By hook or by crook

After the new and old State Drug Control Agency (FSKN)/Committee (GAK) Chief, Viktor Cherkesov, let slip his take on the role of the chekisty in propping up the Russian state as the Soviet Union collapsed and publicly bemoaned the current infighting, it has become clear that some game is afoot in the Kremlin – it might not be a race for succession, but it certainly is a contest among the apparatchiki. Putin's response has been clear...Cherkesov received a promotion that was no promotion, but the appearance of parity with the FSB Chief (for more on this issue, please see RF Security Services below), and a public rebuke that was both mild and a warning of the potential for worse to come.

Putin's response to Cherkesov's comments was pointed: "It is wrong to bring these kinds of problems to the media. When someone behaves that way and ... claims that a war among security agencies [is going on], he should, first of all, be spotless." (1)

However, it seems that Putin orchestrated events that led to the public outburst. Shockingly, the core of the battle is money, tinged with corruption and, of course, control of the investigations into the corrupt practices. It has been noted here that Putin had embarked on a path of creating duplicative institutions—dueling organizations for investigating corruption—likely as a means of stifling opportunistic ambition as his presidency entered its lame duck phase.
The surprise of this autumn for Putin well may be that his maneuvers to preserve his status and retain authority in 2008 and beyond have, in fact, created the seismic shifts that will topple his carefully constructed regime.

In the case of the FSB vs. FSKN (now GAK), an investigation into the Tri Kita furniture case allegedly led to the door of FSB chief Patrushev, who is supported within the administration by Kremlin Deputy Chief (and siloviki clan leader) Igor Sechin, as well as Cadres Chief Viktor Ivanov. When Cherkesov re-launched the investigation, the dismissal of "several FSB generals" was imminent. Putin invited Viktor Ivanov into his meeting with Cherkesov, and reportedly arranged for Cherkesov to run into Sechin on his way out of the office. (2) During the meeting, Putin requested a decree be drafted on the resignation of the generals, but it never surfaced, and the Tri Kita investigation eventually was shuffled away from Cherkesov's (and Prosecutor-General Yuri Chaika's) purview. (Chaika's battle with former Prosecutor-General and current Justice Minister Vladimir Ustinov reflects, only in part, the Kremlin clan warfare; it also has its own personal elements.)

When turnabout came for Cherkesov and his FSKN deputies were about to be arrested, Cherkesov reportedly appealed directly to Putin, but was rebuffed. His Kommersant article apparently reflects his inability to keep his people safeguarded from the institutional muck in which he has waded successfully until now. (3) The impending arrests of FSKN officials, including Aleksandr Bulbov, clearly were anticipated by Cherkesov, as they traveled accompanied by FSKN guards, who nearly fired upon the arresting officers (from both the FSB and the Investigation Committee) when confronted at Domodedovo Airport. (4) [For more on this issue, please refer to the RF Security Services section below.]

The incident carries an echo of the tumult of the Yel'tsin era, when Aleksandr Korzhakov's presidential security forces confronted a faction of the security services (then known as FSK) over the actions and influence of oligarch Vladimir
Gusinsky. Episodes like Korzhakov's "Goosehunting" were supposed to be relics of the past in Putin's Russia, but, with the instability unleashed by Putin's recent political surprises, chaos seems to stalk Russian politics.

Given the lack of institutional stability (and the absence of any viable mechanism for succession), Putin needs to keep his potential successors off kilter in order to prevent the loss of his own authority before any succession (real or virtual) takes place. However, it has become increasingly evident that the replacement of Prime Minister Mikhail Fradkov with Viktor Zubkov (the creator of Russia's "financial intelligence" service), followed by Putin's decision not only to head United Russia, but quite possibly to head the legislative branch of the Russian government as well, created greater shock than anticipated.

While debate over Putin's plan to redistribute authority between the executive and legislative branch followed hard on the heels of his announcement, President Putin eventually had to address concerns about changing the constitutional structure of the Russian Government: "We don't have two centres, we have one decision-making centre – the president, and the parliament, of course. As for the government, under the provisions of the Constitution it is the executive branch’s main body. I do not think it would right to either take any of the government’s rights, prerogatives and obligations from it, or to burden it with new ones. We certainly do not need to create two centres of power within the executive branch. I am not in favour of curtailing the president’s powers. We simply need to ensure more effective interaction between the executive, judicial and legislative branches of power." (5)

While previous analysis of President Putin's administration and his process of decision-making has focused on the circles or clans of advisers around him (see previous issue, The ISCIP Analyst, Executive Branch), it is increasingly obvious that Putin holds some decisions very close to the vest. It seems clear that many were caught off guard by Putin's recent moves; it is possible his advisers and
aides are more influential with mid-level decisions than strategic plans. According to a Moskovskii komsomolets report, "Presidential Aide Viktor Ivanov...is able to influence low-priority appointments, but nothing more. ... Even political heavyweights like Igor Sechin and Kremlin administration director Sergei Sobyanin often get no advance warning at all about Putin's appointment and dismissal pirouettes." (6)

**Putin's stake in elections**

While debate continues over the role Putin will play in 2008 and beyond (his influence clearly still will remain substantial, but from exactly which seat he will exercise power becomes more difficult to discern with each passing story of apparatchik unrest), he has lent his name to the electoral platform and program of United Russia for the parliamentary elections in December.

The decision to constrain the quantity of OSCE observers (discussed in Domestic Issues, below) is worrisome and seems unnecessary. Recent allegations by an opposition leader and onetime Kremlin insider are even more troubling. According to Boris Nemtsov, political council member of the Union of Right Forces (SPS), "as the Duma election approaches, the preparation for falsifying its results is in full swing." (7)

"At the local level, officials have already received quotas stating where and how much [the] United Russia party should get. Somewhere it is 69 percent, while somewhere else it is [a] complete 100 percent. Governors lean over backwards to secure the required result." (8)

As for the possibility of mounting an effective opposition party in Putin's Russia, Nemtsov confirms growing concerns: "There have been created the conditions in Russia making it extremely dangerous to finance the opposition. For businessmen, the fact became evident after Khodorkovsky's arrest. The United
Russia is the only party in which it is safe to invest, and the investments will be good for business." (9)

Perhaps the investments will be good for business, but only for as long as Putin can maintain both his authority as the head of state and parity among his grasping chekisty Kremlin clans. His proposal to lead Russia from the parliament would buck a long historical trend; perhaps he has come to realize the difficulties posed by that task.

