksandr Zhukov and Sergei Naryshkin, on an even footing with Putin's leading successors, Ivanov and Medvedev.
(8) "Meeting with Members of the Valdai Discussion Club," Ibid.
Russian Federation: Domestic Issues and Legislative Branch

By Creeleia Henderson

State Duma elections: No candidates? No issues? No problem!
An opinion poll released in mid-August by the Levada-Center revealed that 43 percent of the Russian electorate does not plan to vote in this year’s State Duma elections. (1) That puts potential voter turnout in 2007 at 57 percent, the same lackluster figure recorded in State Duma elections four years ago. (2) Moreover, during the past four years the number of registered voters behind those percentages has shrunk by about 600,000 names, from 107,675,130 in 2003...
down to 107,062,709 today, reflecting Russia’s shrinking demographics. (3) While low turnout hardly qualifies as headline-grabbing news in a country where the word “voter” is commonly considered a prefix for “apathy,” the dwindling numbers of voters willing to participate in Russia’s upcoming parliamentary elections are a reflection of profound changes taking place behind the headlines, at the core of the country’s electoral system.

When Russian voters were asked in August for whom they would be voting in State Duma elections scheduled to take place December 2, they were not presented with a list of candidates to select from, but with a column of political party flags. The change is due to a new set of Kremlin-backed electoral regulations, under which voters no longer cast ballots for individual candidates as well as for party lists, but instead only for party tickets. As of May 2005, the law “On the Election of Deputies of the State Duma of the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation” delegates the job of selecting would-be State Duma deputies to party organs, where party leaders are responsible for drawing up lists of qualified members. (4)

The latter process is now the election’s most pivotal and least transparent contest. Candidates whose names appear on the party lists are ranked in descending order, according to their relative importance within their party. Assuming that the candidates’ eligibility is affirmed by the Central Election Committee, all that remains to be seen is what percentage of the vote each party will garner in the general election, and thus how many notches down each party list the election results will reach. By the time general elections roll around in December, the really important intra-party scrum will have been played out already and predictions of the election’s final outcome will have been made with a fair degree of certainty, given the abundance of statistical data measuring party preferences among the Russian electorate that is accessible on the Internet with just a few keystrokes. A simple calculation using numbers taken from Levada-Center’s poll reveals the following: United Russia, with 59 percent of the vote,
would gain 265.5 out of 450 seats; the Communist party, garnering 18 percent of the vote, would gain 81 seats; Just Russia, with 9 percent of the vote, would gain about 40.5 seats. These three were the only parties in the Levada-Center survey that met the new 7 percent threshold requirement to qualify for seats in the State Duma, though the LDPR missed the target percentage by a very slender .1 percent, garnering 6.9 percent of the total. If they eventually manage to pull in 7 percent of the vote, they will be awarded 31.5 seats. The 31.5 seats left over would be handed to the winning parties with the highest remainders resulting from the division. (5) In short, the suspense factor of this election is nil.

The human interest factor also has gone with the elimination of individual candidates for voters to choose from. Whereas before, half of all seats in the State Duma (255 of 450) were awarded by single-mandate, that is, voters chose candidates to represent their districts, the current election will produce a body of representatives who are not answerable to voters in their region, but to the leadership of their respective parties. An important bond linking deputies to their geographic constituencies thus has been broken. (6) Significantly, in 2003, 100 of the 255 single-mandate seats were won by independents and minor party candidates, most of whom cannot hope to keep their seats in this year’s election, due to a hike in the eligibility threshold from 5 to 7 percent that was introduced together with the new system of proportional representation in the May 2005 election law. (7)

Proportional representation in itself is a fine system for choosing representatives. Because it has the capacity to pull in a range of diverse perspectives, proportional representation is the means chosen by most of the world’s major democracies to distribute their parliamentary seats. However, that capacity to embrace a range of political viewpoints rests upon the bedrock of party values: parties must have a well-defined platform, and voters must understand what political values those parties represent. Those conditions are absent in Russia. When President Putin initiated the new law on elections in 2005, he claimed it
was an effort to strengthen the party system by reducing the number of parties in the Duma. (8) Considering that only about four parties are expected to win seats according to the new rules (none of them representing the democratic sector), he certainly has achieved that end. But, Russia will lose something important in the process of winnowing down the number of viable parties. It will lose the cacophony of values and opinions brought to the State Duma by minor party members.

Russia’s minor parties are a heterogeneous lot, with values and viewpoints that range the whole length and breadth of the country. Sergei Baburin of the People’s Union party claims that the State Duma is an insupportable form of government for Russians, who are better suited to the ancient practices of direct rule and peasant assemblies. (9) Vladimir Plotnikov of the Agrarian party still is heard to rail against the oligarchs in his speeches calling for the protection of Russia’s farmers. (10) Vladimir Ryzhkov wants to be the liberal force that shatters the status quo in Russian politics. In a recent interview, he suggested that he and his fellow independents were the real reason behind the Kremlin’s abolition of single-mandate districts. Since single mandates swept the mavericks into the State Duma along with the loyalists, he reasons, the Kremlin, fearing any and all new forces, dismantled the electoral system and put a more pliant mechanism into place. (11)

Each of these politicians was elected into the legislature by citizens whose votes suggest that they cared about the issues these candidates embodied in their platforms. However few voters turn out to cast their ballots on Election Day, those that do deserve to be represented by a candidate who shares their values and priorities. Now that the candidates are obscured behind party flags, and the flags themselves don’t stand for any issues disapproved by the regime, the voters who have kept faith in the power of elections have little for which to turn out. That is a misfortune of no consequence, however, since that the new
election law also abolished the minimum voter turnout required for a valid election.

Source Notes:
(3) Ibid.
(5) Ibid., article 83.
Politkovskaya case: Berezovsky did it?

On 7 October 2006, Anna Politkovskaya, one of Russia’s most eminent journalists was murdered, as she exited the elevator in her Moscow apartment building. Politkovskaya was known for her criticisms of President Vladimir Putin’s administration, and of the second Chechen war, launched in 1999. At the time of her death, she was about to publish a major investigative report on torture practices by Russian forces in Chechnya. It is also interesting that Politkovskaya was killed on President Putin’s birthday. Over the past year, the investigation into Politkovskaya’s murder has gone through several stages.

