2008-02-28

The ISCIP Analyst, Volume XIV, Issue 9

Cavan, Susan

Boston University Center for the Study of Conflict, Ideology, and Policy

http://hdl.handle.net/2144/11849

Boston University
Russian Federation: Executive Branch

By Susan Cavan

Elections to confirm Russian executive diarchy, but can it work?
This Sunday, 2 March, Russian voters have the opportunity to vote for president and finally have some role in whether Medvedev wins by 65%, 75% or 82.3% of the Russian electorate. With the final numbers tallied, the public phase of Putin's managed succession will be at an end, and the opportunity for anything as unpredictable as a hard-fought campaign with real challengers will be put to rest.

When Medvedev becomes president, all the criticism and the flak from OSCE monitors and other foreigners will become moot. Theoretically, Vladimir Vladimirovich will move all his things out of the presidential suite at the Kremlin and get the judo equipment removed from Novo-Ogarevo, so Dmitri Anatolyevich can have his law books unpacked in the Kremlin and have a new swimming pool installed at the dacha.

In the last few days before the presidential elections, Putin likely is considering the legacy he leaves as president, the work still to be done, and whether or not he can really trust his successor. The closeness of Putin's relationship with Medvedev, who was one of his very first appointees as acting president on 31 December 1999, (1) likely will be the focus of intense speculation for the next several months as the new diarchy of Putin-Medvedev gets to work, each in his own sphere.

If, as Medvedev has indicated, the planning for his succession has been in the works for over a year, Putin and Medvedev already have delineated clear areas of authority between Putin in the White House and Medvedev in the Kremlin.
Unfortunately, recent statements don't seem to inspire much confidence on that point.

In his "final" press conference as president, Vladimir Putin seemed secure in his ability to differentiate the powers of the prime minister and government from the president:

"The Government is responsible for forming the budget and presenting it to parliament. (...) The Government is in charge of resolving social, healthcare, education and environmental issues, creating the conditions for ensuring our country's defence and security and carrying out our economic and trade policies abroad. The President is head of state, guarantor of the Constitution, and sets the main domestic and foreign policy guidelines, but the highest executive power in the country is in the hands of the Government." (2)

Putin followed these remarks with the now standard refrain about he and Medvedev being able to work together "to divide [powers] between ourselves and build up our personal relationship, if the voters give us a such a chance." (3)

However, it seems perfectly clear that there is an inherent tension between Putin's concept of the Government's role in Russian governance and its secondary position to the Kremlin throughout his presidency.

Putin clearly must be assuming that Medvedev (should he be elected) will bend to Putin's own vision of a division of spheres of authority, and it would be a natural assumption that the two of them had discussed these issues at length.

However, in a recent interview Medvedev emphasized a more traditional view of the Russian presidency: "Our country has been and will remain a presidential republic. There is no other option." And further, "There is no such thing as two, three or five centres. The president controls Russia, and according to the Constitution there can be only one." (4)
Granted, Medvedev also affirmed his faith in the bond he has with the current president. "Vladimir Vladimirovich and I fully understand that this union will be able to work only in an atmosphere of mutual trust and partnership." (5)

As part of his campaign, as such, Medvedev has set rather grand goals to rework the country's financial system, build up its infrastructure, and create a truly independent judiciary. According to Medvedev, "I consider the achievement of harmony between freedom and the rule of law to be the most important goal at this stage." (6) However, his most immediate priority is also the issue that most provokes current Kremlin denizens: "Corruption is the most serious disease in our society…. A real battle must be declared against the disease. A nationwide campaign to combat corruption must be devised and put into practice." (7)

While Medvedev has tempered his comments in recent days, possibly to smooth apparatchiki feathers (e.g., "I am not a proponent of making examples of wrongdoers"), he also makes clear that wresting businesses from grasping state administrators' hands will be a priority of his administration (assuming, of course, that he is elected): "We need to create a system in which stealing from the state is dangerous and unprofitable. … [W]e can't just put our snout in the trough and believe that we have made a success of our life. … Leave the public sector and go to work in the private sector. If you don't understand this or are not prepared to live by the rules, you will be punished with all severity of the law." (8)

Understandably, Medvedev's planned anti-corruption drive (clearly a popular slogan for a presidential campaign) raises serious questions among current public officials: Who will be shielded from these investigations? And the corollary, who will lead these investigations? Will the visible cracks in Kremlin cliques, most notably the siloviki split that broke into the newspapers last fall, mean retribution of one faction against the other? Have Putin and Medvedev agreed to a list of "invaluable" public servants who have immunity?
In a clear sign of anxiety in the ranks, a development that could have been expected some time after the elections, as Putin and Medvedev were working out the details of the division of authorities in their atmosphere of mutual trust, already is unfolding: the staffs of the President-select and the soon-to-be lame duck president are warring. "The entourages of the two co-rulers are already fighting with each other … That will doubtless continue after the election." (9)

Doubtless.

Source Notes:
(2) "Transcript of Annual Big Press Conference," 14 Feb 08 via www.kremlin.ru
(3) Ibid.
(4) "Interview with Itogi Magazine," 18 Feb 08; www.medvedev2008.ru via Johnson's Russia List (JRL), 27 Feb 08, 2008-#42.
(5) Ibid.
(6) "Institutions, Infrastructure, Innovation, Investment - Medvedev outlines his four I's," 15 Feb 08, Interfax; Russia & CIS Business and Financial Newswire via Lexis-Nexis Academic.
(7) Ibid.
(8) "Interview with Itogi," Ibid.
(9) "Could Russia's "dream team" turn into a nightmare?" by Christian Lowe, Reuters, 25 Feb 08 via JRL, 2008-#40, 25 Feb 08.

Russian Federation: Domestic Issues and Legislative Branch
By Rose Monacelli
Lukin sees human rights situation improve, other note a decline

Ombudsman for Human Rights Vladimir Lukin reviewed his findings on the status of human rights in Russia during a 13 February meeting with President Vladimir Putin. Among the facts he highlighted was the drop in complaints submitted to the Commission for Human Rights, down 2000 from last year’s 30,000 submissions. He added that only approximately one-third of the complaints fell under the Commission’s jurisdiction and of those, almost 2500 were resolved, a high success rate, he claimed, when compared to other nations. (1) What Lukin found notable about the data was the fact that only one-third of the reviewed complaints concerned social issues, a change from previous years’ findings that may lead observers to question whether Russia has made major strides to improve the lives of its citizens or if Russian citizens simply have become less likely to lodge complaints against perceived encroachments on their civil liberties. The majority of the complaints were grievances concerning Russian law enforcement or the judicial system. The growing number of such complaints is a reflection of increasingly inhumane conditions for prisoners in Russia’s prison system, which has been documented as being overcrowded, dangerously outmoded, and staffed by abusive prison officials. (2) Lukin ignored such claims, highlighting instead the “various renovations” carried out in the past year at detention centers. (3) However, according to activists like Lev Ponomarev of the Movement for Human Rights, superficial improvements are insufficient when the real issue is the “culture of cruelty” inside. "Prisons in Russia are better funded and some are refurbished but these improvements can't work whilst a humiliating regime is in place." (4)

The committee’s report also warns against “excessive politicization of the human rights situation,” while asserting the difficulty of maintaining a balance between recognizing individual rights and protecting against violations. (5) Perhaps the most intriguing aspect of the report is that it failed to mention the people whose
human rights situation appears to be declining the fastest: those who reside in Russia without citizenship.