Source Notes:
(1) "In Turf War, Putin Scolds Ally and Gives Him a Job," Moscow Times, 22 Oct 07 via Lexis-Nexis.
(2) "The Hook," by Mikhail Fishman and Aleksandr Raskin, Newsweek Russia, No. 42, 15-21 Oct 07; What the Papers Say (WPS) via Lexis-Nexis Academic.
(3) Ibid.
(6) "Everything decided at the top," by Mikhail Rostovsky, Moskovskii komsomolets, No. 242, 25 Oct 07, p. 4; WPS via Lexis-Nexis Academic.
(7) "Russia in need of Democracy," by Boris Nemtsov, Kommersant, 1 Nov 07 via Johnson's Russia List (JRL), 2007-#227, 1 Nov 07.
(8) Ibid.
(9) Ibid.

Russian Federation: Domestic Issues and Legislative Branch
By Creeleia Henderson
State Duma elections: Russia answers to no nation

Vladimir Y. Churov is a former member of the Russian State Duma who was chosen as Chairman of the Central Election Commission in March of this year after his predecessor, Aleksandr A. Veshnyakov, was ousted for criticizing a new set of laws regulating parliamentary elections. (1) A wily, garrulous man, Churov is an unlikely choice for arbiter of Russia’s upcoming elections – he does not have the legal background thought necessary to parse the subtleties of election legislation, (2) and he is known to be partial to monarchy despite its lack of a sophisticated electoral system. (3) However, even as his credentials were sniffed at on the pages of Kommersant, Russia’s leading business daily, (4) Churov held fast to his policy of unstinting, unabashed personal loyalty to President Vladimir Putin. That loyalty has proven to be a sufficient qualification for many of Russia’s top offices and so it was with Churov, now a veritable kingmaker. He will be overseeing a massive power transfer in the State Duma on December 2 and in the Kremlin itself next March.

One may well ask whether Churov is the right man for the job. Up to a point, the job can be altered to suit the man, and was—in January of this year, Putin passed an amendment to the election code allowing people without higher education in law to serve on the Commission (5)—but no amount of tailoring will change the democratic principle underlying free elections, and to this principle Churov has shown himself to be indifferent.

Last April, just two weeks after he had taken over operations at the CEC and sent a premonitory rumble through the headquarters of Russia’s political parties, where the arrival of campaign season was first sensed, Churov granted his first official interview to Kommersant. (6) Although the newspaper had cast doubt on his qualifications prior to his appointment, on the day of the interview Churov was in high spirits.
“Churov’s first law is Putin is always right!” he told the interviewer, waggishly reiterating a phrase for which he had become infamous.

As was to be expected, the interviewer pressed Churov about his belief in Putin’s infallibility, pointing out that he could not serve both the president and the electorate simultaneously in his capacity as head of Russia’s elections. “And if Putin is not right, what then?” he asked.

“Could Putin really be wrong?” Churov replied, ingenuously.

“But what if you have that horrible realization: Putin is not right?” continued the journalist.

“That would mean that Churov misunderstood something. And must simply think it over some more,” laughed the Chairman of the CEC.

Now that he is charged with impartially administering the country’s elections, the slavish loyalty that won Churov his post has become a diplomatic liability. His first trial in office has come in the form of a standoff between the Kremlin and the OSCE over the work of international election observers. With a five week countdown to State Duma elections, observer organizations still have not received an official invitation to attend the polls. (7) Although Russian law empowers the CEC to issue international invitations, (8) Churov evidently has opted not to act on the initiative of his office, but to hand over that decision to the Kremlin, instead. His lapse already has set off an alarm in Vienna, where the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe and its Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights are headquartered, and where plans for a pre-election visit to Russia to determine the size and nature of the OSCE’s impending election observation mission have been shelved for want of sufficient time in the lead-up to December elections. In past years, the OSCE had deployed long-term election monitors at least six weeks prior to the day of
“We are fast approaching the point when it becomes difficult for us to do our job properly,” said an OSCE spokesperson.

Churov, himself a former delegate to OSCE election observation missions, admits that international election monitoring is a useful tool to ensure accountability, although a story in the Russian press quoted him likening election observers to wolves terrorizing sheep that have gathered to vote. In a recent statement he insisted that “Russia attaches great importance to the publicity and transparency of the electoral process.” Yet even as he sought to reassure the international community that he would act in good faith by admitting observers to forthcoming elections, his message was transmuted into a petulant assertion of Russian national autonomy by Aleksei Borodavkin, Russian envoy at the OSCE, who was quoted as saying, “as for our elections, we are completely fulfilling our obligations. They are that we should invite international observers. Period.”

It would appear that Borodavkin has been cast to act out the role of schoolyard bully in a charade choreographed by the Kremlin to head off OSCE election monitoring activities before the start of election season in Russia. A confidential brief, undersigned by Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Russia, spells out the bloc’s strident platform of non-interference for the remaining 48 member countries of the OSCE. The brief, leaked to the New York Times on October 25, contains a list of ten “Basic Principles for the Organization of ODIHR Observation of National Elections,” each of which imposes some limit on the capacity of the OSCE to monitor elections in the former Soviet republics. The proposals are stark, their impact far from trivial: the number of observers in a mission would be reduced from 450 dispatched for State Duma elections in 2004 to no more than 50; all personnel would have to be approved by the government of the host state; and monitors’ reports would be delivered to the government of the host state only after the official results of the election are made public. This is to be followed by the submission of the report to
the Permanent Council of the OSCE, where its publication may be blocked by any one of the organization’s 55 member states. If adopted by the OSCE, the proposals put forward by the Kremlin would nullify the core mandate of the premiere election monitoring institution and render its subsequent findings utterly irrelevant.

What would Russia gain from that? Slack election standards? Free-for-all fraud at the polls? But what need does the Russian government have of electoral chicanery, with Putin’s approval rating fixed at around 80 percent, and United Russia forecast to pull in a comfortable 70 percent of seats in the State Duma?

A credible argument can be made for a grudge left smoldering years after the Orange Revolution contracted Russia’s sphere of influence, a catastrophe for which the OSCE is commonly held responsible. By exacting revenge on the OSCE, the Kremlin would gain the double satisfaction of seeing a powerful international organization wobble, and depriving troublesome opposition movements of an important ally.

The likeliest explanation for the Kremlin’s grandiose show of thumbing its nose at international election observers may be the most prosaic. It is the principle that Churov was chosen as captain of Russian elections to illuminate: Russia is accountable to no nation, no geo-political institution, nor any high-minded international community, but only to Putin.