First, the authorities immediately descended on Politkovskaya’s apartment, seizing her computer, her cameras and her notebooks. Secondly, investigators announced that all of her most recent telephone calls were to be reviewed and scanned—a fact which amounted to tacit admission that Politkovskaya had been under electronic surveillance at the time of her death. (1) Then, seven months ago, a Russian newspaper claimed that “analysis of photographs from military satellites taken on the day of the murder” had allowed the Security Services to track and arrest two individuals, allegedly Chechens. (2)

Both the (apparent) satellite surveillance and the “Chechen connection” provided the Kremlin with problems. Why was Politkovskaya being tracked in a manner that could be designed purely to provide information to her killer, and which could only be authorized at the highest levels? What possible motive would Chechen rebels have for killing a journalist exposing Russian war crimes – for Moscow surely could not be claiming that Kadyrov loyalists had carried out the murder? The evidence at this point—as laid out by authorities—was so suspicious as to indicate to most observers that a cover up was taking place. Now, almost one year after the event, the Politkovskaya case has become even more convoluted, and the prosecution’s case even more nefarious.
On 27 August, Prosecutor General Yuri Chaika’s office announced that ten individuals had been arrested in connection with the Politkovskaya case. According to Chaika’s statement, the individuals included several Chechens and four former MVD officers. (3) Most significantly, one of the individuals arrested is a serving officer of the Federal Security Service (Moscow Central Administrative District Service Region), named Lieutenant Colonel Pavel Anatolyevich Ryaguzov. (4)

The (apparent) fact of a senior FSB officer’s involvement in an assassination presented the Security Service and Chaika with an immediate credibility deficit. This they sought to solve by claiming Ryaguzov was part of a “criminal group,” involved in “extortion and abuse of office.” (5) At the time of his arrest, Ryaguzov had apparently been under surveillance for some time.

In promulgating the criminal conspiracy theory, Prosecutor General Yuri Chaika claimed during his press conference that Politkovskaya’s murder, as well as the murders of Paul Klebnikov and former Deputy Head of the Central Bank Andrei Kozlov, had been carried out by the same gang. Chaika claimed that the individual is “currently abroad.” (6) Moreover, the killings were ordered by someone who wanted a return to “the old system of government in which the money and the oligarchs decided all, discredit the leaders of the state and provoke external pressure on the leadership of our country.” (7) Such language suggests a reference to Boris Berezovsky, whom the Kremlin has already accused of killing Aleksandr Litvinenko – in order to further his own interests. (8)

Chaika’s and the FSB’s tactic in dealing with the Ryaguzov arrest effectively has been to imply that the latter was a single rotten apple infecting a clean barrel. Yet the arrest of such a senior Security Services officer poses a number of questions. First, and in a sense least important: are FSB and indeed all Security Service officers paid so little that they need to moonlight to make ends meet? Secondly,
if, as the Kremlin alleges, Berezovsky’s tentacles are spread so wide that he has “agents” in the Security Services, is not his recent agitation for a coup d’état (9) transformed into a clear and present threat? Should not a massive investigation into FSB officers’ loyalty take place, especially if officers of such senior rank are allegedly conspiring with him?

The authorities were clearly not unaware that Ryaguzov’s arrest would pose a public relations problem, or that inferences would be drawn from his alleged involvement in the Politkovskaya’s murder. A mere three days after his arrest, the FSB retracted its prior confirmation of Chaika’s statement, claiming that Ryaguzov’s arrest had “nothing to do with Politkovskaya’s murder case.” Instead, the charges were related to corruption and “abuse of office.” (10)

These events demonstrate that the FSB and the Kremlin are desperate – but not necessarily to solve the Politkovskaya murder. Rather, the desperation is to “get Berezovsky,” even if it means sounding like a broken record and pinning ridiculous accusations onto him. Berezovsky is clearly an irritant. But the oligarch is in exile, has little political power, and Britain consistently has refused extradition. Therefore, the question must be asked: what does Berezovsky have on Putin that is causing such fear in the Kremlin?

**Moscow-St. Petersburg train bombing: Echoes of 1999?**

In the fall of 1999, a series of explosions occurred at apartment buildings around Moscow. Blamed on Chechen separatists, the bombings resulted in the 2nd Chechen war, and in the swift rise to power of Yel’tsin Prime Minister Vladimir Putin, who was confirmed as Boris Yel’tsin’s successor in March 2000 elections by a significant margin. His victory was due in part to the view that he had responded to terrorism with strength.

Since 1999, and in particular due to the work of now deceased FSB defector Lieutenant Colonel Aleksandr Litvinenko, (11) there is increasing evidence that
the bombings were in fact “false flag-operations” carried out by the FSB, and designed to produce a ‘wag the dog’ effect for Yel’tsin’s Crown Prince.

On 14 August, a train en-route from Moscow to St. Petersburg was derailed, apparently by a bomb. Sixty people were injured, but there were no fatalities. FSB Director Nikolai Patrushev was quick to react to the incident, claiming during televised remarks that “the threat of terrorism and extremism” in Russia had “not yet been eliminated,” (12) and that the perpetrators could be linked to the Chechen conflict. Not surprisingly, Patrushev argued that the derailment was proof that additional powers—naturally for the FSB—and security measures were necessary, especially given the Duma elections scheduled for later this year. (13)

Patrushev’s “concern” has not gone unnoticed: Speaking on Ekho Moskvy radio, Gazeta columnist Yulia Latynina noted that she found it “easy to believe” that the incident was part of a scheme designed to allow Putin loyalists to “persuade him to stay for the third term.” (14)

President Putin’s reaction to the bombing has contrasted markedly to his behavior during other crises—such as the Kursk submarine sinking—when he was not seen or heard from for days. On this occasion, he was filmed by State Television, a day after the incident, conversing on his cell phone with Transportation Minister Igor Levitin, ordering him to “do all you can to help the people…and let me know, a little later, what was done.” (15) A cynical observer might remark that this behavior is so out of character as to be a charade, and that the timing of this incident is “convenient.” Sadly, such cynicism is almost entirely the result of past FSB shenanigans. The fact that there is cause to doubt the authorities is in itself a tragedy, because it detracts from horror of other incidents.