Last year in Russia there were over 5,400 reported ethnic-related crimes against citizens from former Soviet states, including Uzbekistan, Ukraine, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Georgia, and Azerbaijan. (6) This trend continued into 2008, where more than 25 hate crimes in the Russian Federation have resulted in 16 deaths since the first of the year. (7)

In his new book, Russian human rights activist Vladimir Ilyushenko alleges that based on the number of skinheads and the frequency of hate crimes, Russia is the most racist country in the world. (8) In a press conference in Moscow, Ilyushenko announced that “in Russia there are more skinheads than in the rest of the world combined,” and that law enforcement officials have “the highest percentage of xenophobic attitudes of any group of the population, with 63 percent of them telling … the Levada Center pollsters that they do not like non-Russians.” (9)

Russian courts, moreover, are notoriously lax when dealing with hate crimes. The number of convictions for ethnic-related crime, for example, has decreased steadily since 2006. (10) This could indicate that such cases have become less of a judicial priority, but it is more likely that fewer cases are actually labeled as hate crimes, instead being classified as “hooliganism,” a charge with a milder sentence. (11) In addition, there is also an increasing part of the population that does not consider skinhead violence to be a Russian phenomenon. For example, Vladimir Pronin, Chief of Police in Moscow, long has stated that there is no such thing as an organized skinhead movement in his city, but that hate crimes are spontaneous group actions generally committed by students. (12) When pressed for explanation, Pronin blames the rise in youth violence on the collapse of vocational training in Russia, leading to an absence of “working-class youth,” who have been replaced by foreign nationals. Therefore, by Pronin’s deduction,
there are teenagers in Moscow with “nothing to busy themselves with” and “no way to let off aggression.” (13) This implies that teenagers are the only perpetrators of ethnic-based crime, but it may be that teenagers are the ones most often caught in the act. People aged 20-30 are routinely among those convicted for hate crimes. (14) This could be a dangerous trend because with age generally comes experience and expertise. A deeper, more mature, educated, better-funded social base may facilitate the spread of ethnic-related crime.

The rise in hate crime in Russia has wider implications, such as a corresponding rise in tension between the government and leaders of ethnic communities, as demonstrated at an 11 February meeting between community representatives and Moscow city officials. At the meeting, representatives of various ethnic groups residing in Russia accused law enforcement bodies “of harboring sympathy for violent nationalists and failing to investigate adequately and prosecute hate crimes.” (15) The leaders of the groups cautioned that retaliatory action on ethnic Russians at home and abroad might be forthcoming. (16) Their warning may have been unnecessary, as such attacks seem to be happening already. Pronin told reporters after the meeting that “immigrants from countries in Russia’s “near abroad” committed 14,000 crimes last year.” (17) The other major concern raised by the cultural leaders is that large numbers of wealthy ethnic minorities have begun to flee the country, citing a lack of trust in Russian authorities. (18) It remains to be seen how these ongoing ethnic-based conflicts will affect the working relationship between Russia and its regional neighbors in the future.

Nashi outgrows its usefulness

What happens to an activist group when it does its job too well? Nashi may soon find out. Nashi (Ours) was created after revolutions in Ukraine, Georgia and Kyrgyzstan demonstrated the potential political power of younger generations. Then-Kremlin Deputy Chief Vladislav Surkov and Vasili Yakemenko, the creator
of the youth group Walking Together, gathered youth activists in major cities to construct a movement ostensibly dedicated to promoting patriotic ideals and preserving Russian sovereignty, but whose unspoken primary function was to safeguard against revolutionary activism. (19)

By founding Nashi ideologically on “total devotion to the president and his course,” (20) the Kremlin found an ideal way to create a solid young voter base that could bring in other voters and quash any potential revolutionary buzz, ensuring that Russia’s looming transfer of power would occur without incident, although such precautions are proving unnecessary in the current election. Dmitri Medvedev has been all but sworn-in, since Putin handpicked him in December and is currently enjoying an 81% approval rating, higher than that of his predecessor. (21) Barring unforeseen complications, the 2 March elections will serve only to finalize the succession.

So what is next for Nashi? Russia faces no threat of an Orange Revolution, power is firmly in the hands of United Russia, and there is no opposition to speak of, so Nashi no longer needs to act as the Kremlin’s street-level safeguard. Further, with Medvedev’s presidency virtually assured (he is not even campaigning), there is no need for ready-made fans, which leaves Nashi without any role in the new administration. Despite reports of its imminent demise and the fact that only five of Nashi’s 50 regional branches will remain open (22), the group’s leaders announced in early February that they plan to double their membership in 2008, and that they will revamp the organization’s social, educational, and patriotic work to prevent it from becoming irrelevant. (23) However, Nashi’s destiny may be determined already, since even the organization’s founders have changed their rhetoric. Yakemenko recently commented that “youth movements, including Nashi, should now pay more attention to effective projects - for example, they could work with problem teenagers or gifted young people, and promote patriotic education.” (24) That patriotic education may come in a different form. The Russian Defense Sports-
Technical Organization (ROSTO), known during the Soviet-era as the Voluntary Society of Assistance to the Army, the Air Force and the Navy (DOSAAF), recently proposed a youth movement called DOSAAF-Defense that will focus on military recruiting. (25) It is currently impossible to say whether the formation of DOSAAF-Defense is merely a shift from youth political activism towards a new focus on youth military service, or if it points to a wider renewal of Russian militarism.

Source Notes:
(1) "Remarks by Russian President Vladimir Putin and Vladimir Lukin, the Ombudsman for human rights in the Russian Federation, before their meeting," Official Kremlin International News Broadcast, 13 Feb 08 via Lexis-Nexis.
(4) Ibid.
(5) Ibid.
(8) Paul Goble, “Russia is the 'most racist country' in the world, researcher says,” Window on Eurasia, 30 Jan 08 via http://windowoneurasia.blogspot.com/2008_01_30_archive.html.
(10) Ibid.

(12) Ibid.

(13) Ibid.

(14) Ibid.


(16) Ibid.

(17) Ibid.

(18) Ibid.


(23) “Nashi says it’s healthy and planning to double in size,” The Moscow Times, 4 Feb 08 via http://www.moscowtimes.ru/stories/2008/02/04/018.html.

(24) Ibid.

(25) Ibid.

Russian Federation: Security Services
By Fabian Adami

**Medvedev enters council fray**

Late in May 2007, Britain's Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) officially recommended that extradition proceedings be started in the Litvinenko murder case. A statement issued by law-enforcement authorities in the United Kingdom indicated that sufficient evidence had been gathered to charge Andrei Lugovoi, a former KGB officer, with Litvinenko's murder.

Since the extradition request was formally filed, Britain and Russia have conducted a tit-for-tat diplomatic row. Russia variously has claimed that exiled oligarch Boris Berezovsky was behind the murder, or offered to conduct a trial of Lugovoi in Russia. British authorities conversely, have gone out of their way to keep the Lugovoi allegations on an individual level instead of making allegations against the Security Services (and by extension the Russian state) as a whole. Moreover, in November 2007, the CPS made what could only be described as a conciliatory move, in that it asked Russian law-enforcement officials to assist in gathering evidence against Lugovoi. (1)

In mid-December, the Russian Foreign Office ordered British Council Offices across the country to close immediately. Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov claimed that the organization had been guilty of tax evasion. Authorities subsequently added that the FSB would investigate Russian citizens employed by the council, in order to make sure they were not being used in "prevocational" games by the organization, and that, in the interim, all visa applications for the British Council would be suspended. Finally, on 15th January, Stephen Kinnock, the Director of the British Council's St. Petersburg office was, detained (albeit briefly) by the FSB on suspicion of driving under the influence of alcohol. Russia's intimidation tactics clearly were successful, since the British Council suspended its operations in the country on January 17. Throughout the row, it was made publicly clear by Moscow that the actions against the British Council were related
to the Litvinenko case, and that the issue would be resolved immediately if Britain retracted its "unfriendly decisions" against Russia. (2)

Three weeks ago, at an event organized by Morgan Stanley in London, Sir David King, outgoing Chief Scientist for the British government, addressed the Litvinenko question. King asserted that he had personally seen Litvinenko's evidence relating to the 1999 apartment bombings. This evidence, King claimed, convinced him that President Vladimir Putin "was responsible for the bombings," and that "there is no way that Putin would have won the election," had it not been for the atrocities. (3) It is not clear whether this statement was cleared before King made it, or whether it was spontaneous. But, it is likely to have a clearly derogatory effect on Britain's efforts to keep the investigation into Litvinenko's murder narrowly focused. King's statement, by implication alone, gives official voice to the idea that Litvinenko was killed on orders from the top, in order to silence him.

Within a week of King's statement, Dmitri Medvedev, Putin's handpicked successor, addressed the diplomatic row. In an interview given to Itogi Magazine, Medvedev claimed that the British Council was involved actively in "conducting intelligence activity," along with a "mass of other activities that are not widely advertised." (4) This is the first time direct accusations have been made – January's accusation of "prevocation" was by comparison somewhat opaque.