Source Notes:
Russian Federation: Security Services

By Fabian Adami

Two arrests in train bombing
Six weeks ago, a passenger train en route between Moscow and St. Petersburg was derailed by an explosion. Although there were no fatalities, 60 persons were injured. The initial investigation showed that the bomb was positioned 100 feet ahead of a bridge that the train was about to cross and amounted to some 4lb of TNT. As such, the blast may have been mistimed: had the bomb exploded seconds later, the train would have fallen off the bridge, causing heavy casualties. (1)

Within hours of the explosion, authorities claimed that the design of the bomb was similar to the one that used to bomb a train in Grozny in 2005, and that security images from the scene were being used to create composite images of the apparent perpetrators. (2) The attempt to link the attack to the conflict in the Caucasus continued, with FSB Director Nikolai Patrushev insisting that Chechen separatists were responsible and arguing that terrorism in Russia had not yet been “eliminated.” (3)

The timing of the latest (apparent) terror incident did not go unnoticed in the media. Gazeta columnist Yulia Latynina claimed that the bombing might have been carried out by proxy nationalist forces in an attempt to “persuade” President Vladimir Putin to stay for a third term in office. (4) Clearly, Latynina was attempting to draw parallels between the 1999 Moscow apartment bombings and Putin’s ascent to the presidency with this incident.
On October 24, law-enforcement authorities apparently achieved a breakthrough in the case. Working in concert with local police, FSB officers swooped in on a village (Ekazhevo) in Ingushetia, where they arrested Markham & Maksharip Kidiryev, brothers aged 29 and 30, respectively. The two were moved to Moscow for interrogation the same day. According to a statement made by Interior Minister Rashid Nurgaliyev—apparently acting as the administration’s spokesman in this case—the authorities possess “circumstantial evidence that is very compelling” and “very interesting” information tying the brothers to the bombing. (5) As yet, Nurgaliyev has not revealed what constitutes this evidence, or whether the detainees match the aforementioned composites.

The fact that these arrests appear to have been carried out on the strength of circumstantial evidence alone speaks to the absence of a true judicial process of law, and the lack of “presumption of innocence” in Russia. At this point in time, there is no reason to trust that the arrests are anything but a political game designed to show that the Kremlin is tough on security, and to convince the population that “national security” demands a vote for the status quo in December’s polls.

**Litvinenko case moves forward? Or not!**
During the last six months, the investigation into the assassination of Alexandr Litvinenko has been in a stalemate. Late in May 2007, British authorities officially requested the extradition of former KGB officer Andrei Lugovoi from Russia, stating that enough evidence had been gathered to charge him with murder.

Russia’s response came through Prosecutor General Yuri Chaika, who published a letter to the British Home Office, arguing that due to Russia’s Constitution, it was “not possible to satisfy the request of the British Home Office.” Moreover, authorities intimated that Lugovoi would be extradited only if Whitehall were to accede to the extradition of Boris Berezovsky. (6)
Relations between Britain and Russia deteriorated into “tit-for tat” with some rapidity: Britain expelled four diplomats from the Russian mission in London, with the intent of sending a “clear and proportionate signal” to Moscow, and the Kremlin reacted in turn by expelling four British officials. (7)

In the last ten days, British authorities seem to have made a renewed attempt to move their investigation forward. According to Interfax, the Crown Prosecution Service has asked Russian authorities to take “more investigative actions…in relation to Russian businessman and parliamentary candidate Andrei Lugovoi.” (8) This investigative action involves “legal assistance needed to secure some evidence” of Lugovoi’s complicity in Litvinenko’s murder. (9)

Prosecutor General Yuri Chaika’s office confirmed that the British request had been received. Not surprisingly, the response has been to accuse British authorities of non-cooperation, in particular of preventing Russian investigators from meeting with “the doctors who treated Litvinenko…and who autopsied the deceased.” Moreover, Russia has received no “legal assistance” in the criminal case into the attempt “at the life of Dmitri Kovtun,” as is “prescribed by the 1959 European Convention on Mutual Assistance in Criminal Matters.” (10)

Andrei Lugovoi, who is the prime suspect for British authorities, has stated that British requests for Russian cooperation are little more than acts of “provocation,” and that the rumor (denied by Ambassador Tony Brenton) that British Officers were arriving to question him was another act of “provocation.” (11)

The British request to Chaika’s office apparently has not included a repeat extradition request. Reports thus far indicate that it is simply a request for assistance in resolving the case. As such, the British tactic may be one of lowering the level of confrontation and of attempting a new line, in order to move forward in the case. If this assumption is correct, the Kremlin clearly is not
reciprocating, and Britain’s efforts will come to naught. At this point, it is highly
doubtful—at best—that Litvinenko’s killer ever will be brought to justice.

**Putin & Cherkesov: Making peace?**

Early last month, FSB agents arrested three top-level officers in Gosnarkontrol,
Russia’s Drug Control Agency. Lieutenant General Aleksandr Bulbov, Yuri Geval
and Major Sergei Donchenko, all senior deputies to Viktor Cherkesov, the
agencies’ chief, were charged with a number of offenses, including abuse of
office, extortion, and illegal wire-tapping.

Cherkesov’s response to the detention of his deputies was to appeal directly to
the courts for their release and to send an open letter to Kommersant Daily.
Cherkesov’s letter argued that the arrests were a symptom of internecine
struggle between the Security Services and that if the struggle continued, the
network of former Chekists running Russia would lose its power. (12)

President Putin’s reaction to Cherkesov’s article has been two-fold. Speaking to
Kommersant, he scolded the GSK Chief, stating: “If I was in the shoes of the
people who are trying to protect the honor of their uniform, I would not throw out
accusations left and right, especially not through the media. If someone is
behaving in this way, making these sorts of accusations about a war among the
secret services, that person himself must be beyond reproach.” (13)

A day after his interview, Putin announced the creation of a new State Committee
dedicated to fighting the narcotics trade (GAK), and named Cherkesov as its
head. (14) The decree published on the Kremlin website indicates that the
Committee will meet at least every two months, and that its role will be to
“coordinate the work of regional committees,” which are led by the Governors.
(15)
The committee, following the “road for which the Anti-Terrorism Committee
paved the way…must include the leaders of the MVD, and the FSB…the Heads
of the Customs and Migration Service,” and every other Security Agency. (16) Attendance at meetings apparently is prescribed by law for all the Committee’s members.