Source Notes:
(1) “Russian Police Seize Computer of Murdered Journalist,” Deutsche Presse Agentur, 8 Oct 06 via Lexis-Nexis.
(2) “Former Space Forces Intelligence Officer On Spy Satellite Capabilities,” Komsomolskaya pravda, 15 Feb 07; BBC Monitoring via Lexis-Nexis.
(5) Ibid.
(6) “Man Who Ordered Politkovskaya Murder Is Outside Russia, Says Chief Prosecutor,” Channel One Worldwide (for Europe), Moscow, in Russian, 27 Aug 07; BBC Monitoring via Lexis-Nexis.
(7) Ibid.
(8) See The ISCIP Analyst, Volume XIII Number 5 (7 Dec 06)
(9) “I am Plotting A New Russian Revolution,” The Guardian, 13 April 07 via www.guardian.co.uk/russia/article/0,,2056321,00.html.
(10) “Arrest of FSB Officer Not Related to Politkovskaya Murder Probe,” ITAR-TASS, Moscow, in Russian, 30 Aug 07; OSC Transcribed Text via World News Connection.
(13) Ibid.
(14) “Russian Authorities May Have Used Nationalists To Organize Derailment—Pundit,” Ekho Moskvy Radio, Moscow, in Russian, 14 Aug 07; BBC Monitoring via Lexis-Nexis.
Russian Federation: Armed Forces

By Lt. Col. Carol Northrup

Cold War II?
On 8 August, a US military exercise off the Pacific Island of Guam ended in surprise when two Russian strategic bombers appeared on the horizon. The presence of Russian bombers during US and NATO exercises was common during the Cold War, but this is the first time Russian bombers have been seen so deep into the Pacific since 1992. (1) RAF and Norwegian Air Forces also have had to warn off long-range Russian aircraft (in the Atlantic) several times since July, including a formation of eight TU-95 “Bear” bombers (Russia’s equivalent of the US B-52) headed toward Britain on 7 September. (2) On 17 August, speaking to journalists during the Shanghai Cooperation Organization’s “Peace Mission 2007” exercises, President Vladimir Putin announced that “I have decided that Russian strategic bombers will resume regular strategic combat duty.” Putin noted that while Russia unilaterally had stopped strategic combat duty in 1992, “unfortunately not everyone followed our example.” (3) On 6 September, the Russian Defense Ministry announced that fourteen TU-95 “Bear” Bombers had re-commenced routine patrols over the Pacific, Atlantic and the Arctic. (4) These events are the latest in a string of dramatic announcements by the Kremlin apparently designed to demonstrate that the Russian Bear still has sharp claws.

In early August, Russian Navy Commander-in-Chief Navy Admiral of the Fleet Vladimir Masorin announced Russia’s intention to reestablish a permanent naval presence in the Mediterranean. (5) Though Masorin did not give a specific location, the former Soviet base of Tartus in Syria is the most likely candidate. Masorin also announced in July that the Navy plans to begin research and development of six new Kuznetsov-class aircraft carriers with construction to begin “sometime after 2015.” (6)
Meanwhile, Russian Defense spending has increased 22 percent and 27 percent respectively over the last 2 years (7) and plans have been announced to upgrade existing aircraft, (8) develop a new heavy bomber, (9) increase deployment of the TOPOL-M ICBM, (10) and expand the Far East Fleet. (11) Most recently, there was the unveiling of the “Father of all Bombs” on 12 September—a thermo-baric weapon, which the Russians claim is four times more powerful than the US Massive Ordinance Air Blast device nicknamed the “Mother of all Bombs.” (12) Has the Cold War snuck back? Should the US be dusting off old war plans and gearing up for Cold War II?

Not exactly. After fifteen years of neglect, overall Russian military capability is still well below Soviet-era levels—some analysts put it at less than 50 percent. (13) Russian strategic bombers are old, and the crews—both pilots and ground crews—are woefully underpaid and under-trained. According to Col. Gen. Zelin, Russian AF Chief of Staff, Russia hopes to get its pilots 50 hours of flight time this year (14). In contrast, USAF bomber pilots average 300 flying hours per year.

The aging Russian Navy has only one aircraft carrier in its inventory, and that vessel has never been truly operational. Russia has no shipyard big enough to build aircraft carriers and currently lacks the technology and engineering know-how to build a carrier with the size, range and lethality of US carriers. As for the “Father of all Bombs,” even if Russia does have a thermo-baric device of the size and proportions it claims, it is an unguided weapon with no stand-off capability and, therefore, presents a negligible strategic threat to any nation with even a rudimentary early warning/air defense capability. Despite increases in defense spending, Russia’s 2007/08 defense budget lags far behind that of the US, and the primary beneficiaries of newer or high-tech versions of Russian planes are overseas customers; the first buyer for the modernized MiG-29 fighter is Yemen and the second is Eritrea. (15)
This military “resurgence” can be attributed in part to Russia’s loudly voiced objection to US plans to put a missile defense system in Eastern Europe – Putin has promised an “asymmetric” response. Invoking Cold War practices reminds the world that the “energy superpower” also has nukes, and the ability to use them. In the larger picture, as Russia continues to drift toward autocracy, the Kremlin increasingly sees less value in cooperation with the West and more value in framing the US as Russia’s primary enemy. Frequent references to the Cold War invoke memories of the glory days of military might and international power for the Kremlin’s domestic audience and at the same time hint that those days may be returning. Putin’s ambitious eight-year, $189 billion, program to replace nearly half of Russia’s existing military hardware (16) attempts to mask very real problems with manpower shortages and training shortfalls in the military and helps divert attention from domestic social problems.

According to Russia’s leaders, the Russian people want a strong ruler and they want to be respected as a world power. The Kremlin is capitalizing on newfound oil wealth and the perception of a morally discredited America, bogged down in the Middle East, to tell the world that Russia is indeed an international power player. The threat of US military confrontation with Russia remains very low. The real concern is not the resurgence of Russia’s armed forces, but their overseas customers. Daily patrols by Russian bombers armed with training weapons (17) are unlikely to tip the strategic balance of power. Upgraded air defense systems in places like Iran or Syria, and fourth-generation aircraft and helicopters in Venezuela carry the potential for much bigger impact. That’s where the US should focus its concern.