Coming from an individual of his stature, King's comments could not have gone unnoticed in Moscow – Indeed, they were reproduced in Nezavisimaya gazeta. (5) As such, Medvedev's interjection likely represents an attempt simply to ignore the allegations and to refocus the row into an area of comfort for Moscow – namely the "nefariousness" of British intelligence services. Britain, so is the intimation, cannot be trusted on any level whatsoever, giving Moscow "more" reason to refuse to cooperate.
Rhetoric: Response to Kosovo?

After more than a year of rhetoric against Georgia, Russian security officials upped the ante early this month. On February 7, Lieutenant General Anatoli Zabrodin, First Deputy Chief of the Federal Border Guard Service, alleged that “terrorists” were still present in the Pankisi Gorge and said that extremists were working on "elaborate plans" to carry out attacks in the Northern Caucasus. Zabrodin noted that although "specific information" had not yet been discovered as to the rebels' intentions, Russia was ready to respond with the new Border Guards' Spetsnaz units if necessary. (6)

Tbilisi's initial response was to label these comments as "yet another provocation." (7) Within a few days, Georgian officials attempted to use specifics to blunt Zabrodin's accusations – and concurrent threats. On February 11, the Georgian Border Police issued an official statement claiming that "the Russian side" had "never raised the issue of the presence of rebels in the Pankisi Gorge" in conferences "held regularly between representatives" of both national border services. Apparently, the last cross-border meeting was held in December 2007 – significantly, before Georgia's recent presidential poll. (8)

In reality, Georgia's denial of General Zabrodin's accusations is likely to prove inconsequential. Past history demonstrates that Russia is unconcerned by the "truth" of facts on the ground: the idea of raising the issue of rebels in a "dialogue" is as such, risible. Any belief that denying Moscow's assertion provides a reprieve is misplaced.

It is possible in hindsight, that Zabrodin's comments – and all the preceding rhetoric against Georgia from the FSB, constituted preparatory work for possible moves by Russia concerning South Ossetia and Abkhazia, in response to the US and its allies' recognition of Kosovo's independence. Given that this recognition occurred less than two weeks ago, it now seems safe to predict that some kind of Russian action in Georgia's separatist regions may occur soon.
**Badri Patarkatsishvili assassinated?**

On February 13, Badri Patarkatsishvili collapsed and died at his Surrey home in the United Kingdom. An oligarch, who like Boris Berezovsky made his money in the "sell-off" of Russia in the early 1990s, Patarkatsishvili moved to the United Kingdom for fear of facing fraud charges in Moscow. (9)

Throughout his time in London, Patarkatsishvili moved in the same circles as Boris Berezovsky and Aleksandr Litvinenko. During the last few months, he had spoken of a possible assassination plot against himself with increasing frequency. (10) At one point during his association with Berezovsky, Andrei Lugovoi – the prime suspect in the Litvinenko murder, served as his bodyguard. (11) As a result of his fears, as well as his association to Berezovsky, British authorities initially treated Patarkatsishvili’s death as "suspicious," sealing off his residence and its surrounding grounds. (12) The initial autopsy indicated that no "radioactive substances" were found. (13)

Patarkatsishvili was a member of the "clique" that was involved in the "choice of Vladimir Putin" as President. (14) When Berezovsky broke with Putin, the Georgian oligarch followed suit. He also harbored Aleksandr Litvinenko in the initial period after his defection. At the time of his death, Patarkatsishvili had been accused recently of plotting a coup against President Mikheil Saakashvili of Georgia. (15) Thus, it seems clear that he had enemies both in Russia and Georgia. The toxicology report in relation to Patarkatsishvili’s death is some weeks away. Given that fact, it would be premature to state outright either that he died of natural causes, or that his death was the result of foul play.

The question to be asked at the moment is whether anyone benefits from Patarkatsishvili’s death, or whether he needed from any plausible standpoint, to be "silenced." At the time of writing, there is no indication that this is the case – indeed, Patarkatsishvili’s health—he smoked multiple packets of cigarettes on a
daily basis, was overweight and suffered a heart condition—mitigate against the idea of foul play.

As a footnote, Boris Berezovsky has (somewhat surprisingly) not commented yet, except to state that he will wait for law-enforcement agencies to "complete their investigations." (16) By implication, this is a statement of trust in British authorities. It remains to be seen how Berezovsky will behave, if Scotland Yard's investigation shows no foul play; but Berezovsky apparently believes the opposite to be true. Berezovsky yet may seek to use Patarkatsishvili's death as another "weapon" against President Putin.

Source Notes:
(2) "Situation With British Council Will Be Settled If London Cancels Unfriendly Decisions—Source," Interfax, 18 Jan 08; OSC Transcribed Text via World News Connection
(3) "From Russia, With Loathing For Putin," The Daily Telegraph, 3 Feb 08 via www.telegraph.co.uk/opinion/main.jhtml?xml=/opinion/2008/02/03/dp0301.xml.
(5) "'Russia, UK Urged to Meet Each Other Halfway Amid Worsening Relations,' Unattributed Editorial: 'Russian-British Conflict Does Not Die Off,'" Nezavisimaya gazeta, 7 Feb 08; OSC Translated Text via World News Connection.
(7) "Reports on Gunmen in Georgia's Pankisi Gorge 'Provocation,'" Kavkaz Press, Tbilisi, in Georgian, 8 Feb 08: BBC Monitoring via Lexis-Nexis.
(8) "Georgian Border Police Denies Russian General's Claim of Rebels in Pankisi Gorge," Kavkaz-Press, 12 Feb 08; OSC Translated Text via World News Connection.

(9) "Tests Fail To Find Suspicious Causes For Georgian Émigré’s Death," The Guardian, 15 Feb 08 via Lexis-Nexis.

(10) "Test For Poison in Georgian's Death," Financial Times, 15 Feb 08 via Lexis-Nexis.


(13) Ibid.

(14) "Badri Patarkatsishvili: Exiled Oligarch Who Lived in The Shadow of Death," The Times of London, 14 Feb 08 via www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/news/uk/crime/article3365806.ece

(15) Ibid.

(16) "Suspicious Death of Billionaire Who Feared Assassins: Heart Attack or Second Litvinenko?" The Daily Telegraph, 14 Feb 08 via Lexis-Nexis.

**Russian Federation: Armed Forces**

**By Lt. Col. Carol Northrup**

**Dissatisfied arms customers**

For the first time in the history of Russian military arms sales, a foreign customer is returning a military hardware purchase. (1) Earlier this month an agreement was signed between Algeria and Russia to return fifteen fighter aircraft acquired by Algeria last spring as the result of an arms sales agreement signed during Russian President Putin’s visit to Algeria in March 2006. (2) The aircraft will be returned over the course of several months, beginning next month. Algeria was scheduled to take delivery of 28 single-seat MiG-29SMT and six dual-seat MiG-
29UB fighters between March 2007 and February 2008, but Algeria refused delivery after May 2007 and began demanding that the first fifteen aircraft be returned, citing used and low-quality parts found in the planes. (3) In August, Algerian President Abdelaziz Bouteflika sent a letter of complaint to Putin and, as of October, Algeria has stopped making payments on military contracts with Russia. (4)

Russia insists the complaints are unfounded. Though the bodies of the aircraft were produced in the 1990s, that fact was stipulated in the original contract, and everything inside the aircraft was new as of the delivery date, according to the MiG Corporation. (5) Russian arms exporters maintain that Algerian experts checked the aircraft before they were delivered and also upon arrival and found no defects. (6) Russian daily paper Kommersant quoted unnamed government sources as attributing the problems to the Algerian domestic situation and French opposition to Russia’s presence in the region. (7)

Complicating the issue is the fact that as part of the deal, Russia wrote off 4.7 billion dollars of Soviet-era debt in return for multiple arms deals worth 7.5 billion dollars. (8) The contract will not be cancelled entirely, but it is unclear how Algeria will be compensated. The United Aviation Construction Corporation—the Russian government-owned corporation that consolidates the manufacture, design and sale of military and aircraft—has indicated that Algeria may be offered the more up-to-date MiG-29M2 or the MiG-35 “fourth-generation plus” aircraft or possibly non-aviation hardware in exchange. (9) Another possibility is that Algeria may receive additional SU-30MKI (NATO reporting name Flanker H). Algeria currently has a deal in place for 28 Flanker H and already has received three of the fighters. (10) So far, there have been no complaints about the Sukhoi jets.