At first glance, it would appear that Putin has buoyed Cherkesov and put him on an equal footing with Patrushev, who chairs the National Anti-Terrorist Committee (NAK), which has a similar composition. One key difference between the NAK and the new Committee is that the Drugs group does not have an operations staff to “organize planning of the utilization of manpower and resources.” Ergo, the committee apparently has no operational teeth. (17)

The fact that the GAK has no real power of execution demonstrates that Cherkesov’s appointment is not a promotion. Instead, the committee’s creation and Cherkesov’s appointment probably constitute nothing more than a move to mollify the GSK Chief and silence talk of a “Chekist War.” Putin’s plans for the future mean that probably he cannot afford to worry about such a war, while he is preparing his plans for the premiership and the presidential succession.

Source Notes:
(2) Ibid.
(3) See The ISCIP Analyst, Volume XIV, Number 1 (20 Sept 07).
(4) “Russian Authorities May Have Used Nationalists To Organize Derailment—Pundit,” Ekho Moskvy Radio, Moscow, in Russian, 14 Aug 07; BBC Monitoring via Lexis-Nexis.
(7) Ibid.


(10) “New Request From British Investigators Under Litvinenko Case Received—Prosecutor’s Office,” Interfax, 23 Oct 07; OSC Transcribed Text via World News Connection.


(15) Ibid.


(17) Ibid.

Russian Federation: Armed Forces

By Lt. Col. Carol Northrup

Grandiose plans and domestic snafus
Tough talk from the Kremlin once again has the world speculating about a renewed arms race. On 18 October, President Putin reached out to Russia’s men in uniform assuring them that the government would take care of their needs. (1) At the same time he again appeared to be asserting Russia’s role as a power player on the international stage, when he announced “grandiose” plans for the Russian armed forces. During his annual televised question-and-answer session with Russian citizens, Putin outlined an immense ten-year modernization program for the armed forces saying, “We will develop missile technology, including completely new strategic complexes … our plans are not simply considerable, but grandiose. At the same time they are absolutely realistic. Our armed forces will be more compact but more effective and better able ensure the defense of Russia.” (2)

Putin did not specify what kind of “completely new” strategic weapons Russia was developing, but he stressed that they will be above and beyond the new TOPOL systems currently being tested. (3) Earlier in the day, Russia test-fired an RS-12 TOPOL (NATO reporting name SS-25) to assess the probability of extending its service life from 10 years to 21 years. (4) Putin asserted that modernization will not be limited only to land-based ballistic missiles, but that Russia will pay “significant” attention to the entire nuclear triad: Strategic Missile Troops, Strategic Aviation and nuclear submarines. (5) Commenting on the development of the Russian Navy, Putin claimed that the building of a new class of nuclear-powered submarines (called the “Yuri Dolgoruky”) will be completed this year. (6) He also noted that current construction of two submarines would continue and that the Russian Navy has plans to lay the keel of another strategic submarine in 2008. (7)

President Putin stated that modernization and upgrade plans also would extend beyond the strategic nuclear forces. He reminded citizens that the Russian Air Force already has begun adopting small numbers of the new SU-34 fighter-bomber, which he called the best assault planes in the world, (8) and detailed
plans for the commissioning of a much-delayed fifth generation fighter in 2012 as part of a rearmament plan that will be completed by 2015. (9) According to Putin, precision weapons will receive special attention. Testing of “high-accuracy armaments” will continue (10) and the TU-160 bombers from which they are launched will be upgraded along with the elderly TU-95 strategic bomber systems. (11) Reconnaissance, communications, and electronic facilities also were mentioned, as was the phasing in of the new Iskander-M intermediate-range cruise missile. (12)

Meanwhile, Russian arms exports are hitting record highs. Though it still lags far behind the US in world-wide sales, Russia ended 2006 as the number two arms exporter in the world with 21.6 percent of the market. (13) State arms export monopoly Rosoboroneksport estimated earlier this month that it will sell over $6.5 billion in weapons, spare parts and services this year, up from $6.1 billion last year (14) and has contracts for $22 billion over the next three to five years. (15) According to Rosoboroneksport General Director Sergei Chemezov, Russia has plans to supply 50 Sukhoi jets this year to Malaysia, Venezuela, Algeria, and India. (16) Air Defense systems will go to the United Arab Emirates, Syria and other Arab countries, and possibly to China. (17) India and Indonesia are in negotiations for submarines. Business is so good, in fact, that Rosoboroneksport says they can’t handle a sharp increase (18) in production.

On the other hand, Russia’s own Armed Forces seem to be living off the leftovers. According to Komsomolskaya pravda, the Russian Air Force was scheduled to take delivery of nine new fighter jets this year, but they have received only three; the Army was promised 91 tanks, but to date has received only 31. (19) Though a new State Armaments Program for 2007-2015 was adopted in 2006, with $160 billion going to the Defense Ministry, wrangling over prices and payment procedures has held up production and delivery of hardware. (20) The bottom line is that Rosoboroneksport can get more money for the same product with less red tape by selling to foreigners, and it prefers to do so.
President Putin counts Russia’s renewed military muscle as one of the major achievements of his presidency, (21) and the flexing of that muscle has received much attention in recent months. Renewed long-range strategic bomber patrols, threats to target European countries in retribution for US radar systems and missiles in Eastern Europe and repeated rhetoric about new and improved nuclear weapons has sparked fears of another Cold War. (See The ISCIIP Analyst, 19 Sep 07.)

Russian rhetoric, however, should not be mistaken for reality. The Russian military is currently only 25-50 percent the size of its Soviet predecessor. (22) Military reform has been promised for two decades, and the chief of the general staff admitted recently that it will likely go on indefinitely. (23) Troop readiness, training, and recruitment remain major problems, (See The ISCIIP Analyst, 15 Oct 07) and after nearly two decades on a starvation diet, the Russian defense industry is not willing or able to subsidize government orders. Recent attention and focus on the military likely will lead to an increase in capability for the Russian armed forces, and any discussion of a new nuclear capability is certainly cause for international scrutiny. But, Russia is a long way from becoming a peer competitor to the US military. Putin’s plans to get there by 2015 are indeed grandiose, but they are not realistic.