Source Notes:
(2) “RAF Frightens off 8 Russian Bears; Biggest Threat Since Cold War,” The Mirror, 7 Sep 07 via Lexis-Nexis.


(6) “Aircraft Carriers Are To Be!” Krasnaya zvezda, 10 Jul 07 via Lexis-Nexis.

(7) “Moscow’s Military Build-up No Threat,” The Australian, 4 Sep 07 via Lexis-Nexis.


(9) “Russian Aircraft Maker Expects to Develop New Heavy Bomber in 6-7 Years,” BBC Monitoring (Interfax-AVN military news agency website, Moscow, in English 1220 GMT 10 Sep 07), 10 Sep 07 via Lexis-Nexis.


(13) “Should the West Brace for Russia’s Military Build-up?” The China Post, 31 Aug 07 via World News Connection.


(15) “Should the West Brace for Russia’s Military Build-up?” The China Post, 31 Aug 07 via World News Connection.

(16) Ibid.
Bush-Putin meeting in Sydney called unproductive
In a meeting described as unproductive in both Western and Russian media, US President George W. Bush and Russian President Vladimir Putin held bilateral talks for about an hour on Friday, September 7, ahead of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation summit taking place in Sydney, Australia. The meeting followed talks between US Secretary of State Condoleeza Rice and Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov that took place the previous day.

In a press statement following the meeting, Putin said that the presidents had discussed missile defense, Russia’s entry into the World Trade Organization, the Iranian nuclear crisis, US-Russian economic relations and environmental issues. (1) According to Australia’s News.Com.au, however, the meeting produced “no signs of progress” on the issue of US-Russian tensions over the American plan to install missile defense systems in Poland and the Czech Republic. (2) Meanwhile, both Gazeta.ru and Kommersant called the meeting an occasion to discuss fishing plans, in reference to Putin’s invitation for Bush to join him in a future fishing trip on one of Russia’s Siberian rivers. (3) Putin issued the invitation after thanking Bush for his hospitality at Kennebunkport, Maine—the last, highly-publicized meeting between the two presidents—and thus may have been intended to draw attention to that meeting, which similarly failed to produce
any concrete results, but was an opportunity for Putin to appear on equal terms with the American president.

On the issue of missile defense, Putin said, “We have noted that our experts are expected to meet shortly once again and to make a visit to Azerbaijan to the radar station Gabala. We thereby assert that our joint efforts continue in that direction.” (4) When asked to clarify, Presidential Aide Sergei Prikhodko explained that joint consultations of US and Russian experts are scheduled to begin on September 15. (5) These joint consultations evidently are an extension of the initiative that Putin proposed at the Kennebunkport meeting in July, calling for a joint detection and interception system based in Azerbaijan that Bush had described as “interesting,” but which did not change the American commitment to place the ABM sites in Poland and the Czech Republic. The fact that Putin continued to emphasize that proposal, rather than raise the issue of the main US missile defense plan, seems to indicate that, at this point, he was more interested in saying that “progress is being made” than in trying to influence the American position.

The ministerial meeting was described in even vaguer terms. According to Lavrov, he and Rice discussed “the most pressing issues of the day…in particular, the issue of regional security and strategic stability.” (6) He did not elaborate on what these issues were. One may speculate that based on the fact he emphasized regional security and stability, the focus of the talks was North Korea and its nuclear weapons program, although no mention was made of any Russian role vis à vis the Korean crisis.

The fact that no major breakthroughs occurred during the presidents' meeting does not mean that Russia’s participation in the summit was entirely meaningless or unproductive. A major component of the APEC summit was a meeting of foreign ministers and ministers of all the member states, for which the Russian delegation included Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov and Minister of Economic
Development and Trade German Gref. Some observers argue that it was this meeting that was the main focus of Russian diplomatic efforts at the summit. In a televised interview on Russia Today, political analyst Dmitri Kozyrev said that the main goal of the summit from Russia’s perspective was to advance the economic development of the Russian Far East, for which relations with APEC countries – particularly China, Japan, South Korea, Australia and the United States – is critical. (7) This idea is supported by a statement made by Lavrov, who put forth the idea of hosting the next APEC meeting in the city of Vladivostok, stressing that for Russia, the economic development of the Vladivostok region, and the Far East in general, is a top priority. (8) Whether or not there is a chance of that happening, the proposal itself may be a sign that Far Eastern development was, in fact, the main theme of Russian participation in the summit. If that is the case, then the summit did bring some concrete benefits for Russia, such as an agreement with Australia to purchase uranium over the next 30 years. Even if in pure economic terms nothing of great significance was achieved at the summit, the successful Australian deal and Russia’s proposal to host the next conference may be considered as a political success, in that Russia’s prestige as a significant and interested party in APEC, and thus as a major player on the world stage was elevated as a result.

According to Vasili Sergeev of Gazeta.ru, the most important achievements of the APEC summit for Russia and the US, respectively, were Bush’s historic offer to North Korea for a permanent peace settlement in exchange for suspension of its nuclear weapons program and Russia’s uranium deal with Australia. (9) Interestingly, neither subject was mentioned by Bush or Putin in the press conference following the meeting, meaning that if they discussed these issues, both had reasons not to publicize the fact. For Putin, recognizing the US diplomatic breakthrough in relations with North Korea would have been equivalent to independently praising a major American success. For Bush, on the other hand, mentioning the uranium deal would have put Australian Prime Minister John Howard in the spotlight for criticism, even though the Russian and
Australian sides both insist that the uranium is to be used for civilian purposes only, and the agreement specifically forbids the transfer of Australian uranium to Iran and Syria. While these are very different issues, they are very sensitive subjects for both sides: for Russia, its loss of influence over the negotiations on the Korean Peninsula (the American peace initiative having made Moscow’s role in the Party of Six largely irrelevant), and for the United States, its inability to exercise sufficient influence on Russia’s nuclear dealings – this time with a major ally.