Meanwhile India, Russia’s biggest and most profitable arms customer, is getting tired of the poor service and poor performance of Russian military equipment. A
2004 deal that sold the unfinished aircraft carrier Admiral Gorshkov to India is in serious trouble, due to long delays and huge cost overruns (Russia is demanding an additional two billion dollars, more than twice the original cost). (11) Trouble also has erupted over the upgrading of six kilo-class submarines. (12) As a result, India—the leading armaments buyer in the developing world—is looking elsewhere to spend the 30 billion dollars (13) it currently has planned for military refurbishment.

India’s security cabinet recently approved a one billion dollar deal to purchase six Lockheed Martin C-130J transport aircraft in the biggest military sales contract with a US company in fifty years. (14) The aircraft will be used by India’s Special Operations Forces as replacements for India’s aging Soviet-era aircraft. According to reports, India also has begun talks with the US for the purchase of P-8i long-range maritime reconnaissance patrol and anti-submarine warfare aircraft to replace Russian-made TU-142M bombers it uses currently. (15) The Times of India says that a contract, estimated at two billion dollars, will be signed soon for eight aircraft to be delivered between 2012 and 2015. (16) If the deal goes through, it will be the largest US defense contract ever signed with India.

India is also in the market for 126 new multi-role fighters, and intends to award the contract in March. Top contenders are the US F-16, and F/A-18, the French Rafale, the Swedish Gripen, the Eurofighter Typhoon and Russia’s MiG-35. (17) Though the MiG-35 is still in contention, India has indicated that frustration over the Admiral Gorshkov and other Russian arms deals may lead it to diversify its sources of arms imports.

The international arms market is intensely competitive and in Russia, arms sales are big business. In 2006, Russia was the second-largest arms exporter in the world behind the United States (see The Analyst Vol. XIV, No. 6, 17 Dec 07). Like the US, Russia uses arms sales not only to boost its economy (arms exports are second only to petroleum products in Russia’s external trade), but to gain
diplomatic advantage and leverage. One key reason Russia can grab such a large portion of the arms market (28 percent in 2006, the latest year for which statistics are available) is that the current strength of the Russian economy enables Russia to offer very generous terms. In addition, Russian military equipment generally costs about half that of comparable Western equipment, making it especially attractive to developing nations.

Production delays, cost overruns and lack of quality control are problems with which the Russian military has had to cope for years. The fact that they are now becoming evident in international orders is further evidence of the dismal state of Russia's military and the inadequacy of its defense industry. The Kremlin—including Putin himself—has acknowledged the problem, but so far has been unwilling or unable to address it adequately. Until now countries such as Algeria and India have considered Russian equipment a bargain, even given Russia's reputation for poor sustainment support. However, these recent and very public complaints will damage Russia's reputation in the arms market and likely will spell considerable losses for Rosoboronexport in coming months.

Source Notes:
(2) Ibid.
(3) Ibid.
(4) Ibid.
(5) Ibid.


(10) Ibid.


(12) Ibid.

(13) “India’s Defense Sector,” UPI Energy, 6 Feb 08 via Lexis-Nexis.

(14) “Large Military Aircraft Deal to be Concluded Between India and US,” World Markets Research Centre, 29 Jan 08 via Lexis-Nexis.

(15) “India's Navy at 'Advanced Stage' in Plans To Buy Boeing, EADS Planes,” Hong Kong AFP in English, 14 Feb 08 via World News Connection.

(16) 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 Jeremy Weiss
Russia responds to Kosovo declaration

Kosovo’s declaration of independence on February 17th precipitated a flurry of diplomatic activity in Russia and around the world. Reacting only minutes after the announcement from Pristina, the Russian foreign ministry issued a strongly worded statement condemning Kosovo’s move toward independence, claiming that the declaration undermined the international framework of state sovereignty and contradicted the UN Charter. (1) Citing its concern over the safety of Serbs living in Kosovo, Russia called an emergency meeting of the UN Security Council the same day- a move that received support from China, which echoed Russia’s call for a negotiated settlement of the region’s future. (2) Demonstrating their common view concerning Kosovo, Serbia’s reaction to the Kosovar declaration proved nearly identical to that of Russia, as Belgrade also warned that the declaration “violates international order.” Serbian Prime Minister Vojislav Kostunica elaborated on his criticism by calling Kosovo a “false state,” while a Russian government spokesman used similar rhetoric, referring to the declaration of independence as “illegitimate.” (3)

The statements by Russia and Serbia condemning the declaration as an assault on the principle of state sovereignty, as well as Russia’s assertion that international recognition of an independent Kosovo provides a dangerous international precedent, emphasize the possibility that Pristina’s move toward independence could prove to be a double-edged development for the Kremlin. Indeed, any Russian concern that Chechen insurgents would seize on Kosovo’s declaration to bolster their own claims to independence were realized almost immediately. The day following the declaration, a statement on a Chechen secessionist website proclaimed the militant group’s solidarity with the Kosovars and drew parallels between the two peoples’ struggles for sovereignty. (4) Conversely, the Kremlin has utilized its claim that Kosovo’s declaration provides an international precedent to threaten western-leaning post-Soviet republics that face Russian-backed secessionist movements. In January, Russia’s Deputy-Minister for Foreign Affairs, Grigori Karassin, in a statement aimed at states such
as Georgia, suggested that any precedent set by Kosovo could be applied elsewhere. (5) Although Foreign Minister Lavrov seemed to retract this suggestion last month, his ministry suggested as recently as last week that international recognition of an independent Kosovo would influence Russia’s stance toward secessionist movements throughout the post-Soviet arena. (6) The reaction to Kosovo’s declaration by such groups in the Caucasus and Transnistria shows that they were quick to capitalize upon this development. South Ossetia’s separatist leader Eduard Kokoity said his movement would appeal to the United Nations for international recognition of the region’s independence, claiming that South Ossetia has a better claim to sovereignty than Kosovo. Nearby, Abkhazia’s separatist regime also proclaimed that it would renew its drive for recognition at the United Nations, while simultaneously the self-proclaimed “Foreign Minister” of Azerbaijan’s separatist region of Nagorno-Karabakh argued that international recognition of Kosovo had strengthened his region’s claim to sovereignty. In Moldova, the secessionist parliament in Transnistria also demonstrated its interest in the Kosovo development, although President Putin claimed that his government’s attitude toward these regions had not changed as a result of the Balkan situation. (7) While the secessionist aspirations may not come to fruition in the immediate future, their statements connecting their aims to events in Kosovo add weight to Moscow’s implication that international recognition of Kosovo as an independent state may have implications for the post-Soviet sphere. Although the attempt by the troublesome Chechen separatist movement to derive credibility from the developments in Kosovo may prove irritating for the Kremlin, similar moves by Russian-backed separatists elsewhere in the former USSR demonstrate that the Kosovo declaration may advance Russia’s foreign policy aims in the Caucasus and Moldova.

Pristina’s independence also sent ripples throughout other regions of the CIS. The Baltic states, which have poor relations with the Russian Federation, took the opposite stance by recognizing Kosovo as an independent state. In his
statement on Kosovo, Estonia’s Foreign Minister Urmas Paet called the Balkans a “priority region” for his government. (8) Latvia and Lithuania also initiated legislative proceedings necessary for their governments to extend diplomatic recognition to Kosovo within days of the independence proclamation. (9) Ukraine, which relies heavily on energy supplies from Russia, (but, more to the point, has to worry about possible secessionism in such predominately Russian-speaking regions as Crimea), echoed Moscow’s stance, withholding recognition of Kosovo as a sovereign state and reflected concerns that the declaration may set a troubling precedent. (10) Georgia, confronting secessionists in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, and relying heavily on Russian energy imports, also withheld recognition. President Saakashvili specifically addressed the issue of a precedent. In reference to the claim that Kosovo merited independence due to earlier “ethnic cleansing” by Serbia, Saakashvili remarked that while the Kosovars may have been victims of such practices, similar atrocities in Georgia had been perpetrated by the separatists themselves. Consequently, the situation in Kosovo was not comparable to those in Abkhazia and Ossetia. (11)

Finally, Belarus, Russia’s most ardent supporter in the CIS, condemned the Kosovo declaration and called for a resumption of negotiations as a means of resolving the final status of Kosovo. (12) With this support of Russia’s position, the Belarusian government upheld promises made as recently as late January to align itself more closely with Moscow’s foreign policy agenda. (13)

