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Russia’s multipolar landscape

Vladimir Putin’s decision not to leave the political stage upon completion of his second presidential term produced a pseudo-multipolar diorama in Russian politics. The diarchical leadership structure occasionally appears strained, but President Medvedev’s forays (thus far, primarily rhetorical) into reform of the judiciary or of corrupt practices among the apparatchiki seem simply to imply critique of the still unassailable Prime Minister Putin; thus far, few moves suggest the president intends to pose a serious challenge to his prime minister, only, perhaps to individual members of the surrounding siloviki clan.

However, a new dimension recently appears to have been added to the scene, as the new head of the Orthodox church in Moscow, Patriarch Kirill, has stepped into the political realm, specifically in matters involving the passage of legislation. After a meeting with deputies from United Russia, Patriarch Kirill apparently was granted the right to preview all legislation under consideration by Russia’s Duma. The Patriarch had appealed to leaders of the Duma’s central party, United Russia, regarding legislation that formed part of an EU-sponsored initiative to bring sex education into schools. (1) More recently, the Patriarch’s trip to Ukraine, despite strenuous denials from church leadership of political implications, has raised concerns that Kirill’s pastoral “pilgrimage” indeed has decidedly political overtones: “[Kirill] sees himself as the patriarch of Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, Moldova and all the Orthodox Christians throughout the world….” (2)
The potential addition of Patriarch Kirill to Russia’s political firmament seems to produce a neo-tsarist spin on Orthodoxy, Autocracy and Nationality. In this modern, deconstructed version, Patriarch Kirill clearly personifies Orthodoxy; absolute power resides in the person of Vladimir Putin, whatever his formal political position; and President Medvedev wades into the contentious arenas of national pride and historical revision with the creation of his commission to review possible misrepresentations of Russian/Soviet history. (This Commission, headed by apparatchik-extraordinaire, Sergei Naryshkin, seems particular concerned with the efforts of former Soviet republics and satellites to write their own versions of events during WWII and evaluate for themselves their experiences with liberation/subjugation at the hands of Soviet forces.) (3)

This new expression of the formula embraced by Tsar Nikolas I may exude an air of familiarity, but it lacks a key component: the three elements of this ideology once were personified in a single individual. Perhaps, if the new model discomfits, Putin someday will be persuaded to re-consider the tri-polar power structure and stand once again for election to the presidency on a platform of strong nationalist planks with his commitment to Orthodoxy given Patriarch Kirill’s imprimatur.

Despite its domestic uses, the multipolarity concept’s initial application belonged to the realm of international relations, and here, too, it is strangely resonant now. This month brought high-level visits to the region by both the new US President and Vice President. Barack Obama’s Moscow trip featured meetings with both President Medvedev and Prime Minister Putin. The public exhibition carried forth the tone of an old school arms control Summit; fortunately, despite the build up given to its hallmark arms agreement, none of the urgency or gravity of the earlier Cold War era was in evidence.

Vice President Biden called in on the leaders of Ukraine and Georgia this month as well, in visits that seemed intent on expressing solidarity through presence alone. In Tbilisi and Kyiv, his words conveyed little in new policy relevance, but
reflected general support. (In Georgia, Biden did make known US policy on providing even defensive weapons to Georgia. Please see The Caucasus Region, below.) For the leaders of Ukraine and Georgia, Biden’s visit itself, with its acknowledgement of US interest, was the message.

As the focus of US foreign policy, and the Obama administration’s developing vision internationally, shifts ever more perceptibly towards the Middle East and the Iranian question, Russia is posed with a question that jumps from the pages of its own multipolar playbook: What leadership role is Russia willing to play as the world considers a new security concept for the Middle East that factors in the potential (a potential made possible by Russian expertise and materiel) for a nuclear-armed Iran?

The approach being put forward by the Obama administration appears to mark a departure from previous efforts to prevent Iran’s possession of a nuclear weapon and may instead have moved focus to deterrence of a nuclear-armed Iran. Certainly, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton’s recent remarks in Thailand pointedly suggested that Iran should consider the ramifications of a possible US “defense umbrella over the region” and whether or not “Iran will be any stronger or safer, because they won’t be able to intimidate and dominate, as they apparently believe they can, once they have a nuclear weapon.” (4)

Most relevant to Russia in this debate appears to be the US intention to construct a multilateral approach to the issue, signaled most notably this month by a series of warnings to Israel by American officials, most recently Pentagon officials in advance of Secretary of Defense Robert Gates’ visit to the region, cautioning against an Israeli strike on Iran. (5) Earlier such warnings contained a request that the new US administration not be surprised by a serious shift in “facts on the ground” before it could take up the issue; now, it appears US policy would favor a multinational approach in resolving the Iran issue.
Russia is thus faced with a critical “multipolar moment.” After reaping the financial benefits of providing the elements of a nuclear energy program (at least) to Tehran, what effort is the Russian leadership willing to exert in order to deter the weaponization of Iran’s nuclear program, or perhaps to deter a nuclear weapon armed Iran? Previous years have seen what appear to be Russia’s willingness to proliferate nuclear technology throughout the region; by some estimates, Russia has offered its nuclear services to thirteen Arab states. (6) Will proliferation of its nuclear technology form the cornerstone of Russia’s approach in the Middle East? Or is it possible that having provided Iran the wherewithal to establish its nuclear program, Russia’s leaders will take another long, hard look at a map, contemplate the question of security along its southern flank, and derive a constructively multipolar conclusion?