It appears, then, that Russia failed to use the APEC summit in Sydney to make any significant changes in its relationship with the United States, but that nonetheless, Russian participation in the summit produced some benefits. At the very least, it established Russia’s status as an active player in the Asia-Pacific region, and resulted in at least one important agreement with another major APEC member state. As for Putin’s apparent lack of enthusiasm at the summit (he was described as looking “visibly grim” after the meeting), (10) the fact that the summit came only days before the reshuffling of the Russian government and the naming of Zubkov as prime minister is evidence that his mind simply may have been somewhere else. In that case, the lack of any breakthroughs may be summarized in two words describing the APEC summit for Putin: bad timing.

Source Notes:
Newly Independent States: Caucasus

By Robyn Angley

GEORGIA

Russian missile incident

On 6 August, an undetonated missile landed near Tsitelubani, a village under Georgian control in the separatist South Ossetian republic and located several miles from a Georgian radar base. Georgia claimed that the missile came from Russian planes that violated Georgian airspace; Russia denied the charges. Georgia sought to bring the situation to the attention of the international community. Soon, several investigative groups came to inspect the missile’s landing site. One group included representatives from the United States, Latvia, Lithuania and Sweden. A second was composed of experts from Great Britain, Estonia and Poland. The third group consisted primarily of Russian officials. OSCE Chairman-in-Office Miguel Angel Moratinos also appointed a special envoy, former foreign minister of Croatia Miomir Zuzul, to look into the matter.

After inspecting the available evidence, the two non-Russian investigative groups both concluded that the missile in question was an anti-radar Raduga Kh-58 fired
from an SU-24. Unsurprisingly, the Russian investigation did not support those claims.

The OSCE investigation, falling prey to the organization’s norm of consensus, failed to determine the source of the missile, but did propose preventative measures, including the appointment of a rapid reaction representative for the Caucasus, to ensure that future events could be promptly investigated. (1) In order to be approved, these measures would run up against Russia’s OSCE veto. However, the OSCE representative did seem to pride himself on maintaining open communication channels between Russia and Georgia throughout the conflict.

Due to the involvement of the international community, the Tsetelubani incident has overshadowed several other altercations, which have taken place in the intervening six weeks and have the potential to aggravate tensions between Russia and Georgia. On 22 August, Georgian forces fired on a plane over Upper Abkhazia, claiming that it had violated Georgia’s airspace. (2) Shota Utiashvili, an upper-level interior ministry official, stated that the plane was believed to be Russian, although he produced no evidence of this assertion. (3) Abkhazian authorities confirmed that a plane had crashed in the lower Kodori Gorge on the day in question, although, according to their statements, the aircraft “most likely” was Georgian. (4) Russian officials denied that the plane was Russian and, in keeping with the two countries’ established relation pattern since the Rose Revolution, accused Georgia of manufacturing provocations. (5) In the wake of the uproar over the Tsetelubani confrontation, neither country has seemed interested in pressing the Abkhazian airplane incident further.

A second noteworthy occurrence was Russian authorities’ interception of two men who they claimed were Islamic terrorists, as they attempted to cross into Russia’s Karachai-Cherkessia region from Georgia in early September. The two men were killed in a clash with Russian border guards. According to Russian
officials, one of the men, operating under the alias of Abubakar, was the leader of Islamic militants in Karachai-Cherkessia. (6) The Georgian border police declined to comment on the incident. (7) The clash follows Russia’s claims that Georgia is unable to control its own borders. Relations between Russia and Georgia have been particularly tense in the past over Georgia’s Pankisi Gorge, through which Russia alleges that Chechen separatists are able to enter Chechnya.

Neither Russia nor Georgia have made much fuss over the Abkhazian plane crash or the militants’ Karachai-Cherkessia border crossing, beyond exchanging the ritual accusations and denials. Instead, both have channeled their diplomatic efforts into affecting international opinion over the Tsitelubani missile skirmish.

**Military budget increases**

Georgia’s Defense Ministry budget is slated to receive its second increase of the year, according to recent parliamentary activity. The yearly budget is being raised from approximately $566 million in June to $769 million. (8) Initially, the defense budget for 2007 was $310 million. (9) The infusion of money for defense spending has been attributed to Georgia’s aspirations for NATO membership. However, it is possible that Tbilisi also aims to demonstrate that its efforts to reincorporate South Ossetia and Abkhazia are backed by an increasing military might.

The construction of military bases near the country’s breakaway regions also suggests that Georgia has its eye on more than just its admittance into NATO. Last year, Georgia opened a military base in Senaki, near Abkhazia. This year, a Georgian military base is scheduled to open in a few months in Gori, near Tskhinvali, the capital of separatist South Ossetia. The Gori base was built fairly rapidly, suggesting that it might be part of the state’s most recent push to bring that area back into the fold. The Georgian military also is training a 500-strong rapid reaction force to be stationed in Tbilisi.
Georgia’s troop strength is also on the rise. A recent proposal submitted to Parliament advocates increasing the army from 28,000 to 32,000 troops. (10) Officials explain that this increase is related to the number of Georgia’s troops in Iraq. In June, Georgia upped its troop commitment there from 850 to 2000; on 14 September, however, the Defense Ministry announced its intention to reduce its troop contribution to 300. (11) Currently, Georgia is the third largest contributor of manpower to the coalition, after the United States and Great Britain. Georgia’s troops patrol the Iraq-Iran border to interdict smuggled weapons and other contraband.

All told, the budgetary success of Georgia’s Defense Ministry may bode ill over the long haul for authorities in Tskhinvali and Sukhumi.