Pristina’s unilateral declaration has intensified diplomatic tension between Russia and the west, as the United States, Britain, France, Italy, and Germany all recognized Kosovar independence. (14) This was sharply denounced by Dimitri Rogozin, Russia’s envoy to NATO, who remarked that should the EU adopt a common position on Kosovo or if NATO exceeded its UN mandate in the Balkans, the Kremlin would “proceed on the basis that in order to be respected we need to use brute force.” (15) The United States immediately called on the Russian government to repudiate Rogozin’s remark, and later Russia’s EU
envoy, Sergei Yastrzhembsky, called for a strictly political resolution of the impasse. (16) However, Russia again lashed out at the United States on February 24th, attacking the US for eroding “world order” with its stance on Kosovo. (17) The escalating war of words over Kosovo takes on additional significance in light of the fact that US-Russian relations already are strained due to ongoing tension over Washington’s attempts to build missile-defense batteries in the Czech Republic and Poland, and Russian threats to target nuclear missiles against Ukraine, should the former Soviet republic join NATO. (18) One-time Soviet satellite Bulgaria sided with the United States on the Kosovo issue, as its Foreign Minister recommended recognition of Kosovo. (19)

Not all European states opposed Russia on the Kosovo matter, however, as Spain, Cyprus and Romania all voiced opposition to Kosovo’s unilateral declaration. (20) These states face challenges related to existing or potential separatism. Likewise, the island state of Sri Lanka, which has struggled with a violent secessionist movement over the past decades, condemned the Kosovo declaration by stating that it could create an “unmanageable precedent.” (21) Thus, despite strong opposition from the United States and leading EU powers, Russia’s arguments the Kosovar precedent has some European and other supporters.

Source Notes:
(1) ABC News, “Russia Denounces Kosovo Declaration”, 17 Feb 08 via www.abcnews.go.com/international.
(3) RIA Novosti, “Kosovo declares independence, protests from Serbia, Russia”, 17 Feb 08 via http://en.rian.ru/world.
(5) Agence France Presse, “Russia toughens stance”, 18 Jan 08 via Lexis-Nexis.


(10) Kyiv Post, “Europe split on Kosovo independence, Ukraine doesn’t want precedent set,” 21 Feb 08 via www.kyivpost.com/nation.


(17) Reuters, “Serbia back on Kosovo offensive, with Russian help”, 24 Feb 08 via www.reuters.com/article/europeCrisis
Russian Federation: Energy Politics

By Creelea Henderson

Gazprom in Iran

Gazprom currently is engaged in negotiations to form a partnership with Iran to exploit that country’s abundant oil and gas reserves. On February 19, emerging from a meeting with Gazprom Chief Executive Aleksei Miller in Tehran, Iran’s oil minister told reporters that the deal, set to be finalized within the next two months, will give Gazprom a major role in developing a giant gas field known as South Pars, as well as unspecified projects in the oil sector. Gazprom reportedly has expressed interest in projects that range from upstream prospecting to downstream marketing of Iran’s petroleum resources, including an ambitious bid to develop a liquefied natural gas (LNG) terminal to export Iranian gas volumes. (1)

South Pars is familiar territory for Gazprom. The company has been involved in the development of the field since 1997, when it was awarded a contract for Phases Two and Three of the project together with Malaysia’s Petronas and Total South Pars, a subsidiary of the French energy giant Total. The three companies collaborated to bring the largest gas project in the Middle East on line in the course of five years. (2) After the field was transferred to Iran’s state-owned gas company in late 2002, development in the region stalled and foreign
interest cooled, not least due to apprehensions aroused in recent years by Tehran’s nuclear-enrichment program. (3)

The South Pars project seemed all but abandoned in late January, after Total announced that it was reconsidering participation in the field, citing “huge cost issues” involved in building Iran’s first LNG terminal. One month later, Moscow stepped in to fill the void left by Western energy firms that, mindful of UN sanctions, are avoiding major new commitments in Iran. Is Gazprom’s latest partnership with Tehran a favor, and if so, what has Tehran done to inspire Moscow’s largesse?

The second question is perhaps the easiest to address, given the very public show of bilateral cooperation extending between Moscow and Tehran recently. Whether owing to a spirit of bonhomie or to desperation on the part of Iran’s collapsing petroleum industry, the government of Ahmadinejad has shown itself to be amenable to the will of Moscow. During a two-day summit on the hotly disputed partition of the Caspian Sea in October 2007, Iran expressed willingness to reconsider its share of the sea basin and the abundant natural resources therein. (4) The collapse of the Soviet Union threw the status of the inland sea into question, as newly independent littoral states jostled for larger shares of the seabed than were allotted them by a 1940 treaty that divided the sea between Iran and the former Soviet Union. (5) Although no common agreement on the partition of the Caspian Sea was reached during the October 2007 summit, Iran’s extraordinary offer to accept a reduced share of its former rights as a littoral state was nothing less than a waist-deep bow to pressure from Moscow.

To return to the question of political favors exchanged between Moscow and Tehran – it must be admitted that the claim of Moscow’s munificence is purely spurious. Although details from the bilateral energy agreement on the development of the South Pars and Iranian oil fields have yet to be hammered
out, it is fairly certain that, once established, the terms will be far more favorable for Gazprom than any of the deals that Tehran has struck with foreign firms in the past.

To date, all Iranian energy contacts have included a vexing clause referred to as a “buyback regime,” which stipulates that all oil and gas produced by foreign investors in the country passes into the possession of the state, whereupon producers have the option to buy back the volumes at prices determined by Tehran. (6) Because the price is set by the Iranian government, according to undisclosed criteria that have little or no relation to market factors, foreign investors find that they are unable to predict the long-term profitability of complex projects such as South Pars, making companies wary of long-term commitments in the country. Iran’s opaque pricing regime is one reason, quite apart from the threat of UN sanctions, that the country, in spite of having the world’s second-largest natural gas reserves, became a net importer of gas in 2007. (7)

Iran lacks the capacity to exploit its own wealth of resources and cooperation from potential foreign energy partners is not forthcoming. In February, the EU went so far as to reject Iran’s offer of gas supplies to feed the Nabucco pipeline until Tehran shows itself willing to renounce its alleged plans to enrich uranium to develop nuclear weapons. (8) Into this void steps Moscow.

Gazprom negotiators will be able to name their terms vis-à-vis the government in Tehran which is already in debt to Russia's state-owned Atomstroyexport for the $1 billion construction of the notorious Bushehr nuclear reactor. (9) Moscow’s support for the Iranian nuclear program, both within the UN Security Council and on the ground in Bushehr, together with Tehran’s utter lack of alternative means to exploit the country’s petroleum reserves have given Russian negotiators tremendous leverage in the current energy partnership agreement.
Should Gazprom push ahead with its stated plans to develop South Pars and to invest in the Iranian oil sector, the revenues flowing to the company are likely to be impressive, however, it is worth noting that in signing this agreement with Tehran, Gazprom is launching into uncharted territory. While the company played a part in bringing early phases of the South Pars gas field on line, it did so in collaboration with international partners and, to a great extent, it remained reliant upon the infrastructure and expertise brought to the project by Petronas and Total. (10) Even within Russia, Gazprom was forced to take back its declaration that it would develop its Shtokman gas field alone after it found that it lacked the expertise to build an LNG conversion facility. (11) Plans for South Pars include the construction of just such a facility.

Regardless of Gazprom’s capacity to fulfill the plans underway in Iran, and regardless even of the potential profits to be made there, an overriding impulse to assert Russian independence by obstructing international consensus on Iran lies behind Moscow’s bid to keep the petroleum sector afloat in Iran. The energy deal in the works may prove to be a double-crown victory for Moscow: it will bring Gazprom profits, and it will block UN efforts at full implementation of economic sanctions against Tehran.

Source Notes:
(3) “Iran, France: Total Delays on South Pars,” Stratfor Inc. Website, 22 Jan 08 via (http://www.stratfor.com/analysis/iran_france_total_delays_south_pars).
(4) Mansour Kashfi, “Did Caspian summit share the sea or Iran's oil riches?” Oil and Gas Journal, 28 Jan 08 via Lexis-Nexis Academic.

(5) Ibid.