Source Notes:
(2) “Will the New Patriarch of Moscow Succeed in His New Role in Ukraine?” Comment by Andrei Zolotov, Jr., 27 Jul 09, Russia Profile via www.russiaprofile.org/page.php?pageid=International&articleid=a1248717160; See also commentary from Brian Whitmore, “From a Diarchy to a Troika,” 9 Jul 09 Power Vertical blog, “www.rferl.org/content/From_A_Diarchy_To_A_Troika/1773488.html.
Russian Federation: Domestic Issues and Legislative Branch

By Rose Monacelli

FSB adds a weapon to its arsenal – Order 65

In an action that does nothing to belie accusations that Russia is steadily regressing into a totalitarian state, the government had a law passed last Tuesday authorizing a task force comprised of members of the police, Russia’s Federal Security Service, and six other law enforcement agencies, to intercept and examine letters and packages sent via the country’s postal system. The passage of Order 65, as the law is commonly known, confirms a decree released by the Communications and Press Ministry at the beginning of July. Under the law, special camera-equipped “inspection rooms” will be established at every post office in the country. (1) Within these rooms, authorities have the right to check and if need be, hold, open, and examine the letters and packages of people suspected of breaking the law, or even those under suspicion of planning to do so. (2) The police and each of seven security agencies also were given complete access to the postal service’s national and regional databases, which not only include names and addresses, but also a complete postal history. (3) Additionally, Order 65 grants the security services access to the same information collected by electronic communications service providers. (4)
Like its predecessor, the Committee of State Security (KGB), the Federal Security Service (FSB) long has been suspected of monitoring all forms of communication inside Russia’s borders. To many, Order 65 is a formal expression of this pervasive, but unacknowledged, state control. In recent years, thanks in part to the government’s encroachment on electronic communication, Russian citizens have relied more heavily on traditional mail services, because an individual’s right to privacy in letters and packages sent by post was guaranteed in 1993 with the ratification of the Russian Constitution. Articles 23 and 24 of the Constitution establish the idea of a private identity, granting every citizen “the right to privacy of correspondence, of telephone conversations, postal, telegraph and other messages” and banning “the collection, storage, use and dissemination of information about the private life of a person” without prior consent. (5) Until recently, mail sent through the postal system could be examined only after investigators obtained a court order.

Unfortunately, Order 65 no longer contains this provision. In fact, it conveniently fails to outline the standards for or process by which mail will be made available to the various monitoring agencies. (6) Without clear standards, such decisions inevitably will be left to the security services. This last change has exercised the country’s human rights proponents, who claim that Order 65 represents a return to Soviet-era KGB tactics designed to detect and smother dissent. Moscow Helsinki Group, Russia’s oldest non-governmental organization, (NGO) was one of the first to go on record with its view of Order 65 as a violation of the constitutionally mandated right to privacy. Lyudmila Alexeyeva, the NGO’s leader, called the inspection rooms “a front” that “will allow the security services to rifle through private correspondence with impunity.” (7) The liberal press, most notably Novyye izvestia, also has joined in the protest, editorializing that Order 65 is simply another action in a long line of governmental maneuvering designed to monitor everything its citizens are doing. (8) Russia’s security services have little need to implement Order 65 effectively, as the simple announcement of the
plan, and the criticism it garners, likely will strengthen the deterrent effect of the law.

Despite an outpouring of criticism, the government has put forth little effort to justify the new law. In a brief statement, a spokesman for Russia’s Communications and Press Ministry argued that Order 65 was simply an attempt to better “regulate cooperation between post offices and special agencies in the course of investigative work” and that “the document was approved by the Justice Ministry, which means that it corresponds with the Constitution and the other laws of the Russian Federation.” (9) He did concede that the government’s newfound ability to monitor mail sent by post could limit the rights of Russian citizens, but only those of individuals under suspicion. (10) The Ministry has maintained that the order does not give investigators greater power, because they still would need to obtain a court order to open letters or packages. The conditions that would prompt investigators to request opening mail are outlined on the agency’s web site. (11)

These statements have done little to assuage the fears of the plan’s detractors, not least because the standards as posted online are so vague (suspect has committed a crime, suspect is preparing to commit a crime, the suspect’s actions could endanger the public, the military, the economic, or environmental security of the Russian Federation) (12) that they could be applied to any situation. The decision to enact a decree with such wide-ranging potential for abuse may serve to provide insight into the Russian government’s self-perceived strength (or weakness) domestically.

Two weeks ago Russia’s Ministry of the Interior established a new department dedicated to monitoring public attitudes and preventing social unrest. MVD representatives will be stationed in every region of the country to monitor and analyze “social tension.” (13) For almost a year, there have been sporadic but steady outbreaks of protests and other anti-government demonstrations
spearheaded by citizens reacting to the effects of economic crisis. Despite slight improvements over the past few months, Russia’s recession, coupled with high unemployment and high prices, has lowered the public’s confidence in the government’s ability to solve economic and social problems. This has led to concern over increasing public unrest. (15) The government’s actions over the past few months may be seen as preemptive steps to contain social protest. Of course, it is also possible that the Kremlin is using the economic crisis, and whatever tension it releases, as a convenient excuse to exert further control over its citizenry.

Source Notes:
(6) “Russian Intelligence Granted New Powers over Citizens [mail],” Ibid.
(7) “Russian security services to examine personal post,” Ibid.
(8) Ibid.
Russian Federation: Security Services and Armed Forces

By Fabian Adami

Politkovskaya: New trial announced

On 17th February, the jury in the Politkovskaya case returned a unanimous not-guilty verdict against four men accused of conspiring in the reporter’s assassination. The decision was made almost inevitable by virtue of DNA and fingerprint evidence, as well as by the fact that prosecutors failed to present—apparently because they had been misplaced—several key pieces of evidence.

On 27th May, prosecutors in Moscow filed an appeal with the Supreme Court. Three weeks later, that body announced that it had annulled the verdict, and stated that the case would be reexamined with “new jurors,” although no date was set at that time. A week ago, Anna Savitskaya, one of the Politkovskaya family attorneys, informed reporters that preliminary hearings would begin on 5 August. (2)
Until now, Politkovskaya’s family and colleagues have reacted to events by focusing purely on the fact that they believe the trigger-man and the “person who ordered” the hit were still at large, while insisting that the defendants nonetheless were involved in her assassination in some capacity. (3) Since the Supreme Court’s ruling however, they have become somewhat more outspoken: on June 26th, Sergei Sokolov, Politkovskaya’s former deputy editor asserted that “the authorities came to the conclusion that it looks very improper that nobody ended up behind bars.” (4) The Supreme Court’s decision Sokolov added, was clearly a “political not a procedural one,” designed simply for public relations purposes. (5)

Sokolov’s opinion likely is the correct one. If that is the case, the defendants stand no chance of being exonerated for a second time, making their lawyer’s assertion that his clients have nothing to fear as long as prosecutors are able to bring in “unbiased,” and “objective” people for the new jury (6), naïve at best. Their actual innocence matters not a jot. The reality is that if the state wants a conviction, it will set out to get one, where-after the matter will be considered closed.