Source Notes:
(1) Jean-Christoph Peuch, “Georgian-Russian missile incident poses conflict-resolution challenge for OSCE,” Eurasianet, 10 Sep 07 via Lexis-Nexis.
(3) Ibid.
(5) Ibid.
(6) “Russian border guards kill 2 gunmen crossing from Georgia,” Associated Press, 5 Sep 07 via Lexis-Nexis.
(7) Ibid.
(9) M. Alkhazashvili, “Is a higher defense budget lifting Georgia closer to NATO?,” The Messenger, 7 Sep 07 via Georgian News Digest, 10 Sep 07.
Newly Independent States: Central Asia
By Monika Shepherd

UZBEKISTAN
Increased bread prices squeezing family budgets
Prices for staple goods such as flour, meat, bread, cooking oil, and gasoline have risen recently in Uzbekistan, causing shortages even in Tashkent and sparking a number of protest demonstrations in the Ferghana Valley (in the towns of Andijon, Namangan, and Ferghana, as well as in the village of Yangi-arab). (1) The price of bread increased 50-100% as flour imported from Kazakhstan doubled in price; since bread has become the dietary mainstay for poverty-stricken families, (2) the price increase puts a significant portion of Uzbekistan’s population at risk of going hungry. The protests over price hikes occurred just a few days after President Islom Karimov’s speech commemorating 16 years of Uzbek independence, during which he proudly declared that that his country had succeeded in achieving self-sufficiency in grain production and is not only able to meet domestic demands for grain but also exports grain to other CIS states, Afghanistan and Iran. (3)

In reality, Uzbekistan still imports grain from Kazakhstan, (which is the largest grain exporter in Central Asia) because Kazakh grain is of higher quality. Although Uzbek grain farmers enjoyed a larger than expected harvest this year (the average yield was 4.8 tons per hectare, exceeding both last year’s harvest and the target amount set for the 2007 harvest), the wheat is of poor quality and commercial bakers prefer to buy Kazakh wheat. An added problem is that in
order to meet government grain harvest targets, farmers must devote more and more of their acreage to sowing wheat, at the expense of other, more profitable crops. Uzbek farmers receive only 118 soms (approximately 10 US cents) per kilo of wheat from the state, in spite of the fact that the market price is at least five times as much. Should they try to sow other crops on their wheat fields, local law enforcement authorities step in to prevent and/or punish them. (4)

The rising cost of basic foodstuffs combined with an increase in the retail price of gasoline (5) could have a devastating effect on the population’s access to even the most basic staples. Poverty and malnutrition already pose serious problems in Uzbekistan: according to a recent UNDP National Human Development Report, the consumption of meat products was only 32% of the recommended level in 2005, while the consumption of bread and other products made from wheat flour was 1.6 times higher than normal. (6) Many families who cannot afford meat and other food products have come to rely on bread as their dietary mainstay; (7) for them, the increased cost of wheat could lead to starvation. Bread prices have increased from 200 soms per loaf (or round – traditional Uzbek bread is baked in large, flat rounds) at the beginning of August to today’s price of 400-500 soms; one kilo of flour now costs no less than 1,000-1,100 soms (1,273 = US$1); (8) meat has increased in price from roughly US$3.75 to nearly $6 per kilo. (9) The retail prices of gasoline and diesel fuel were raised 17-22% in early August for domestic supplies; gasoline imported from Russia and Kazakhstan costs twice as much. (10) Even fares on public transport have risen, by as much as 25%. (11)

At least one quarter of Uzbekistan’s households already live in poverty: A UN Household Budget Survey conducted in 2003 reported that 26.2% of Uzbekistan’s households were living at or below the poverty line (28.7% of these were in rural areas, 22% in urban areas), with malnutrition being one of the leading poverty indicators. (12) The average monthly salary in Uzbekistan is $70-$80, which is what a teacher or doctor might earn, and the minimum monthly
salary is $12. (13) The recent spate of price hikes could cut household buying power in half, plunging even more families into poverty. To make matters worse, the availability of food products also is shrinking, as many private vendors have responded to the price increases simply by shutting down their stores and kiosks. The Uzbek government itself is partially to blame for this trend by ordering private grocery sellers not to raise their bread prices – with the cost of wheat and flour skyrocketing, private bakers can no longer make a profit. (14) Increased fuel prices undoubtedly have caused the availability of other food products to shrink, especially in rural areas, where any goods not produced by the local state farms must be brought in by truck. This was a significant problem even during Soviet times, contributing to malnutrition and illness throughout rural Central Asia.

The rest of the Central Asian states are experiencing similar increases in bread prices, due to an upswing in the worldwide grain market that some reports attribute to a rising demand for grain supplies by the biofuel industry, (15) while others blame it on droughts and on the fact that the Kazakh government ceased subsidizing its wheat prices. (16) Whatever the reason for the price hikes, rather than trying to address the problem collectively, each Central Asia government is struggling to find its own solution, sometimes to the detriment of neighboring states. The State Anti-Monopoly Committee in the Kyrgyz city of Osh (located near the Uzbek border), apparently dissatisfied with the national government’s response to the crisis, decided to take matters into its own hands and banned all further export of wheat and flour by local traders to Uzbekistan. (17) In an effort to halt bread prices from spiraling even further, Kyrgyz Prime Minister Almazbek Atambaev ordered 2,000 tons of grain to be sold from state reserves at below market price, (18) but the crisis has yet to abate.

Uzbekistan, on the other hand, seems to be stuck between a rock and a hard place. The government has kept such tight control over the economy that most industries, including agriculture, remain very centralized and have provided little room for the creation of private enterprise. In fact, many government officials
seem to view private businesses as rivals that threaten the profit share of state-owned industries, reducing the amount of revenue available for graft. No business is too small to avoid being singled out for retribution by state authorities – a few weeks ago Uzbek Prime Minister Shavkat Mirziyoev ordered approximately twenty tax service and interior affairs ministry employees to confiscate meat products being sold by butchers at the Farhod Bazaar in Tashkent. The butchers’ safes were also opened and the equivalent (in local currency) of roughly US$500 was seized. The tax service personnel then paid the butchers 3,500 som (2.9 dollars) per kilo of confiscated meat (one kilo of mutton costs 6,000 som in the bazaar). According to Surat Ikromov, chairman of the Initiative Group of Independent Human Rights Activists of Uzbekistan, the purpose of the illegal raid on the butchers’ stalls was to force them to reduce their meat prices to 3,500 som per kilo, far below market price. Two of the butchers were arrested. (19)

Tactics such as these will serve only to stifle further the development of private enterprise in Uzbekistan, scaring off not only potential local entrepreneurs, but foreign businesses, as well. The recent price hikes clearly have illustrated the vulnerability of Uzbekistan’s economy and have brought enormous pressure to bear on an already heavily burdened population. Most of Uzbekistan’s citizens do not earn sufficient income in order to weather a rise in the cost of living and the government does not appear willing or able to create a social safety net for them to fall back on when times are hard. Foreign investment could help reinvigorate existing industries and create new opportunities for both large and small businesses, providing much needed new sources of income for the nation’s work force. If, on the other hand, President Karimov continues to administer his country as though it were a feudal fiefdom, the next round of price hikes may bring Uzbekistan’s economy dangerously close to collapse.