(6) “Iran, France: Total Delays on South Pars,” Stratfor Inc. Website, 22 Jan 08 via (http://www.stratfor.com/analysis/iran_france_total_delays_south_pars).


Newly Independent States: Caucasus

By Robyn Angley

ARMENIA
The Georgia scenario? Protests follow declared Sarkisian win
In the lead-up to the presidential elections, the streets of Yerevan literally were lined with posters supporting Prime Minister Serzh Sarkisian, presidential
candidate and heir-elect of Armenia’s current executive, Robert Kocharian. The posters seemed to multiply overnight as election day approached. A bus stationed near the Opera House, the site of pre-election rallies for Sarkisian, as well as for opposition candidate and former president Levon Ter-Petrosian, sported a huge likeness of the Prime Minister’s face. It was joined on the day before elections by a banner with a full-length shot of the Prime Minister that took up no less than three meters of the exterior of a nearby restaurant. Sarkisian’s ubiquitous portrait was not without competition, however. Most tellingly, one of the statues in front of the Opera House cradled a Ter-Petrosian sign in his arms, a reminder of the Ter-Petrosian rally that took place just prior to election day.

Election day passed in relative calm in the capital, with some media reporting Sarkisian ahead in the ballot count within 30 minutes after polling stations closed. As widely anticipated in case of a declared Sarkisian victory, rallies began in Yerevan on 20 February to protest what some opposition groups are calling rigged elections. Protesters began to assemble even before the scheduled rally that day and have continued to gather in the following days. As many as 30,000 people are estimated to have rallied in Yerevan in support of Ter-Petrosian. (1) In contrast to the opposition’s claims, OSCE observers have declared, in a suitably vague statement, that the elections were mostly in line with international standards and Armenia’s international obligations. (2)

The current state of affairs in Yerevan bears striking similarities to the ongoing situation in neighboring Georgia. Like its Georgian counterpart, the Armenian opposition has refused to acknowledge a victory for the leading candidate and is advocating a run-off or a recount. Ter-Petrosian’s supporters also have demanded the resignation of the Armenian Public TV and Radio Company board, presumably because of slanted coverage during the election campaign. (3) A new board for Georgia’s public television station also has been a key demand of that country’s nine-party opposition. Armenia’s protesters have warned that they will instigate permanent rallies until their demands are met; a similar threat was
made several weeks ago by Georgia’s Levan Gachechiladze and his colleagues, although they recently called a halt to their proposed hunger strike recently after negotiations with the authorities. Armenian authorities have responded with rhetoric similar to that heard in the near north—Kocharian accused Ter-Petrosian and his followers of trying to overthrow the government. (4)

Unlike the Georgian rallies, the Armenian protests already have caused some fallout in government circles. Ter-Petrosian received the public endorsement of Deputy Prosecutor-General Gagik Jhangiryan, who spoke at a rally on 22 February. (5) Following his public appearance, the deputy prosecutor-general was dismissed from his post by current president Robert Kocharian, ostensibly on the basis of Article 7 of the “Law on the Prosecutor's Office,” which prohibits the involvement of state prosecutors in politics. (6) Jhangiryan subsequently was detained by police. (7) Additionally, three Armenian diplomats were removed from their positions after reading a statement at an opposition rally on 23 February that called on state authorities not to use force on the protesters. (8)

While some officials have supported the opposition publicly, others fiercely have contradicted statements that they support the former president. Ter-Petrosian’s supporters earlier had announced that two members of the dominant coalition in parliament and the Prosperous Armenia faction, Karo Karapetyan and Tigran Stepanyan, backed the erstwhile president. However, the two legislators denied these claims in a statement on 23 February after Ter-Petrosian failed to force Sarkisian to a run-off. (9)

Although protests already had been in process for four days, the official CEC results were not announced until 24 February. According to the official tally, Serzh Sarkisian garnered 52.8% of the vote, Ter-Petrosian 21.5%, and Artur Baghdasaryan 17.7%, with the remaining six candidates accruing 9% among them. (10)
With protests continuing and growing pressure on officials who support the rallies, it is difficult to say what the outcome will be. State authorities have not ruled out the use of force. The final outcome of Armenia’s most recent elections remains to be seen.

GEORGIA

Russian-Georgian relations see possible improvement

The CIS summit witnessed meetings between Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili and Russian President Vladimir Putin in what could signal a slight warming of the habitually chilly relationship between their two countries. Afterwards, Saakashvili announced that Russia would not acknowledge Georgia’s two separatist republics, South Ossetia and Abkhazia, a critical question for Georgia in light of Kosovo’s recent declaration of independence. (11) While Saakashvili may breathe at least a momentary sigh of relief over that announcement, all is not smooth sailing. Russia and Georgia have reached a tentative agreement (opposed by the separatist republics) about joint monitoring for two border-crossings, one in Abkhazia and one in South Ossetia, in return for Georgia’s support of Russia’s WTO membership. (12) The establishment of joint border crossings had been a precondition for Georgian support of Russia’s desire to join the WTO; Georgian membership in that international organization is one of the comparatively few levers it has over Russia. Despite this potentially favorable sign, however, Putin recently has pressed again for a Georgian commitment not to allow the establishment of foreign military bases on its soil, a reminder of Russia’s staunch opposition to Georgia’s much sought after NATO membership. (13) Other issues still to be resolved, although possibly in the works, are the resumption of flights between Moscow and Tbilisi and the lifting of the embargo on Georgian wine exports to Russia. While the recent meetings did not work out all of these issues, they at least signal cautious progress toward the improvement of Russian-Georgian relations.

Source Notes:
(2) “Sarkisian does not rule out police use to prevent disorders,” 22 Feb 08, TASS via Lexis-Nexis.
(3) "Levon Ter-Petrosyan's supporters demanded resignation of leadership of Armenian Public TV and Radio Company," 23 Feb 08, ARMInfo via Armenia News Network, 23 Feb 08.
(8) “Authors of Statement Read at Opp Rally Relieved of Posts, Ranks,” 24 Feb 08, Noyan Tapan via Armenian News Network, 24 Feb 08.
(9) “Two Armenian ruling coalition MPs deny they support opposition,” Public Television of Armenia, 23 Feb 08; BBC Monitoring via Lexis-Nexis.
(10) “By decision of RA CEC, RA Prime Minister Serzh Sargsyan proclaimed winner of February 19 presidential election in Armenia,” 24 Feb 08, ARMInfo via Armenian News Network, 24 Feb 08.
(11) “Russia not to recognize Abkhazia, South Ossetia – Georgian President,” 22 Feb 08, Rustavi-2; BBC Monitoring via Lexis-Nexis.
Newly Independent States: Central Asia

By Monika Shepherd

Tajikistan’s crisis continues to deepen
An unusually cold winter has been creating significant problems across Central Asia, causing severe shortages of natural gas deliveries and electricity supplies. In Tajikistan, the poorest and least developed of the Central Asian states since Soviet times, still is struggling to overcome the destruction wrought by the 1992-1997 civil war; the energy crisis has brought the country’s industry, state institutions and private enterprises to a virtual standstill. Until recently, even Dushanbe received electricity for only two four-hour periods per day, while most rural areas were forced to make do with even less. At a meeting with President Putin in Moscow last week, Tajikistan’s President Emomali Rahmon detailed the extent of the damage that the energy shortage has inflicted on his country’s economy: “The situation is catastrophic. According to preliminary estimates, there has been more than $1 billion damage. The winter crop was completely lost, the horticultural sector was badly hit, and we lost nearly 70 percent of our livestock. Fully 90 percent of industry is idle for the third consecutive month.” (1) Such a candid admission is unusual for a Central Asian head of state – the normal modus operandi is to downplay the gravity of any given crisis and then assure the world at large that the government is in control and fully capable of handling the situation. For Rahmon to describe his country’s circumstances in such dire terms could be interpreted as an acknowledgment that his government’s resources are not up to the task of managing the present crisis.