**FSB anti-terror exercise as cover?**
During the spring and early summer of this year, Russia took steps in Georgia’s separatist regions of South Ossetia and Abkhazia, designed to consolidate the gains made by Russia and its supposedly newly-independent allies in the conflict last fall. The most important step was the agreement signed in April between President Dmitri Medvedev, and “Presidents” Eduard Kokoity and Sergei Bagapsh, that allowed the FSB’s Border Guards to move in with a mandate to protect the “state borders” of the splinter regions until such time as they could raise their own forces. The deployment was justified by the claim that Georgia was “provoking” Russia, and that the troops in question were ideally suited to provide humanitarian aid to local refugees. (7)
On 30th June, the FSB announced that it was launching a new anti-terrorist operation in Kabarda-Balkaria, a Republic bordering Georgia. According to Natalya Borovinskaya, an FSB spokeswoman, the goal of the operation is to find “members of illegal armed formations” who may be hiding in a number of villages in the region’s Elbrusskiy District. (8) It is not clear how long this operation is due to last, but the timing is interesting: A week after the exercise was launched, a number of Russian pundits predicted that the upcoming meeting between Presidents Barack Obama and Dmitri Medvedev would decide whether Russia would attack Georgia again. (9)

If this assumption was correct, it would shed new light on the Border Guards’ deployment, as well as on the exercise: even if an attack has not been ordered definitively, preparations would be necessary to ensure that a go-order could be executed quickly. What better way of moving forces (particularly elite units) toward the start line than under the guise of an anti-terror operation?

In brief: FSB in Ukraine

On June 28th, Valentyn Nalyvaichenko, Head of the Ukrainian Secret Service (SBU) announced that all Russian FSB officers attached to the Black Sea Fleet must leave the country by December 13th. (10) Nalyvaichenko noted that the SBU would target any officers believed to be conducting intelligence operations actively, and insisted that his agency possessed “sufficient strength,” as well as the “means,” to enforce the aforementioned deadline. (11)

Is it possible that the Ukrainian government is publicizing the issue with the goal of increasing pressure sufficiently for Russia to have to accept Ukraine’s request? If so, this tactic is unlikely to work. What, realistically, could the Ukrainian government do, were Russia to refuse to remove its security and intelligence officers from Sevastopol and other locations in Ukraine?

Natalia Estemirova betrayed?
On 15th July, Natalia Estemirova, a prominent Russian Human Rights activist based in Chechnya, was murdered. Snatched by four gunmen as she left her apartment building in Grozny, Estemirova was thrown into a getaway car, which apparently, “breezed through” several checkpoints in and around the capital unchallenged. Once they had crossed into Ingushetia, her abductors stopped their car, forced her out, and killed her, firing five shots into her head and chest. (12) At the time of her death, Estemirova was working in Grozny for “Memorial” (a Russian human rights group), and her task was to record abuses perpetrated by Chechnya’s law-enforcement and security agencies. Estemirova had been threatened numerous times, most notably by President Ramzan Kadyrov himself in May 2008, when she was “summoned” to his office to face a man proudly boasting about the amount of blood on his own hands. (13) It is important to note that Estemirova’s death has a wider context. She was a friend of both Anna Politkovskaya and Stanislav Markelov, two other Kadyrov critics, who have been murdered—the latter just five months ago.

Estemirova’s friends and colleagues have been quick to direct blame for her murder towards Kadyrov, (14) noting that once Russia lifted its anti-terror regime from the Caucasus republic in April and handed full control to its local strongman, Estemirova’s workload had increased significantly. President Kadyrov has denied involvement, threatening to sue those who allege it, (15) and promising to launch a full and complete investigation into the assassination, just as President Medvedev has. (16)

There is little to no chance of discovering who ordered Estemirova’s murder, nor of discovering who carried it out, whether it was Russian special units or paramilitary units loyal directly to Kadyrov. It is possible, however, that the hit was set up at very short notice, in order to silence her on a specific issue: on the day of her abduction, she was due to meet with the Head of the Chechen Republic Investigations Directorate of the Investigations Committee under the Russian Prosecutor’s office – she had set the session in person the day before.
(17) It is also possible that the Chechen and Russian authorities have learned from the Markelov and Politkovskaya murders: in contrast to a hit in Chechnya, an assassination in Moscow must be investigated, even if only for public relations purposes. The killers may have waited to carry out the hit on Estemirova for that reason—until she returned to Grozny from a sabbatical in Oxford in the fall of 2008.

Source Notes:
(2) “Court to Launch Retrial Of Politkovskaya’s Murder Case on 5 August,” ITAR-TASS, 22 Jul 09 via Lexis-Nexis.
(4) “3 Russians To Be Retried in 2006 Slaying; High Court Overturns Acquittal on Charges Linked to the Death of Investigative Journalist Politkovskaya,” Los Angeles Times, 26 Jun 09 via Lexis-Nexis.
(7) See The ISCIAnalyst, Volume XV, Number 13 (25 Jun 09).
(9) “Obama- Putin Meeting ‘Will Decide Whether Russia Attacks Georgia,’” Yezhedenevnyy zhurnal, 6 Jul 09 via Lexis-Nexis.
(10) “Intelligence Chief Vows FSB Operatives will Leave Ukraine,” Interfax-AVN Online, 29 Jun 09; OSC Transcribed Text via World News Connection.

(13) Ibid.


(17) Russian Murdered Rights Activist Was To Meet Top Investigator on Day of Death,” RIA-Novosti, 16 Jul 09; BBC Monitoring via Lexis-Nexis.