Source Notes:

(15) Ibid.


(17) “Kyrgyz Southern Town Bans Selling Flour To Uzbekistan,” 4 Sep 07, Kyrgyz Channel 5 TV; BBC Monitoring International Reports via Lexis-Nexis Academic Universe.

(18) “Kyrgyz premier orders selling grain from state reserves,” 5 Sep 07, ITAR-TASS via Lexis-Nexis Academic Universe.


Newly Independent States: Western Region

By Tammy Lynch

UKRAINE

The campaign that could change voting patterns....

On 30 September, Ukraine’s voters go to the polls for the fifth time in four years. This time, they will vote again for their parliament (Rada) after the convocation elected last year was dismissed by President Viktor Yushchenko. Three important factors in the current campaign are identifiable and will likely affect the vote: apathy, the use of American campaign consultants and a new battle for Eastern voters. In particular, while two of the country’s major blocs generally are focusing on historical regional strongholds, one is embarking on a potentially risky strategy designed to break through the East-West voting divisions that have plagued Ukraine since its independence 16 years ago.
Will voters go to the polls?

The campaign to date has been characterized by general disinterest. While pollsters are suggesting that upward of 65% of voters nationally still say they plan to cast their ballot, there is genuine concern among Ukraine’s biggest parties that this apathy could lead to a serious decrease in turnout. This is especially true for Prime Minister Viktor Yanukovych’s Party of Regions and the leading opposition Bloc of Yulia Tymoshenko (BYUT), both of which view turnout as key to their success on election day.

Yanukovych, in particular, appears worried about surveys that suggest supporters in his traditional Eastern and Southern strongholds will vote at lower rates than the supporters of other parties in the Central and Western regions. Speaking on a regional television station in Zaporizhya, the Prime Minister suggested that he has seen statistics that predict less than 60% of voters in the East and South will cast a ballot. “If this indeed will be the turnout,” he said, “then … it won't be necessary to blame anyone. … If the Ukrainian people want to have an orange government in power, it means, this is what we'll get, if this will be the turnout. If it [Ukraine] does not want this - it is necessary for everybody to get out and vote. September 30th – go to the elections. This is the main question for the country and the Ukrainian people.” (1)

However, judging by the lack of campaign energy in Kyiv, it is clear why Yanukovych is not the only politician who is worried. “If I have time,” said one man on Kyiv’s main Kreshchatik Boulevard, “I will vote for Yulia [Tymoshenko].” Then, with a shrug, he added, “It doesn’t really matter. They’re all the same. Well, maybe she’s a little bit better, but it doesn’t make a difference.” This opinion was echoed by numerous Kyivites around the city in informal conversations with this author. Seamstresses working in one of Kyiv’s tailoring shops, men standing in line at the central McDonald’s, women relaxing in a park, and waiters working at a restaurant on the outskirts of the city all said they would
vote “if I have time,” or “if I am near a polling station,” or simply “if I feel like it.” These are, of course, unscientific samples, but illustrative nonetheless. (2)

Both Yanukovych and Tymoshenko have tried to respond to this attitude with aggressive television and radio advertisements calling on Ukrainians to vote. Tymoshenko has introduced a new advertisement with a very direct message: “All politicians are not the same. Yulia is different.”

Since polls suggest that the race between the Party of Regions and Tymoshenko’s bloc is tightening, both leaders understand that the loss of even a few percentage points of support as the result of apathy could determine whether or not they will be able to form a governing coalition with their partners.

**Goodbye Russian spin doctors, hello Americans**

Recently, in the Washington Times, an opinion editorial appeared by Michael Caputo, whose byline on the piece noted that he is a “Miami writer” who “lived in Russia from 1994 to 1999 as an election adviser to Boris Yeltsin’s administration and was a media director of former President George H.W. Bush's 1992 re-election [campaign].” (3)

In actuality, Michael Caputo is a public relations specialist who has worked in the past with representatives of Davis, Manafort & Freeman, an American consulting company now working for Prime Minister Viktor Yanukovych. It is unclear why the Washington Times chose to allow Caputo to appear as an independent analyst; a quick Google search uncovers his profession and connections.

Caputo’s likely connection to the Party of Regions is further suggested by the tone of the piece, and by the use of – to put it nicely – alternative interpretations of events over the past two years. Listing the piece’s questionable interpretations would take too much time and space, but it is perhaps instructive that these interpretations relate only to the work of Yulia Tymoshenko, and that
they somehow always support Caputo’s call for voters to reject Tymoshenko’s campaign.

The Caputo piece serves primarily to spotlight the emergence of American political spin doctors in Ukraine. Davis, Manafort & Freeman first worked for Yanukovych during the 2006 parliamentary campaign, when they established a base in Kyiv to assist the campaign. Davis, Manafort and their allies have gradually replaced Russian spin doctors, who have become less important over the past year. “Strategies which could work well on Russian territory often did not work out in Ukraine,” wrote Irina Khmara in Nezavisimaya gazeta. (4)

Davis and Manafort, however, created a new Western-friendly public image for Yanukovych and the Party of Regions, which helped propel the party to a first place showing in 2006, and earned praise from Western corporations. However, this image has been undermined by recent government decisions instituting manual price controls in the gas and wheat sector, as well as major delays in passing WTO-related legislation. There are signs, therefore, that the strategy may not have the success in 2007 that it had previously.