Source Notes:
(3) “Putin Says Russia Has “Grandiose” Military Build-up Plans,” RTR Rossiya, Moscow, in Russian; BBC Monitoring, 18 Oct 07 via Lexis-Nexis.
(6) “Russia to Have Another Nuclear Submarine, New Fighter Jet,” TASS, 18 Oct 07 via Lexis-Nexis.
(7) Ibid.
(8) Ibid.
(10) “Russia to Have Another Nuclear Submarine, New Fighter Jet,” TASS, 18 Oct 07 via Lexis-Nexis.
(15) “Russia has Weapons Export Contracts Worth 22BN Dollars – Arms Trader,” RIA Novosti, Moscow, in Russian; BBC Monitoring, 9 Oct 07 via Lexis-Nexis.
(17) Ibid.
(18) “Russia has Weapons Export Contracts Worth 22BN Dollars – Arms Trader,” RIA Novosti, Moscow, in Russian; BBC Monitoring, 9 Oct 07 via Lexis-Nexis.
(19) “We’ve Got the Money – But Where are the Tanks?” Komsomolskaya pravda, 17 Oct 07 via Johnson’s Russia List #218, 18 Oct 07.
(20) Ibid.
(23) “Russia’s Doing Great. Or Is It?” Ibid.

The thoughts and opinions expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the official position of the United States Air Force, Department of Defense, or the United States government.

Russian Federation: Foreign Relations
By Melissa McGann

Missile defense system: A bargaining chip?
On 23 October during a visit to Prague, US Defense Secretary Robert Gates publicized a proposal to postpone activation of the US missile defense sites in Eastern Europe, if Russia in return pressures Iran to halt its nuclear program. In January 2007, plans for the US missile defense system officially were announced to include the installation of missile interceptors in Poland and linked to a missile tracking system in the Czech Republic. (1) Russia continues to express concerns that the missile defense system will be used to target Russian intercontinental ballistic missiles, rather than its stated purpose to defend against missile attacks by “rogue states,” such as Iran and North Korea. (2) During a recent press conference in Brussels, US Assistant Secretary of State for Euro-Asian Affairs Daniel Fried reiterated that the missile defense shield is intended to defend against impending threats from Iran, and its activation would be postponed if Iran was no longer determined to be a threat. (3) As reported by US Defense Department spokesman Geoff Morrell, “It is our intention to proceed with the construction of missile defense in Europe, but the pace at which it becomes operational could be adjusted to meet the threat.” (4) The US proposal appears
to signal a shift in its approach by attempting to appease Russia’s stated concerns over the US missile defense shield and gain Russian cooperation in pressuring Iran to stop its nuclear ambitions.

On 12 October, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov and Defense Minister Anatoli Serdyukov met with US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and Defense Secretary Robert Gates in Moscow with the stated agenda of reaching an agreement on plans for the missile defense system. After a forty-minute wait for President Putin, Rice and Gates introduced new proposals of cooperation with Russia on the missile defense system, although Putin expressed his continuing doubts at the outset of the meetings, and Russia still adamantly is opposed to US plans for moving forward in Eastern Europe. (5) These talks failed to bolster cooperation between the two nations on the basis of mutual defense against threats from the Middle East, the most immediate being Iran.

The intensified Russian-US discussions regarding the missile defense system take place against the backdrop of the recent Caspian Sea summit in Tehran. Although the stated purpose of the summit was to reach an agreement regarding the Caspian Sea’s legal status, the timing of Putin’s visit to Tehran was considered more significant, in light of the controversy surrounding Iran’s nuclear program. (6) Putin’s visit to Tehran, the first by a Russian leader since 1943, (7) resulted in a political declaration by the five nations not to use aggressive force against one another. (8) This declaration, along with economic agreements, was reported to strengthen Iran’s regional position and reaffirm Iran’s influence on the international stage. This contradicts the vigorous attempts made by the West to isolate Iran through strengthened sanctions. According to some analysts, the recent Caspian Sea Summit agreement in effect obligates Russia to defend Iran’s interests if diplomacy fails and the US resorts to military action against Iran. (9)
On 17 October, at a meeting of NATO ambassadors and top Russian security officials, the US announced a package of concessions regarding the missile defense system. The offer was presented by Daniel Fried and consisted of three main components of cooperation, in what appeared to be an attempt to allay Russian concerns. (10) The first proposal by the US is that the antimissile defense system would be deployed based on a threat, which would be jointly recognized by Russia and the US. (11) The second component of the offer is that the US missile defense program in Eastern Europe should be linked with the Gabala facility in Azerbaijan, which Putin had offered as an alternative at the G-8 summit in July 2007. (12) The final component in the US proposal is that Russia would be able to monitor US activities in Poland and the Czech Republic by having officers stationed in both countries. (13) Russia reportedly responded with interest to the US offer, but continues to oppose plans to move forward on the missile defense system.

Through a series of inconsistent messages from the US, proposals and deals that link the missile defense shield to Iran’s nuclear program and Russia’s ability to convince Iran to halt nuclear development have appeared in the media; it appears, however, that plans for the missile defense shield continue to move forward. On 23 October, at the US Defense University in Washington, President Bush reiterated that a nuclear Iran would pose a threat to the entire international community and emphasized the immediate need for a missile defense system. (14) Bush even mentioned the possibility of World War III, should Iran come to possess nuclear weapons. (15) Following these statements and in what appears as an attempt to appease Russian concerns, Robert Gates hinted that the US would delay the activation of the missile defense sites in Poland and the Czech Republic until the Iranian threat is definite. (16) Tom Casey, a US State Department Spokesman, corrected confusion over statements that the missile defense program may be delayed, by saying, “That’s simply not true,” and verified that the US intended to continue plans for the deployment of the missile defense system based on the imminent Iranian threat. (17) Additionally, on 25
October, the US implemented further sanctions against Iran’s Revolutionary Guard Corps. (18) Russia has responded negatively to this most recent set of sanctions against Iran, calling them counterproductive. (19)

Statements made by Russia regarding the missile defense system continue to oppose plans for moving forward. In a live, televised phone-in on 18 October, Putin reassured the public that if Russia is not consulted regarding US plans for missile defense, then Russia would be prepared to defend itself to restore stability in the region. (20) Putin also hinted at the development of what he called a “completely new” nuclear weapon. During the live phone-in show, Putin reiterated in relation to Iran that, “direct dialog with the leaders of states…is the shortest path to success, rather than a policy of threats, sanctions, and a resolution to use force.” (21) During the recent NATO meeting, Russia’s Defense Minister Anatoli Serdyukov stated, “All that has been proposed to us does not satisfy us, our position remains the same,” although he added that Washington was “beginning to better understand our concerns.” (22) Following the recent EU-Russia summit in Portugal, Putin drew a non-apparent analogy between the missile defense system and the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis, which brought Russia and the US to the brink of nuclear war. (23)

The deals proposed by the US reportedly fall short of Russian expectations, and that Moscow expects a major reward if it were to join the West in pressuring Iran to halt its nuclear ambitions. (24) Russia and the US appear to hold fundamentally incompatible views concerning Iran as an immediate nuclear threat. So far, it seems that the strategy of using the missile defense system as a bargaining chip to gain Russian support in pressuring Iran to halt its nuclear ambitions has been unsuccessful.