Russian Federation: Energy Politics

By Creelea Henderson

Nabucco, Act 2: Suppliers wanted, and unwanted

In 2002, at the close of a meeting of European energy majors, who had gathered in Vienna to discuss the creation of an independent natural gas supply corridor to provide the EU energy market with an alternative to Russian domination, the newly minted consortium decided to christen their project “Nabucco” after an opera by Giuseppe Verdi on the theme of liberation from oppression. Thus, from its inception, Nabucco was designed to advance energy security in Europe by tapping directly into gas-rich regions in Central Asia and the Middle East, without relying on transport networks controlled by Russian gas export monopoly Gazprom. It is puzzling, then, that the search for gas producers to supply the project has pointed back to Russia. Last week, US special envoy for Eurasian energy, Richard Morningstar, extended an invitation to Russia to supply gas for the European pipeline, and urged other participating countries to accept Russia
as a partner in the project. (1) Whatever its intention, the offer is certain to be spurned by Moscow, where the Nabucco pipeline is perceived as a menace to core Russian interests.

In recent years, Moscow has had the pleasure of watching the rival pipeline plans anguish amid financial meltdowns, political quarrels and supply snags, not a few of which were Russian-orchestrated. This summer, however, Nabucco suddenly seems to have revived, partly as a result of the pipeline consortium’s taking a page from its rival’s playbook and hiring a German politician to boost its project. Like Gazprom, which welcomed retired German Chancellor Gerhard Schröeder onto its board in 2005, the Nabucco consortium recently hired the former German foreign minister and Green Party leader, Joschka Fischer, to serve as chief negotiator for Nabucco. (2) Fischer used his credentials as an advocate for Turkish membership in the EU as an entré into negotiations with Turkey, a crucial transit nation in the Nabucco pipeline scheme that had long been demanding, among other highly favorable terms, ownership of fifteen percent of total gas volumes piped across its territory, even though other transit nations would be allowed to keep only five percent. (3) Fischer’s efforts already have shown impressive results: early in July Turkey agreed to a compromise by accepting higher transit fees in lieu of discounted gas volumes, and on July 13, transit countries Turkey, Bulgaria, Romania, Hungary and Austria signed a key accord in Ankara, giving the $11 billion project a boost that has put Nabucco back onto the EU energy agenda.

The transit accord is a real victory for Nabucco’s backers, but one that puts the pipeline back into thorny territory. No concrete supply deals have been signed yet to ensure that the pipeline will carry the 31 billion cubic meters (bcm) of natural gas needed to satisfy about seven percent of Europe’s gas consumption by 2014, as its backers had planned. Though a bitter opponent of the project, Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin made a point when he remarked that “before putting millions of dollars into a pipeline and burying it in the ground, you
have to know where the gas for this pipeline is going to come from.” (4) To some degree, the lack of suppliers is a result of strategic poaching by Russia and to some degree it is the result of the Nabucco consortium putting the pipeline’s end—energy security through diversification—ahead of the means of filling it.

Recognizing the need for a source of natural gas that is free from Russian control, a need that grew more apparent after the 2006 and 2009 Russian-Ukrainian pricing disputes that left EU countries without gas in mid-winter, the Nabucco consortium planned a new pipeline route that would offer a wide range of supply sources, including the Caspian region, Central Asia, and the Middle East. In particular, the consortium has mentioned Azerbaijan, Egypt, Iraq, Turkmenistan, and possibly Iran as sources for gas. (5)

Each of these potential suppliers presents problems, however. Azerbaijan, the country that was supposed to supply the main injection of gas, just concluded a supply contract to begin selling natural gas from its Shah Deniz II field to Russia’s Gazprom in 2010. Although Baku denies that the Azeri-Russian deal will limit the volumes available for Nabucco, the terms of any future supply arrangement may have been pushed beyond economy by Gazprom’s agreement to pay the steep price of $350 per thousand cubic meters for Azeri gas. (6) By comparison, the European price currently stands at $250 per thousand cubic meters, on average. (7) Clearly, the Nabucco consortium cannot contract for Azeri gas at the higher price and expect to turn a profit downstream.

Turkmenistan, another gas-rich potential supplier, has expressed interest in selling volumes to Nabucco, particularly after a mysterious pipeline explosion last spring brought the country’s gas exports to Russia to a halt. (8) Though the cause of the blast has not been officially determined, it was clear that Russia’s Gazprom, which lost over $1 billion in the first quarter of 2009 by buying Turkmen gas at $340 per thousand cubic meters (a number set by Gazprom to out-price its competitors, among whom is the Nabucco consortium), stood only to gain by
the shut off. (9) Though Ashgabat already has signed an agreement with German energy major RWE, a Nabucco consortium member, to tap gas fields on the Caspian Sea bed, the country remains totally dependant upon Gazprom-controlled pipelines to transport Turkmen gas to Europe. (10) Ashgabat’s isolation may be nearing an end, however, if Turkmenistan and Azerbaijan are able to reach an agreement on talks begun recently about building a trans-Caspian pipeline that would open a new route to the west for Turkmenistan’s gas exports. (11)

Iraq is the potential source of gas about which the US has shown the most enthusiasm. US Senate foreign relations committee member, Richard Lugar, suggested that exports of Iraqi gas through Nabucco could give the country the resources it needs for reconstruction: “Ideally, in the way of the world, the natural gas—and maybe in due course oil supplies—coming out of a united Iraq might provide this kind of capital, which would be a miraculous happening and a wonderful ending to a very tragic period in their history.” (12) However, Baghdad since has clarified that the country does not have any surplus gas for export at present, and, although the country is willing to consider future gas sales to Nabucco, there is currently no infrastructure in place to link the country’s gas fields to the pipeline. Moreover, in the future, talks over exports of Iraq’s contested energy resources must produce an agreement that satisfies rivals within and without the Kurdish-controlled territory in the north of the country where most of Iraq’s known gas fields are located. (13)

Egypt might serve as a supplier to Nabucco, if a planned Arab gas pipeline is realized. (14) For the present, the cast of national gas producers is willing to consider offers, but unready to make promises. That leaves the Nabucco consortium with sizeable gas supply volumes to secure ahead of 2011, when construction of the pipeline is slated to start. The press to make the pipeline a reality has some members looking to less agreeable sources, such as Iran.
Officially, Iran is off-limits, though talks appear to be ongoing, regardless. Ankara has stressed openly that Turkey is relying on Iranian cooperation in Nabucco. (15) It was in the context of excluding Iran from the project that US special envoy Morningstar raised the idea of including Russia in the supply arrangement instead. “My understanding of the agreement is that fifty percent of the gas that will go into Nabucco is open for competition among any suppliers and Russia is certainly free to participate in that way to supply part of that fifty percent,” said Morningstar. (16)