This crisis was precipitated by the most severe winter that Central Asia has experienced in decades, as well as a water shortage (brought about by such factors as lower than normal rainfall levels, overuse of water for crop irrigation, and the freezing of water in reservoirs used to generate hydropower) which has...
compromised the ability of hydroelectric plants to generate enough power to meet rising domestic demand, much less to fulfill their export contracts. In fact, water levels at Tajikistan’s Norek Dam (on the Vakhsh River) had fallen so low by February 12 that the hydropower facility was in danger of having to rely solely on river current to produce electricity. With river levels also below normal, this would permit the production of only 15 million kWh per day and most likely result in even further electricity rationing. Electricity imports to Tajikistan also have fallen, from 16-20 million kWh to 5.5-6 million kWh per day, as Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan struggle to meet their own domestic demands for heat and power. Tajikistan has had to rely on natural gas imports from Uzbekistan for years and it has become common for residential gas supplies to be severely reduced in the winter months, when the Uzbek government decides to withhold fuel exports, ostensibly over payment arrears. But, even at the worst of these times, Tajikistan’s manufacturing sector continued to receive enough fuel for its daily operations. This winter, not even the country’s most vital industrial enterprises are able to operate at full capacity: the Tajik Aluminum Plant (TadAP) has experienced a 20% reduction in its power supply and has had to scale back production as a result. (2) As the country’s most profitable industrial enterprise, TadAP long has been the crown jewel of Tajikistan’s industrial sector; the fact that its power supply is being rationed is perhaps the most alarming indicator yet of just how dire the energy shortage has become.

The United Nations has issued an appeal for a donation of US$25 million in order to send three months’ worth of emergency food rations to feed 200,000 of Tajikistan’s neediest families, most of whom live in rural areas. The UN’s World Food Programme (WFP) already considers 10% of the country’s population (roughly 500,000 people) to be “chronically food insecure,” with an additional 17% considered “very vulnerable to food insecurity,” according to WFP Tajikistan Country Director Zlatan Milisic. (3) As food supplies dwindle and the cost of both food and fuel rises further, an even greater portion of Tajikistan’s population can be expected to become “food insecure,” especially if the spring planting is not
able to go forward as planned, due to electricity rationing. A fair number of countries including the US, Russia, Iran, France, Germany, Holland, Saudi Arabia, Kazakhstan, Ukraine, as well as the European Commission have all donated funds and supplies such as heaters and generators to the beleaguered Tajik government. (4) Iran has even donated 4.5 million liters of kiln oil, kerosene, and gas oil (oil which has been heated to a gaseous state and then condensed). (5)

Hopefully, between the UN-sponsored aid and donations from individual governments, Tajikistan’s residents will manage to survive what remains of the winter. Unfortunately, the humanitarian aid donations are little more than a band-aid for the country’s socioeconomic woes, which now include not only an outdated, insufficient energy infrastructure, but also the very real possibility of large-scale and long-term food shortages, a lack of potable water, non-functioning sewage systems, and the consequent risk of epidemics of diseases such as typhoid, dysentery, hepatitis, etc. Incidents of hypothermia and frostbite have risen sharply, as well as maternity-related deaths. According to data obtained by the World Health Organization (WHO), 50% of all medical facilities in Kulob District, the Rasht Valley, Qurghonteppa and Sughd Provinces are suffering from either extreme shortages of electricity or a complete lack thereof and all hospitals in Kulob District are without running water. Health experts are predicting that Tajikistan may be on the brink of a humanitarian disaster, with thousands of people at risk of severe malnutrition and disease. (6)

To make matters worse, recent events indicate that there are still deep fractures between various factions of the ruling elite, including within the security services, fractures which date back at least as far as the civil war and which the ensuing “peace process” has done nothing to heal. On February 5, two contingents of OMON personnel (special forces riot police) engaged in an armed skirmish in Gharm (located in the Rasht Valley in central Tajikistan, northeast of Dushanbe), during which the commander of one OMON unit, Colonel Oleg Zakharchenko,
was killed. Col. Zakharchenko, Rajabali Mahmadaliev (chief of the national police directorate for combating organized crime), and a number of other men ostensibly were in Gharm to discuss the performance of the local police department when they clashed with the head of Gharm’s anti-organized crime unit, Mirzohoja Ahmadov. According to the Interior Ministry’s version of events, Zakharchenko and company were approaching the building that houses the anti-organized crime unit, when Ahmadov and his men opened fire, without provocation. Ahmadov, on the other hand, claims that Zakharchenko’s men fired the first shots and that, furthermore, he had no idea that the group was from OMON, but thought that his building was under attack from unknown, armed assailants and was forced to fire back in self-defense. Regardless of whose story is more accurate, the incident has alarming implications for the cohesion, or lack thereof, among Tajikistan’s security personnel. Ahmadov and his comrades in Gharm’s anti-organized crime unit are amnestied former members of the United Tajik Opposition (UTO), which opposed President Rahmon and other members of the former Communist elite during Tajikistan’s civil war. During the peace process, Ahmadov and hundreds of other UTO combatants were amnestied, disarmed and then “reintegrated” into the country’s military and security forces. In Ahmadov’s case, he and men who had served under him in the UTO were incorporated into Gharm’s anti-organized crime unit, which functions under the auspices of the Interior Ministry. According to a report in the Vechernyi Dushanbe newspaper, Interior Ministry authorities had decided that Ahmadov’s unit had become troublesome and should be disbanded, but refused to comply and surrender its weapons. Consequently, Col. Zakharchenko’s unit was dispatched to Gharm, to arrest Ahmadov by force, if necessary. (7) Rumor has it that many former UTO commanders and the men who served under them were brought wholesale into the Interior Ministry, particularly into the anti-organized crime forces. This gave them ample opportunity to set up their own local fiefdoms and run things as they pleased, which, not unpredictably, eventually would bring them into conflict with other law enforcement personnel.
President Rahmon diligently has been pushing former opposition members (not only from the UTO, but also from other opposition groups, such as Abdumalik Abdullajonov’s group in Khujand) out of the government, both at the national and local level, but it seems as though he may have more trouble removing them from the security services. Under the best of circumstances, re-arming former UTO fighters and allowing their command units not only to remain together, but to assume control of law enforcement functions in entire towns and districts would seem to be a recipe for disaster. However, given the current level of dissatisfaction with the Rahmon administration and its seeming powerlessness to do much more than ask the international community for aid, the uneasy truce that has existed between former UTO sympathizers and the current political elite may not be sustainable for much longer. Many of the deep-seated political and social divisions, which led to the 1992-1997 civil war were never fully addressed during the “peace process,” but simply were swept under the rug. During his 15-year reign, President Rahmon has taken considerable steps to consolidate his power and marginalize those who opposed him, but the fact that there are former UTO units armed with government-issue weapons controlling even small sections of the country is a clear indicator that his rule is far from total and that there may be a great deal of trouble ahead.

Source Notes:
(3) “WFP To Feed 200,000 Vulnerable People Affected By Food Emergency In Tajikistan,” 22 Feb 08, State News Service via Lexis-Nexis Academic.
(4) “Foreign aid streaming into freezing Tajikistan,” 21 Feb 08, Russia & CIS General Newswire; Interfax via Lexis-Nexis Academic.


Newly Independent States: Western Region
By Tammy Lynch

BELARUS
Lukashenka’s Potemkin good will
On 26 February, Belarus President Alyaksandr Lukashenka approved a three-day furlough from prison for opposition activist Alyaksandr Kazulin, an Amnesty International-recognized prisoner of conscience. The furlough allowed Kazulin to attend the funeral of his wife, Iryna, who died of cancer on Sunday. (1)

The furlough request originally was denied, but Lukashenka appears to have reversed his decision after a torrent of international criticism. Just months ago, this reversal likely would not have happened, but in recent weeks, President Lukashenka has been making a very public show of reaching out to the West for improved relations. The question is how many of the overtures are just that – a show.

The grandest gestures from Lukashenka lately have concerned the release of numerous individuals classified as “political prisoners” by international organizations and governments. The US State Department this week welcomed the recent releases of opposition activist and former parliament member Andrei
Klimau; journalist Alyaksandr Sdvizhkau; “Youth Front” leaders Zmitser Dashkevich and Artur Finkevich, and leaders of the Movement of Entrepreneurs, Nikolay Avtukhovich and Yuriy Leonov. (2) Several had been in prison or hard labor camps for more than two years.