Source Notes:


(9) Kommersant, Andrei Kolesnikov, “President of Iran Sticks to the Agenda,” 17 Oct 07 via Lexis-Nexis.


(11) Ibid.

(12) Ibid.

(13) Ibid.


(16) Financial Times 23 Oct 07, Ibid.

(17) Associated Press, “US says no missile defense review if Iran drops nuclear program,” 18 Oct 07 via http://afp.google.com/article/ALeqM5jlggZGV324C3Xz1uUFnIHXGij_QQ.
Russian Federation: Energy Politics
By Alexey Dynkin

Russia prepares for struggle over Arctic resources
As part of an ongoing campaign to stake a claim over extensive portions of the Arctic seabed, Russian Minister of Natural Resources Yuri Trutnev said on October 25 that “we believe that the research results of the Arctic-2007 expedition are sufficient for a bid to include the Lomonosov Ridge in Russia’s economic zone.” (1) The results are to be announced officially by scientists in December 2007, after which Russia presumably will submit its bid for sovereignty over the seabed in question to the UN Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf (CLCS) – a bid the commission previously has denied, on the grounds of insufficient scientific evidence to back up the claim. Whether or not it
will be recognized this time is uncertain, but what does appear certain is that Russia lately has been making serious efforts on several fronts in what various media sources already have begun calling a future battle over ownership of the thawing Arctic Ocean – or, rather, over what lies underneath it.

The “Arctic-2007” expedition to which Trutnev referred drew widespread attention on August 2, when two submersibles planted a titanium Russian flag on the bottom of the ocean at the North Pole. That gesture, though obviously symbolic (Yuri Kazmin, the Russian member of CLCS, has emphasized for the record that “fixing a flag gives no legal right to the shelf. Russia's position is the same”), raised eyebrows and provoked some angry responses in the other countries that have an Arctic coastline, particularly Canada, which has its own long history of claiming Arctic territory, including the North Pole. "There is no question over Canadian sovereignty in the Arctic," Canadian Foreign Minister Peter Mackay told journalists on August 2 – the same day that news of the undersea Russian flag was announced. "We have established, a long time ago, that these are Canadian waters and this is Canadian property. You can't go around the world these days dropping a flag somewhere. This isn't the 14th or 15th century….This is Canadian territory, plain and simple." (3) Plain and simple as far as Canadians are concerned, perhaps – but, whose territory is it really?

Normally, maritime law defines a country’s territorial waters as those extending to within 200 nautical miles (322 kilometers) of its coastline. Since 1980, however, exceptions have been made in cases where the outer edge of the continental shelf adjacent to the country in question extends beyond that limit. It was precisely for the purpose of reviewing claims for such exceptions that CLCS was established. (4) Since then, not only Russia, but also Canada and Denmark (through its possession of Greenland) have tried—thus far, unsuccessfully—to denote the various undersea mountain ranges that stretch across the Arctic seabed as extensions of their respective continental shelves. Until very recently, however, such claims reasonably could have been dismissed as petty quibbles,
hardly worth any attention. Now, there are compelling reasons to believe that this may change very dramatically and very soon.

What appears to be brewing is, according to Time’s James Graff, “a perfect storm seeded with political opportunism, national pride, military muscle flexing, high energy prices and the arcane exigencies of international law.” (5) The ultimate trigger is global warming, which already has reduced the size of the Arctic ice cap by nearly 25% of what it was 30 years ago, and which, according to at least one scientist, may make the entire Arctic Ocean ice-free during the summer months, by as early as 2040. (6) This, of course, has all sorts of worldwide implications, but the one at stake in the Arctic seabed dispute is the fact that as much as 25% of the world’s undiscovered oil reserves, according to a report made by the US Geological Survey (USGS) in 2000, may lie under the ocean floor. For a country that already appears to have tied the resurgence of its global clout to its control over energy resources, and which enjoys maximum geographic advantage when it comes to access to the Arctic Ocean, it is not difficult to imagine the opportunities envisioned.

Indeed, in spite of all its shortcomings in other areas, Russia has the potential to make serious gains on the Arctic issue, owing to a number of advantages over its rivals. For one thing, as Graff points out, “Russia is already a dominant force in the Arctic; it has the world’s largest fleet of icebreakers and long experience developing its icy northern coastline.” (7) This dominance, the result of a long and extensive history of polar exploration, means that Russia, according to one analyst, “has the will and means to conduct the required research, pursue its claim through the mechanisms established by the Convention, and defend its position on the ground.” (8) The purpose of the flag-planting endeavor, then, was to demonstrate that will and means. “This expedition shows that the Arctic continental shelf is a matter of Russian vital national interest that will be pursued with full force.” (9) The question is to what extent the other countries in the region
will try match Russia’s determination, and if they do, how that rivalry will play out during the next decade and possibly longer.

Another possible advantage for Russia may be the various disputes, some ongoing and some that may develop, between its competitors. According to Nikolas Gvosdev of The National Interest, the future conflict won’t necessarily be “Russia versus the West, but a coalition of states who can make claims versus those who want to challenge them.” (10) There is, indeed, some evidence to support this view. For example, Canada’s emphasis of its Arctic claims has not been very well-received by the United States, which has refused to recognize them – particularly those regarding ownership of the famous Northwest Passage, which also has become an issue, now that global warming is beginning to allow the waterway to be used as a regular shipping lane during the summer. While such disagreements may seem petty in comparison to what is at stake (given that a quarter of the world’s available petroleum might be concerned), by the time the parties involved come to realize this fully, it may be too late.

But, many problems remain. Even if Russia is successful in claiming the seabed adjacent to the Lomonosov Ridge as its own economic zone, this does not mean that it will be able automatically to exploit this opportunity. Polar exploration is one thing; undersea drilling in an environment as hostile as the Arctic Ocean is quite another – and one in which Russian know-how still has quite a long way to go. But, efforts on this front are taking place parallel to those along the geographic-scientific-diplomatic one. On October 25, Gazprom announced that it has decided to partner with StatOilHydro, a Norwegian company, to develop the Shtokman natural gas field under the Barents Sea. (11) As a result of the partnership, Gazprom hopes to learn from Norway’s extensive experience in, and develop technology for, undersea drilling in northern waters. StatOil and Hydro long have been drilling undersea oil and gas in the North Atlantic off the west coast of Norway, and are considered experts in this field. (12) If all goes well for Russia, its underwater extraction capabilities will have advanced sufficiently by
the time development of the Arctic seabed is legally and physically possible, so that it will be able to take full advantage of this potentially vast resource.