Morningstar’s suggestion struck a number of Nabucco consortium members as contrary to common sense. Those members criticized the idea for killing the main purpose of the whole pipeline project. With Gazprom as a partner, they argue, Nabucco will be just another avenue by which Russia can extend its dominance over European energy markets. (17) The naysayers are right to be incredulous. No one believes that Russia would participate willingly in a pipeline project that Prime Minister Putin calls a frontal attack on Russia’s energy strategy. What Morningstar hoped to achieve by suggesting otherwise is anyone’s guess. What Putin hoped to achieve by insisting that without Iran, Nabucco is lost, is clear enough. (18)

Source Notes:
(1) “US says Russia can supply gas to Nabucco,” Upstream Online, 13 Jul 09 via (http://www.upstreamonline.com/live/article183275.ece).
(3) “Norway’s Statoil May Bypass Turkey, Imperiling Nabucco Pipeline,” Bloomberg, 2 Apr 09 via (http://www.bloomberg.com/apps/news?pid=20601087&sid=aGW4JZfWm1BM&refer=home#).


(8) “Pipeline Explosion Raises Tensions Between Turkmenistan, Russia,” RFE/RL, 14 Apr 09 via (http://www.rferl.org/content/Pipeline_Explosion_Stokes_Tensions_Between_Turkmenistan_Russia/1608633.html).

(9) Ibid.


Newly Independent States: Caucasus

By Robyn Angley

GEORGIA

Biden visit reassures Georgia, for now

The recent visit of American Vice President Joseph Biden to Tbilisi appears to have been a relative success for Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili. Biden’s trip to Ukraine and Georgia follows closely on the heels of Barack Obama’s trip to Moscow to “reset” Russian-American relations. For those concerned that efforts at recalibration might come at the expense of Tbilisi, Biden had one message: “They have not, they will not, and they cannot.” (1)

Biden’s two day itinerary in the Georgian capital included bilateral talks with Saakashvili, an address to the parliament, meetings with non-parliamentary opposition leaders, and a visit with displaced children from the August 2008 war.

Although specifics of the top-level discussions have not been released, a senior American source stated that Saakashvili requested defensive military weaponry from his American visitor and was refused. (2) The issue of provision of materiel to Georgia is a controversial one and, not surprisingly, is opposed inflexibly by Russian authorities. The Vice President’s trip already had prompted Russian
Foreign Minister Gregori Karasin to state in an interview that Moscow would take “specific measures” to prevent Georgian weapons acquisition. (3)

Saakashvili apparently also raised the issue of American participation in the EU monitoring efforts for South Ossetia and Abkhazia. (4) Though Biden made no mention of this in his public statements, the EU president recently announced that the possible participation of non-EU countries in the mission will be a topic for discussion in the fall. (5) The monitoring mission recently was extended for another year.

A third likely point of discussion between the two leaders was an admonition by Biden that Saakashvili should not attempt to retake the separatist regions by force. Indeed, even in his talks to parliament and with refugee schoolchildren, the Vice President emphasized the importance of enticing South Ossetia and Abkhazia to rejoin Georgia proper by building a strong economy and vibrant democracy rather than compelling their return by exercising military power.

Prior to the trip, there had been speculation, particularly in Russia, that part of Biden’s purpose was to urge Saakashvili to step down from power. (6) While there were hints that the Obama administration wanted to distance itself from the over-personalization of Georgian-American relations that characterized the Bush era, Biden primarily seems to have encouraged Saakashvili to implement reforms, rather than to pave the way for a successor. According to some sources, Biden, in his meeting with opposition leaders, emphasized that the decision regarding when to hold elections was the purview of the Georgian people alone. (7) As the situation stands, Saakashvili’s term does not expire until 2013, and the opposition has yet to produce a truly capable contender. At this point, simply restraining Georgia’s pro-American president from providing a pretext for Russian intervention may be viewed by Washington as the best contribution to Georgia’s continued independent existence.
Biden’s call for continued reforms was not unanticipated. In his address to parliament, Biden urged the administration to improve media freedom, ensure an independent judiciary, and finesse the division of power between parliament and the president. His speech to the legislature came only days after Saakashvili had made his own address to the parliament. On that occasion, the Georgian leader’s proposals included the direct election of mayors, including in Tbilisi; limitations on the power of the president to dissolve parliament; restrictions on the amount of contact to be had with judges concerning specific court cases; and an offer to the non-parliamentary opposition to reinstate their mandates, which many had given up to protest the last parliamentary elections. (8) While Saakashvili’s proposals may have been sincere, they also constituted clearly an attempt to preempt anticipated criticism from the US Vice President.

Despite calls to improve the domestic situation, Biden’s comments generally offered support for issues high on the list of Georgia’s foreign policy objectives. For instance, in his speech to the parliament, Biden said that the US would not recognize Georgia’s separatist republics and called on Russia to honor the agreement brokered by Nicolas Sarkozy after the conflict. Biden also strongly reiterated US support for Georgia’s entry into NATO.

In fact, the Vice President’s statement regarding NATO came at an awkward moment, as only days earlier NATO Secretary General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer had asserted that Georgia and Ukraine were not ready to join NATO and “the situation is unlikely to change in the near future.” (9) Even more problematic was a statement regarding Georgia’s NATO aspirations made by Saakashvili in an interview with the Wall Street Journal: “We all know that the issue is almost dead. It’s tragic. If they manage to kill NATO [Georgia's hopes of joining the alliance], it means the Russians fought for the right reasons. It would mean you can still achieve political goals with brutal sinister means and that [Russian Prime Minister Vladimir] Putin was proved right.”(10) While Saakashvili’s statement was a fairly accurate assessment of the situation, it met with considerable domestic
criticism and prompted some presidential backpedaling. The topic is particularly sensitive because, for many in Georgia, NATO membership remains an important goal. Saakashvili afterwards claimed the newspaper had misquoted him and had offered him an apology, but no evidence to support that claim appeared in the publication itself. (11)

The Biden visit may not have produced the results that Saakashvili deserved in the form of weapons or a promise of US involvement in the EU monitoring mission. However, it did leave Saakashvili in a relatively secure position. For now, his domestic opposition has called a halt to its strategy of permanent protest, (12) and he has received a demonstration of continued US support for Georgia despite the Russian “reset.” The extent to which that support will be extended once tested by issues requiring Russian participation, such as international efforts to address Iran’s nuclear aspirations, remains unclear.