American PR consultants are reportedly working also with President Viktor Yushchenko. According to Business Ukraine magazine, Washington lobbyist Sten Anderson now advises the president on media communications and has done so since the beginning of the year. Anderson’s influence is evident in Yushchenko’s new confident appearances before the media. There is no evidence, however, that Anderson is influencing the day-to-day campaign of Yushchenko’s Our Ukraine-People’s Self-Defense Bloc (OU-PSD). (5)

Lobbyist Ron Slimp of Washington, DC-based TD International also has been representing Yulia Tymoshenko and BYUT in the United States, since the beginning of the year. Slimp appears to be the only US representative of a Ukrainian politician officially registered under the Foreign Agents Registration Act
(FARA), which “requires persons acting as agents of foreign principals in a political or quasi-political capacity to make periodic public disclosure of their relationship with the foreign principal, as well as activities, receipts and disbursements in support of those activities.” (6) Tymoshenko has encouraged other DC lobbyists working for Ukrainians to comply with FARA, as required by the US State Department.

Slimp is based in the US and appears to focus solely on Tymoshenko’s outreach to US media and political representatives.

**A national party?**
Unlike in 2006, when significant focus was placed on Kyiv, today’s campaign is taking place largely outside the capital. Yushchenko and OU-PSD so far have spent considerable time campaigning in Western regions that were the president’s strongholds in 2004. Our Ukraine lost a fair amount of support in a number of Western regions to Yulia Tymoshenko in 2006 and now hopes to bring these regions back into the Our Ukraine stable.

At a 10,000 strong rally (named a “popular assembly”) in Lviv Oblast, Yushchenko praised all “democratic forces,” saying Our Ukraine and BYUT were working “shoulder to shoulder” against “betrayal.” But he asked voters to “support my team, Our Ukraine-People’s Self-Defense. As president and as a citizen, I am convinced I have the right to request you to do this, as they are the third force, patriotic and professional, which can effectively help me implement your plans.” (7)

Although Yanukovych immediately lashed out at Yushchenko for injecting himself into the parliamentary campaign, calling the action “unconstitutional,” it appears that technically Ukraine’s president is prohibited from being a member of a political party, but not from campaigning for it.
Unlike OU-PSD, the Party of Regions and BYUT are both, to different extents, attempting to attract voters in regions where previously they have found little support. This focus on territory that crosses established East-West and North-South voting patterns is new and could signal a shift in voter allegiances.

The Party of Regions is concentrating largely on its Eastern base, but also has shown a significant increase in campaign activity in the capital and surrounding towns, which have been “orange” strongholds. Party leaders suggest that voters in this area are unhappy with President Yushchenko and the orange forces, and are working to convince these voters to support Yanukovych. Party of Regions billboards predominate in Kyiv (BYUT complains that many of its billboards have been summarily removed), with the party’s campaign booths clearly outpacing those of BYUT and OU-PSD. At a large BYUT rally in Bila Tserkva (Kyiv Oblast), the Party of Regions held a small, but significant demonstration nearby.

In the Central region, which appears to be both the most apathetic and the most politically savvy, it is unclear the extent to which this campaign by the Party of Regions can work. It demonstrates, however, the desire of the Party of Regions to position itself as more of a “mainstream,” center party.

In an interview on 12 September, Tymoshenko confirmed that her bloc had decided to use the majority of its resources to try to break through in the East and the South of the country, which historically have been Yanukovych strongholds. “After a year and a half of the current Yanukovych government, there are significant numbers of voters in eastern and southern Ukraine who are disappointed,” she said, “which is why we are focusing two thirds of our entire campaign time in the region.” The BYUT leader suggested that, for the first time, ideological differences of language and foreign policy in the East have been overtaken by concerns about the standard of living. This, she said, has provided an opportunity to compete for Eastern votes. (8)
So far, although Tymoshenko’s Eastern and Southern rallies have gained far more participants than in 2006, surveys still indicate that old voting patterns will prevail. Valeriy Khmelko, president of the respected Kyiv International Institute of Sociology told the Kyiv Post that in the eight westernmost regions of the country, (22 percent of all voters), Orange support is eight times higher than that for the Party of Regions. Meanwhile, voters in the three easternmost regions (also 22 percent of voters) are eight times more likely to vote for Yanukovych’s party. (9)

Apparently because of this remaining polarization in the extreme Eastern and Western regions, Tymoshenko has chosen to concentrate not on the far Eastern Luhansk and Donetsk (Yanukovych’s home oblast) regions, but on those Eastern regions considered to border the “center.”

She has held over 50 events in that “border” area, including Dnipropetrovsk, Kirovohrad, Kherson, and Zaporizhya, and has also focused on Kharkiv, which borders Russia, but boasts some of the country’s most active student groups. At an early September rally in Kharkiv, BYUT claimed 55,000 in attendance. Although local officials suggested the number was 20,000, the turnout was significantly higher than at any previous Eastern rally. (10) Two separate polling firms found that in Kharkiv, BYUT’s rating had increased by at least 5 percent in the last several months. (11)

All of this activity has led observers to suggest that 2007 may be the year when Ukraine’s parties begin to break down the regional voter division that has plagued the country since its independence – or perhaps the year when the country sees its first national party. To do so, political leaders will have to overcome apathy and growing cynicism. If this occurs, Ukraine will have taken one more step toward consolidating its democracy.

Source Notes:
(1) Zaporizhya TV, 13 Sep 07 via ForeignNotes.blogspot.com.
(2) Interviews, Kyiv, 5 Sep-16 Sep 07.
(4) “A million dollars for Manafort. Americans replace Russian spin doctors in Ukraine,” Nezavisimaya gazeta, 22 Aug 07, p. 6; BBC Monitoring, 30 Aug 07 via Action Ukraine Monitoring Service for the Action Ukraine Report (AUR); An e-mailed request for comment from Caputo received no response over several days.
(8) Interview with Tymoshenko, 12 Sep 07, Bila Tserkva, Kyiv Oblast, Ukraine. See also “Yulia Marches East: The Eastern Front,” Business Ukraine, 17 Sep 07.
(9) “Polarization High, Voter Turnout Critical,” Kyiv Post, 12 Sep 07.
(10) For more specifics about Tymoshenko’s Eastern rallies, see “Yulia Marches East: The Eastern Front,” Business Ukraine, 17 Sep 07.
(11) Ibid.

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