There are many unknowns, of course. Will Russia’s claims for sovereignty be successful? Even if they are, how will the other countries of the Arctic basin respond? Will Russia develop its own capabilities for undersea drilling fast enough to monopolize whatever territory it is able to claim, or will it remain dependent, as it currently is, on outside assistance? Is there really enough oil under the Arctic Ocean to be worth the effort needed to monopolize it? The real amount is highly disputed, and not all agree with the USGS’s assessment. (13) Finally, no one knows for sure how fast global warming will take place, or whether it may, in fact, be reversed. One can expect, however, that Russia’s efforts to become master of the Arctic will continue and possibly intensify over the next several years. How others will respond, and how the struggle ultimately will be decided, remains to be seen.

Source Notes:

(2) “UN commission could decide on Russian Arctic bid in 3 years,” RIA Novosti, 31 Aug 07 via Johnson’s Russia List (JRL), JRL 2007, #186.
(6) Ibid.
(7) Ibid.
Newly Independent States: Central Asia

By Monika Shepherd

KYRGYSTAN

New constitution, new parliament, as executive clings to old methods

Kyrgyzstan’s constitutional referendum took place duly as scheduled on October 21, over the protests of various opposition members. Voters overwhelmingly approved the constitutional amendments and the vote was declared valid, (1) in spite of international observers’ allegations of ballot-stuffing and other violations, (2) as well as the revelation by Central Electoral Commission member Jyldyz Joldosheva (only three days prior to the referendum) that voter registration lists contained an unspecified number of names belonging to voters who were deceased. Ms. Joldosheva assured the public that since the CEC’s initial discovery, the lists had been purged of all invalid names, but then stated that, in fact, it is not the responsibility of the CEC to compile voter registration lists, but
that of local governments, (3) thereby neatly shifting the blame for any further irregularities onto hundreds of local election offices.

On October 22, President Kurmanbek Bakiev signed a decree dissolving the Jogorku Kengesh (parliament), in order to clear the way for new elections. (4) The amended constitution increases the number of parliamentary seats from 75 to 90 and also requires that all deputies now be elected based on a party slate system, eliminating the handful of single mandates that previously had been permitted. These changes make the current parliament invalid and dictate that new elections must be held, although the president undoubtedly is far from displeased to bid good-bye to the current group of deputies, a number of whom not only opposed his policies, but also repeatedly called for his resignation.

Bakiev has set new elections for December 16 (elections must be held within 60 days of parliament’s dissolution), (5) a date which Jogorku Kengesh Speaker Marat Sultanov has deemed ten years too early: “It will take exactly this period of time [ten years] before the party system becomes stronger. Political parties and their initial cells should be formed, and society itself should be prepared for this.” (6) However, given the fact that the majority of MPs currently are elected based on party slates, the new electoral system does not represent a drastic change and may not be so difficult to implement; the party slate model already exists and must simply be extended to incorporate all districts.

The real danger to Kyrgyzstan’s political system stems not from the elections themselves, but from President Bakiev’s enhanced authority (granted to him by the referendum) to appoint and dismiss government officials at the ministerial level all the way down to local municipal administrations, as well as his decision to establish and chair a new party, the Ak Zhol eldik partiasy (Bright Path People’s Party), which will participate in the December elections. (7) It is clearly unconstitutional for the president to be a member of a political party, much less to create one himself, a fact that was pointed out to Bakiev when he first broached the subject, and which he himself acknowledged in late September. (8) A few
weeks later, his admission seemed to have been all but forgotten as he proudly announced: “I have decided to create and support a new party - a party of creativity, responsibility, a party of action, which will be called Ak-Jol eldik partiasy… It will be a party of people who want to work for the welfare of the Kyrgyz people. It is not a party of bosses.” (9) The president’s justification for creating a new party was that, although there are already just over 100 political parties in Kyrgyzstan, many of them are too small to be of much consequence: “Very few of them take on any responsibility – at best, they just criticise the authorities. As yet there hasn’t been any party that sets about doing actual work. So I have taken a decision myself to create a new political force, a party of construction, responsibility and action.” (10) In other words, due to his displeasure at the often scathing criticism leveled at him by numerous political parties and movements, President Bakiev has decided to create a political force whose members would be obliged to support him. One day after Ak-Jol’s founding, following the party’s official registration with the Ministry of Justice, Bakiev resigned from his post as party chairman and suspended his membership, at least for the duration of his presidency. (11) Of course, it is abundantly clear to all and sundry, including the party’s members and the country’s voters, to whom Ak-Jol owes its loyalty and very existence; with the president’s weight behind it, Ak-Jol undoubtedly will have little trouble obtaining media access to publicize its platform and conduct a campaign. Various experts have predicted that Ak-Jol will come to serve as an umbrella movement for a number of the other pro-presidential parties; should the majority of these parties (such as Moya Strana/My Country, chaired by head presidential administration head Medet Sadyrkulov; Novy Kyrgyzstan/New Kyrgyzstan, chaired by presidential adviser Usen Sydykov; and the Social Democratic Party, co-chaired by Prime Minister Almaz Atambaev and Finance Minister Akylbek Japarov) (12) join forces with Ak-Jol, it will become a powerful movement, indeed. Even without the support of the rest of the pro-presidential factions, the simple fact that Bakiev openly supports the party is bound to garner its members a significant
number of parliamentary seats in the December elections, with or without fraudulent electoral practices.

Pro-presidential parties are hardly uncommon in Central Asia; in fact, Bakiev was the one exception to the rule, and therefore the sole president to observe the laws set out by his country's constitution. The fact that he so blithely, and with full knowledge of his transgression, contravened the law and that no one has challenged his actions in a court of law, does not bode well for Kyrgyzstan’s further political development and the upcoming parliamentary elections will provide a good litmus test for the direction of that development: backward, to an era more akin to Soviet one-party rule, or forward, toward a more democratic, politically open society.