Source Notes:
(3) “Russia to counter "Georgian remilitarization", deputy minister says," ITAR-TASS, 23 Jul 09; BBC Monitoring via Lexis-Nexis.
(7) Irina Aleksidze, “US Vice President Joe Biden reassured Georgia of support but abstained from making promises,” Vremya novostei, 24 Jul 09 via Johnson’s Russia List, #139, 24 Jul 09.

(8) “Address to the Parliament of Georgia H.E. Mikheil Saakashvili, President of Georgia,” 20 Jul 09 President of Georgia website via http://www.president.gov.ge/?l=E&m=0&sm=3&id=2988.


(10) Excerpts: 'I Thought That the Noose Was Tightening Around the Russians' Necks and Then I Realized It Was Tightening Around Our Neck,' Wall Street Journal, 24 Jul 09 via Johnson’s Russia List, #139, 24 Jul 09.


Newly Independent States: Central Asia

By Monika Shepherd

KYRGYZSTAN

Kyrgyz elections produce new comeback kid

Overall, Kyrgyzstan’s July 23 presidential elections held few surprises: prior to the elections, various obstacles were placed in the way of the few candidates plucky enough to challenge Bakiev’s reelection bid; the opposition parties struggled to maintain unity and obtain sufficient publicity for their leading candidate’s platform; during the election itself, there were numerous and blatant attempts at voter fraud, including ballot-box stuffing; and the incumbent, Kurmanbek Bakiev, sailed smoothly into a second term. The post-election period
so far also is proceeding in fairly predictable fashion, as President Bakiev takes further steps to squash the opposition.

However, the election campaign did have one unexpected result: the rehabilitation of former pariah (at least in some circles) Nurlan Motuev, previously known as the “Coal King of Kara-Keche.” Not long after Askar Akaev’s removal from power in 2005, Mr. Motuev and an armed group of his supporters took over the operation of the Kara-Keche coal mines (located in Naryn Province) and then proceeded to sell the coal to the highest bidder, neglecting to pay any taxes on the profits. (1) Quite understandably, these actions put Mr. Motuev in direct conflict with the post-Tulip Revolution Bakiev-Kulov governing tandem. When, in January 2006, Motuev and roughly 350 of his supporters threatened to burn down the Jumgal District police headquarters in Naryn unless he received assurances that he would not be arrested, (2) not only the government, but also the Interior Ministry was made to look foolish, and even worse, powerless. Motuev finally was arrested on May 23, 2006 and charged with fourteen violations of the country’s criminal code, including causing over 37 million som (approximately US$1 million) in damages to the mine owners. (3) Then, in what would seem to be a most unlikely turn of events, in April 2009, the Interior Ministry’s Main Investigation Department announced that the criminal case against Mr. Motuev was being dismissed, due to insufficient evidence, (4) clearing the way for him to register as a candidate for the presidential elections.

Motuev had announced early in April his intention to challenge Bakiev in the July 23 elections, stating that his supporters in the Union of Muslims of Kyrgyzstan (which he co-chairs), as well as those in the Joomart Patriotic Movement (which he leads) had persuaded him to throw his hat in the ring. (5) Apparently, he was counting on receiving a great deal of support from voters in southern Kyrgyzstan, stating in one interview, “You perfectly remember how many people (70 thousand!) supported me in Jumgal rayon and Naryn Oblast in general, when I had restored the order at Kara-Keche coal strip mine.” (6) In answer to how he
planned to finance his campaign, he stated, with somewhat remarkable candor: “There are some sponsors who are ready to support me… There is also a small coal business. I think I will handle it.” (7)

Kyrgyzstan’s Central Election Commission (CEC) gave its official blessing to Mr. Motuev’s candidacy on June 17, 2009 (8) and his campaign was up and running. Some of the key points of his platform included promises to raise the minimum salary and retirement allowance; use the country’s coal, water, and gold resources to reinvigorate the economy; and to turn Kyrgyzstan into a popular tourist destination. He also had some very harsh words for the opposition candidates and their supporters, “…people can also make mistakes, for instance by electing Hitler or Napoleon. I told about real aspects so that you do not make a mistake. Vote with your heart and with your mind for the worthiest candidate.” (9) At a press conference just two days before the election, Motuev further smeared his opponents, alleging that main opposition candidate Almazbek Atambaev had close ties with criminal enterprises, accusing Temir Sariev of “tribalism,” and Toktayim Umetalieva of fraud. (10) Oddly, he had only praise for the incumbent president, lauding all that Bakiev had accomplished in four years and even going so far as to state, “We are as if allies. We have no any disagreements,” as justification for why he refused to participate in an election debate with the president. He also told journalists that he did not wish to distract the president from state affairs. (11)

Given his own run-ins with the law, Mr. Motuev’s use of a smear campaign was certainly an interesting strategy. It does not seem to have produced many dividends, at least in terms of the election – Almazbek Atambaev beat him out rather handily. However, given Motuev’s history and rumored ties to the late Ryspek Akmatbaev’s crime syndicate (to which Bakiev allegedly was connected), garnering votes may not have been the main purpose of his campaign. Permitting Motuev to register as a candidate may have been the incumbent president’s way of offering him a chance to redeem himself, by boosting Bakiev’s
campaign. Rather than stooping to mudslinging himself, the president employed Motuev to do it, with the pay-off being Motuev’s complete and very public rehabilitation, which will allow him to serve in elected and/or public office in the future. If Motuev comports himself appropriately, he could reap a variety of rewards.