The US and European Union also have welcomed the news that Kazulin would be allowed to attend his wife’s funeral, but have called for the furlough to be altered to a full unconditional release. “Should Mr. Kozulin’s [sic] release be made permanent, all internationally recognized political prisoners would have been released,” State Department Spokesperson Tom Casey said, “and we would be prepared to begin a dialogue with Belarus on further steps to improve bilateral relations.” (3)

Prior to Lukashenka’s reversal, the EU’s External Relations Commissioner Benita Ferrero-Waldner said a decision to allow Kazulin’s furlough would be “an important signal.” (4)

Clearly, Lukashenka hopes that this “signal” will prompt Western countries to lift travel and banking bans on members of his regime, and to open negotiations over improved trade relations. He has called his recent actions “an unprecedented step of good will toward the West,” and noted his interest in “cooperation with Western countries.” (5)

The bans on members of his administration were instituted following the 2006 presidential election. The election was judged to be neither free nor unfair by all internationally accredited election monitoring organizations, and led to a police crackdown on Lukashenka’s political opponents, with over 1000 activists placed in detention for various periods. As a result of this and previous crackdowns on business, the media and his opponents, the country is isolated, with the US labeling it “the last dictatorship in Europe.”
Today, Belarus’ largely unreformed, Soviet-style economy, for all intents and purposes, has collapsed. The country survives almost entirely on direct Russian subsidies of up to $2 billion per year, combined with the money [up to $3 billion per year] it makes re-exporting Russian oil bought for under-market cost to Western Europe, at higher prices.

On 30 January, Belarus’ Finance Minister revealed that the country soon would raise the possibility of a new Russian loan. The request is expected to be received very favorably. (6) In exchange for these loans, lower oil and gas prices, and military assistance, Belarus has opened its markets to Russia business, turned over half of its pipeline transit system to Gazprom, and supported every major Russian foreign policy initiative. Furthermore, it has served as an important beachhead for Russia, which sees former allies turning away, and EU and NATO borders creeping closer every year. The two countries continue to discuss the creation of a “union state,” although little progress has been made on the project from either side.

But, Lukashenka’s position vis à vis Russia is that of a child to a parent. He appears to have little say in joint decisions, and risks losing his subsidies should he publicly disagree with Russia on any major point. He has lost control of his energy transit system and Russian businesses dominate the country’s economy, such as it is. At the same time, Russia has begun gradually raising oil and gas prices, with the stated purpose of meeting “market prices” in 2011.

Last week, Lukashenka confirmed plans to build a new nuclear reactor as an alternative energy source; Russia quickly pointed out that the country should invite its neighbor to build the structure and to supply its nuclear fuel. (7) Russia’s assistance likely would result in an ownership stake, if it follows the path of previous joint development projects.
It is no surprise, then, that the Belarus president is speaking of good will to the West. But are Lukashenka’s actions truly representative of a shift in the regime’s behavior? His opponents have proclaimed loudly that they are not.

Although former parliamentary deputy Andrei Klimau told the press that his and other prisoner releases will “bring us closer to the European Union,” (8) he and his allies also pointed out that arrests continue. In fact, although a reported six political prisoners have been released over the last month, 14 other political opponents were detained in just one day in Minsk, following a protest in late January. (9) Additional arrests outside the capital have been reported by the independent Charter 97 website.

Former presidential candidate Alyaksandr Milinkevich also was detained following another protest on 18 February, as was Kazulin’s daughter Volha, after she unfurled a banner reading “Freedom for Kazulin!”. (10)

Several protests against Lukashenka recently were quickly—and sometimes violently—broken up by police. The protests, which are the most active since 2006, are being run by the Movement for Entrepreneurs. This group is protesting a new presidential decree outlawing non-relative employees in “individual” businesses (yes, you read correctly). Decree 760 ensures that all “individual entrepreneurs” are barred from hiring anyone except family members. Should they hire a non-relative, prohibitive tax, licensing and other economic laws would be triggered.

The decree primarily affects kiosk owners and small business people who sell goods on the street – the largest (and some suggest, only) source of free enterprise in Belarus’ planned economy. The measure prompted a quick, unified, and sustained response from a committed core of venders and their new political allies, although the majority of the population has not joined the cause. (11)
The detentions of activists protesting this decree demonstrate that international pressure to release “political prisoners” has not resulted in an easing of oppression in the state, despite hopes to the contrary.

As noted above, the US State Department is offering to restart “a dialogue with Belarus on further steps to improve bilateral relations” if Kazulin is released, since “all internationally recognized political prisoners would have been released.” The EU's foreign policy chief Javier Solana echoed those sentiments on 26 February. "Mr Kozulin's release would mean the release of all political prisoners," he said. "I sincerely hope that this important step will be taken." (12)

But, while the recent releases are a welcome and important gesture, by focusing on certain “internationally-recognized political prisoners,” an unintentional impression may be created that Belarus has stopped arresting opponents of the regime. At the same time, “lower-level” activists serving sentences for opposing Lukashenka may be left without international advocates.

In fact, officials regularly confine protestors and civic activists for up to 15 days at a time, release them, and then detain them again a bit later. Speaking against the government remains a crime, and the media is wholly state-owned and/or controlled, limiting access to information critical of the regime.

Youth activist Andrei Kim, who volunteered for the Belarusian Helsinki Committee and represented the “Initiative” civic organization, is currently the most well-known activist in prison. He is in detention, awaiting trial for participating in an entrepreneurs rally on 21 January. His release is not being discussed, and he could be jailed for up to six years.

On 27 February, Kazulin was supported at his wife’s funeral by a gathering of approximately 1,000 opposition activists. Kazulin praised his wife’s unrelenting
opposition to Lukashenka. “She set an example of how to live and die,” he told mourners. “I bow before my wife’s grave and before you in order that love, kindness, justice and humanity should reign in Belarus,” he said. (13)

Kazulin was joined by the US and Israeli Ambassadors. However, in a clear sign that Lukashenka’s good will is limited, US Deputy Assistant Secretary State David Kramer was blocked from traveling to Belarus. Kramer, who continues to be very critical of Lukashenka, technically was granted a visa, but was told that the document would only become effective on 3 March. (14) The New York Times quoted Kramer before the visa request as noting a “stagnant to slight deterioration” in the political situation in the country over the last two years, notwithstanding the releases. (15)

Charter 97 reported on 27 February that a number of regional representatives of the Movement of Entrepreneurs also were detained on their way to attend the funeral. (16)

Another important test for Lukashenka’s new courting of the West will come on “Freedom Day,” 25 March. That day, Lukashenka’s opponents hope to gather up to 10,000 people in the center of Minsk, for the biggest rally since early 2006. Kazulin, Milinkevich and other activists are urging that all prisoners being held on political charges be released prior to the day. They fear, however, that the “Freedom Day” rally will result in further detentions.

Lukashenka’s choice about how to deal with this rally will speak volumes about the true level of his good will to the West.

In the face of returning to prison for several more years, Kazulin remains defiant, urging Belarusians to gather in the name of his wife. “As you can understand, Irina above all needed her husband near her. That would have been humane, but (Lukashenka) did everything to humiliate me more.” Earlier, before his release,
Kozulin said: "Lukashenko killed my wife, he is a murderer, my wife's death is on his conscience." (17)

Source Notes:
(2) “US Welcomes Belarus’ temporary release of opposition leader, wants it made permanent,” Associated Press, 27 Feb 08.
(3) Ibid.
(4) “EU Appeal over Belarus dissident,” BBC News, 25 Feb 08.
(5) “Belarus dissident freed to go to funeral,” Associated Press, AM EST, 26 Feb 08; and “Belarus interested in dialogue with the West, EU- President,” Belapan News Agency, 12 Feb 08 via Lexis-Nexis.
(6) Belapan news agency, 1119 GMT, 30 Jan 08 via Lexis-Nexis.
(7) “Russian company offers 'strategic' partnership to Belarus in nuclear project,” Belapan News Agency, 1441 GMT, 12 Feb 08 via Lexis-Nexis.
(12) RIA Novosti, 1404 CET, 26 Feb 08.
(13) “Mourners bury jailed Belarus opposition leader's wife,” Agence France Presse, 0201 EST, 27 Feb 08 via Yahoo! News.
(14) Ibid.
(17) “Mourners bury jailed Belarus opposition leader's wife,” Agence France Presse, 0201 EST, 27 Feb 08 via Yahoo! News.

Copyright Boston University Trustees 2008

Unless otherwise indicated, all articles appearing in this journal were written especially for Analyst. This article was originally published at http://www.bu.edu/iscip/digest/vol14/ed1409.html.