Source Notes:
(3) "Kyrgyzstan referendum on new constitution valid - election commission," 21 Oct 07, Interfax; Russia & CIS General Newswire via Lexis-Nexis Academic.
(4) Leila Saralayeva, "Kyrgyz president signs decree dissolving parliament, calls for sweeping constitutional changes," The Associated Press via Lexis-Nexis Academic.
UKRAINE

Ukraine still waits for government

More than one month since Ukraine’s parliamentary election, the country remains in leadership limbo, as negotiations over a new government drag on. While a government coalition including the Bloc of Yulia Tymoshenko (BYuT) and President Viktor Yushchenko’s Our Ukraine-People’s Self-Defense Bloc (OU-PSD) has seemed likely since preliminary results were released, the lengthy negotiations suggest that this is not a done deal. Some within OU-PSD instead
are encouraging a coalition with the party of the current Prime Minister Viktor Yanukovych.

The sluggish pace of the new government’s formation has led to frustration not only among Ukraine’s voters, but also among international investors and officials who must wait to finalize meetings, agreements, and future plans. It is difficult, after all, to negotiate over things like WTO membership, visa protocols, future gas deals, and implementation of EU cooperation accords when there is no final word on who will be in charge next month.

This is particularly problematic since a new government led by Yulia Tymoshenko—Ukraine's former prime minister and current opposition leader—would differ significantly from that of the Yanukovych government. In particular, while the Yanukovych government drastically has slowed reforms, including those necessary for WTO membership, Tymoshenko has vowed to implement rapid Western-style reforms. It is not a surprise that the greatest progress toward WTO membership since 2004 came during the nine months of Tymoshenko’s premiership.

However, Tymoshenko needs the support of President Viktor Yushchenko’s Our Ukraine-People’s Self-Defense (OU-PSD) to return to the prime minister's post. While the vast majority of OU-PSD members strongly support such a coalition, a small group of roughly 15 deputies within the bloc prefers a coalition with Yanukovych’s Party of Regions. Furthermore, Yushchenko has been lukewarm on the idea of a premiership for a woman he views as a rival, particularly since the prime minister’s position has about equal power to that of the president. This same issue helped lead to her dismissal in 2005.

The negotiation process also has been stalled by inexplicable delays in submitting election count protocols to the Central Election Commission and now-dismissed court challenges to the results.
Despite the political stagnation resulting from the lack of a clear plan for
government formation, the majority of Ukraine’s politicians seem unconcerned. It
is now likely that the new parliament will not sit until the end of the week of
November 4 at the earliest. A vote for a new government, it seems, could take
yet another week (at least). The calls of the Bloc of Yulia Tymoshenko and its
allies in OU-PSD for a speedy confirmation of the coalition government have
fallen on the deafest of ears.

This scenario is precisely one that EU officials hoped Ukraine would avoid. The
country has been mired in a series of political crises since Tymoshenko’s
dismissal in September of 2005. In March 2006, Yushchenko and Tymoshenko
could not overcome differences following regular parliamentary elections, in order
to form a new majority coalition and government. Instead, Yushchenko agreed
to the premiership of Yanukovych—his 2004 presidential opponent—after almost
five months of negotiations, while the country was overseen by a caretaker
government. The negotiated agreements were never fulfilled, leading to
Yushchenko’s dismissal of parliament and last month’s snap elections.

The worst scenario for Ukraine would be to repeat those missteps. And yet,
Yushchenko remains reluctant to embrace a coalition with BYuT fully. In recent
statements calling for a “democratic coalition,” he rarely speaks Tymoshenko’s
name or the name of her political bloc.

Most recently, Yushchenko suggested that the signing of a new "unity pact" by
the country's political leaders "would be welcomed." (1) The first such pact was
signed by Yushchenko, Yanukovych and other party leaders in 2006, and the
five-page document was said to provide the foundation for all future policy
decisions in the country. “The basics of the definition of Ukraine's domestic and
foreign policy, of its continuity, have been completed,” Yushchenko said at the
time. (2)
Tymoshenko refused to sign that document, suggesting it was unworkable and essentially worthless. In essence, the document was designed to remove all differences among parties by committing them to the pursuit of one vague "national" program. Following the pact, Yushchenko introduced Yanukovych's name to become premier.

Less than two months later, the "pact" was in tatters. "Ukraine's process of integration into the WTO is being wrecked, the program of Ukraine's accession to the EU has been basically stopped and there has been a fundamental block on Ukraine's entry into NATO," Yushchenko's bloc said. (3) The bloc suggested Yanukovych was not following the policies agreed upon in the pact. Within one year, Yushchenko had dissolved parliament, accusing Yanukovych's party of "betrayal." (4)

Yet inexplicably, Yushchenko is considering repeating the same idea. It is likely that Tymoshenko again will refuse to sign a "unity agreement" with Yanukovych's party and the Communist Party, since their programs differ so greatly. This could create new potential for disagreement between the two former Orange leaders.

In order to meet Yushchenko's concerns, Tymoshenko has proposed a sweeping new Law on the Opposition, which would give Yanukovych's party—as the largest in the opposition—unprecedented rights to control parliamentary committees overseeing the budget process. She also has agreed to grant the opposition a new position of Deputy Prime Minister for Relations with the Parliament and several deputy minister portfolios. It is unclear why a new "pact" would be needed, given these concessions.

As these discussions continue, Ukrainians sit and wait for a government, much as they’ve been sitting and waiting for most of the last two years. Since 2004’s Orange Revolution, Ukraine has seen three Prime Ministers and many more
changes at the level of minister. Fully 13 months of this time, the governments have been forced to function in a caretaker fashion, unable to implement changes or new initiatives. The country has had no functioning parliament for eight months this year, following its dismissal. But Ukraine’s leaders are in no rush to usher in a new government.

This may be partly to force Tymoshenko into concessions, and partly to ensure that some individuals are able to maximize their informal “severance packages.” It is no secret in Ukraine that outgoing governments and/or ministers routinely receive (or create) “deals” involving property or other financial bonuses from the state. More time likely equals more deals – and a larger budget deficit for the new government.

In the meantime, Western governments are left to puzzle over Ukraine’s inability to form a stable parliamentary majority and cabinet. Prior to the elections, several Western representatives privately suggested that, following the poll, Ukraine’s leaders had a perfect opportunity to demonstrate their ability to work efficiently, decisively and productively – an ability they have not shown abundantly in the past. While many promises have been made since 2004’s Orange Revolution, very few have been kept. Ukraine has been unable to reform its tax, customs, justice, or security systems. Should the country continue to be mired in political crisis, indecision and confusion, it risks not only angering voters, but also losing its international credibility.

Source Notes:
(2) UT1-TV, 2253 GMT, 2 Aug 06; BBC Monitoring International Reports via Lexis-Nexis.