Source Notes:
(2) AKIpress, 11 Jan 06; OSC Translated Text via World News Connection.
(5) "Co-chairman of Kyrgyz unofficial Muslim group intends to run for presidency," 8 Apr 09, AKIpress; BBC Monitoring Central Asia Unit via Lexis-Nexis Academic.
(6) “Kyrgyzstan: Coal Baron Nurlan Motuev to run in the presidential elections,” Ferghana.ru Information agency, Ibid.
(7) "Co-chairman of Kyrgyz unofficial Muslim group intends to run for presidency," AKIpress, Ibid.
(8) “Another Kyrgyz candidate given official go-ahead to run for president," 17 Jun 09, AKIpress; BBC Monitoring Central Asia Unit via Lexis-Nexis Academic.
(9) "Presidential candidate Nurlan Motuev not to withdraw from presidential race,” 20 Jul 09, AKIpress; Al Bawaba via Lexis-Nexis Academic.
(10) “N.Motuev’s address to electors,” 21 Jul 09, The Times of Central Asia via Lexis-Nexis Academic.
(11) “Nurlan Motuev names Bakiev his ally, refuses to debate with him,” 9 Jul 09, AKIpress; Al Bawaba via Lexis-Nexis Academic.
Finally, will there be justice for Gongadze?

On 28 July, Ukraine law enforcement officials announced the discovery of what they believe to be skull fragments from murdered journalist Georgy Gongadze. The reported discovery comes almost nine years after Gongadze’s decapitated remains were discovered along the road in a village outside Kyiv. The discovery also came less than two weeks after the capture of former Interior Ministry General Oleksiy Pukach, the man long accused both of overseeing Gongadze’s kidnapping and of physically strangling the journalist in 2000.

Pukach first was arrested on obstruction of justice charges in 2003, but was released on a pledge to remain in the city. He quickly disappeared. Despite suggestions that Pukach was hiding abroad—in particular, in Israel—it now appears that, for most of his years as a fugitive, Pukach was living comfortably in Ukraine. (1) Although he was one of Ukraine’s most wanted men, Pukach’s quiet life remained undisturbed until mid-July.

How could this happen? This is a question repeated frequently by those who have followed the hapless, nearly nine year investigation into Gongadze’s death.

The investigative journalist disappeared in September of 2000. Gongadze had been saying for months that he believed he was being shadowed by state security officials. He had reason to be concerned. Although he was not a well-known journalist in Ukraine, his investigations of possible corruption among high-level officials—placed on the internet news portal he cofounded—were unusual in Ukraine’s heavily censored media environment. He openly questioned
President Leonid Kuchma about corruption on live television. He named names – very inconveniently for some, apparently.

Not long after Gongadze’s body was discovered, Kuchma’s opponents released tapes, which they said contained his conversations secretly recorded by a bodyguard. On the tapes, a voice said to be Kuchma’s repeatedly discusses Gongadze and urges his Interior Minister to “deal with” him. Since the release of the tapes in December of 2000, they have been authenticated by several international firms and agencies, including the FBI, using voice prints of the alleged officials on the tapes. Even so, Kuchma maintains he had nothing to do with Gongadze’s murder. He managed to stave off numerous opposition attempts to have him removed from office before the end of his term.

The discovery of Gongadze’s body, the release of the tapes, and Kuchma’s apparent impunity, triggered a slow build-up of anger at state officials. It was no surprise that, when the Orange Revolution began in 2004, many of Gongadze’s friends were at the core of the protests. It also was no surprise that Gongadze’s name became synonymous during the protests with the alleged corruption of the administration. Chants of “Justice for Georgy” and “Bandits to Jail” were common during those heady days of “revolution.”

Soon after taking office following these protests, President Viktor Yushchenko announced that the Gongadze case would be one of his priorities. “I regard the investigation of the death of Gongadze as a matter of honor for me and my team,” he said.

Within months, Yushchenko revealed that several suspects—all Interior Ministry officers—had been detained and would be charged with carrying out the murder. But, he said, “The main task now is to get to the most important thing: who organized and ordered the murder.” (2) Weeks earlier, Kuchma’s former Interior Minister Yuriy Kravchenko was found dead with two gunshot wounds to the head.
The death, which inexplicably was ruled a suicide, seemed to close one important avenue of investigation.

Nevertheless, almost four years later, after repeated delays, all three Interior Ministry officers were found guilty and sentenced to 12-13 years each in prison. During their interrogations, each admitted to being complicit in Gongadze’s murder, claimed they were following orders, and named Pukach as their leader. Still, total justice has not come for Gongadze or for Ukraine. While these three guilty verdicts and the arrest of Pukach are heartening, no one in Kyiv believes that any of these men ordered or arranged the murder.

Pukach is said to be cooperating with officials. He reportedly has confessed to his part in the murder and has begun to name others who were involved. “The main thing is he has confirmed his involvement,” Deputy Head of the State Security Service Vasyl Hrytsak said. “He has confirmed the involvement of some state servants whom we suspected, as it were, and he is giving testimony which is of interest to the investigation.” (3)

It was unclear what level of “state servant” reportedly has been named by Pukach, but Ukraine Prime Minister Yulia Tymoshenko reacted skeptically to these statements. “I very much hope, on the human level,” she said, “that the investigation will not lead to the arrest of pawns. I hope the real organizers of Hia’s [Gongadze’s] murder will be convicted.” (4)

This skepticism appeared justified when a newspaper connected to Ukraine’s opposition Party of Regions carried a comment from Pukach’s lawyer. In it, Serhiy Osyka contradicted Hrytsak and claimed that his client did not name any others involved. (5) Three days later, Osyka was informed by the Prosecutor-General’s Office that Pukach no longer wished to use his services. (6)
It is possible that Osyka spoke out of concern for the welfare of his client. Upon hearing of Pukach’s arrest, journalists and politicians immediately called for extra security measures to protect Pukach, given his potentially explosive testimony against former and possibly current officials. Tymoshenko said simply: “I hope that Mr. Pukach’s life will be protected until he gives all information and testifies in court.” (7)

It is unknown whether that information includes the names of the individual or individuals that ordered the attack on Gongadze. Pukach likely received his direct order from former Interior Minister Kravchenko, who, conveniently, is dead. It appears that three others with information about the case also have died in the last several years. But, a journalist from Kyiv’s Fifth Channel told viewers shortly after Pukach’s first interrogation that “not all those who had given Pukach the direct order are now dead.” (8)

Gongadze’s widow, Myroslava, went further. “Kuchma has reason to be afraid,” she said following Pukach’s arrest. “The head of his administration, [current Speaker of Parliament Volodymyr] Lytvyn, has reason to be afraid. Many ranks within the Interior Ministry have reason to be afraid. Because this was a serious, great campaign.” (9) Myroslava Gongadze and her two children received asylum in the US, and she now works for the Voice of America Ukrainian Service.

Mrs. Gongadze also suggested that Pukach could provide information about much more than just her husband. “Georgiy’s murder was just one of the crimes committed by President Kuchma’s regime,” she said. “And if Pukach really tells everything he knows, I think we can expect large revelations.” (10)

Almost simultaneously, the Prosecutor-General’s Office (PGO) announced that Pukach would be charged not only with involvement in Gongadze’s murder, but also in the abduction and beating of journalist Oleksiy Podolskiy.
In 2007, two Interior Ministry officers were found guilty of Podolsky’s abduction and sentenced to four years each in prison. They claimed they received their orders from Pukach. The men reportedly claimed that Pukach partially strangled Podolskiy and forced him to dig his own grave, but did not kill him in the end. (11)

In a discussion of this incident allegedly found on the secretly recorded tapes of Kuchma, then-Interior Minister Kravchenko reportedly laughs about the issue and then assures Kuchma that he “has a group” and “they have begun to silence things.” (12)

The PGO also confirmed that they had reopened the case regarding the death of popular opposition leader Vyacheslav Chornovil. The co-founder of Rukh, Ukraine’s first independent political movement, Chornovil died in an unexplained car crash in 1999. The death occurred just weeks before he was to begin his campaign against Kuchma in that year’s presidential election.

But, even with all of this activity, many wonder whether anything really will be resolved in the end. “To name those who ordered the murder is one thing,” said Myroslava Gongadze, “but to gather evidence and charge them is another matter.” (13) Moreover, Gongadze’s attorney questioned whether the investigation can stand up in court.

Valentyna Telychenko expressed concern over Pukach’s lack of a lawyer for some of his interrogations and suggested that this could cause his statements to be deemed inadmissible. (14) Telychenko has reason to be cynical; she has endured her fair share of intimidation while trying to force the case to be investigated on behalf of Myroslava Gongadze. (15)

But the biggest question surrounding Pukach’s arrest remains – why now?
The easiest and most cynical response is that Yushchenko would like to tout “his” work on this case during his upcoming re-election campaign, which will begin in the fall. After promising in 2004 to find “justice for Giga” by convicting those who ordered the murder, almost five years of inactivity in the case is a clear problem for the president. This is particularly true since the lack of activity can be traced almost completely to him and his allies.

In 2005, Yushchenko gave the Security Services of Ukraine and the Prosecutor General’s Office, both of which are solely under his authority, complete control of the Gongadze investigation. Voters clearly understand this, and lack of progress on this case is one reason why Yushchenko’s rating has fallen into single digits. This arrest may be the president’s last ditch effort to resurrect his political fortunes.

Tymoshenko, who will run against Yushchenko in the upcoming election, has used the opportunity to claim that state officials have protected Pukach from arrest for years. Given his comfortable life in a well-populated area, there is some logic to that suggestion.

In a 2006 interview with this author, Tymoshenko suggested that Yushchenko had made an agreement with “Kuchma … and some of the highest officials in law enforcement agencies” during the Orange Revolution, in order to convince the then-president to agree to a new election. She, and many officials in Ukraine, suggest that this agreement included a promise not to pursue Kuchma on the Gongadze issue.

“In reality, everybody knows who ordered it [Gongadze’s murder],” she said. “I know there is enough evidence, more than enough facts, to put those responsible into prison,” she added, but “due to this agreement the case is not solved.” (16) Both Yushchenko and Kuchma vigorously deny that such an agreement exists.
Tymoshenko, however, now finds herself in an awkward position, as she, Yushchenko, and many former champions of the Gongadze cause have chosen to remain largely silent about the case in recent years and to form a government coalition with Kuchma’s former ally, Parliamentary Speaker Volodymyr Lytvyn. The speaker has been accused of complicity in the crime by both Gongadze’s family and a parliamentary commission investigating the case. This commission found that “the kidnap and murder of Mr Gongadze had been organized by former President Kuchma and Mr Kravchenko and that the current speaker of Parliament, Mr V. Lytvyn, and a member of parliament, Mr L. Derkach, were involved in the crimes.” (17) Like Kuchma, both Lytvyn and Derkach vehemently deny these accusations. Lytvyn recently has called for a thorough investigation of the crime.

In reality, given Ukraine’s current polarized political atmosphere, and given that the same officials who once refused to investigate the case remain in office, it is difficult to understand how a thorough investigation can be completed. But, at the very least, Georgy Gongadze’s family finally may be able to bury their son, husband and father. At the very least, they will know that the man directly responsible for killing him is now—and probably will be for the rest of his life—in a cell. This may be as much justice they can hope for in the Ukraine of 2009.

Source Notes:
(1) 5 Kanal-TV, 1400 GMT, 22 Jul 09; BBC Monitoring via Lexis-Nexis.
(2) “Government announces arrests in case of Gongadze murder,” Ukrainian Weekly, 6 Mar 05.
(3) 5 Kanal-TV, 1400 GMT, 22 Jul 09; BBC Monitoring via Lexis-Nexis.
(4) ICTV, 1845 GMT, 26 Jul 09; BBC Monitoring via Lexis-Nexis.
(5) “Lawyer denies arrested ex-general implicated top Ukrainian figures,” Segodnya, 24 Jul 09; BBC Monitoring via Lexis-Nexis.
(6) Interfax-Ukraine, 27 Jul 09; BBC Monitoring via Lexis-Nexis.
(7) 5 Kanal-TV, 1400 GMT, 22 Jul 09; BBC Monitoring via Lexis-Nexis.
(8) Ibid.
(10) Ibid.
(12) Ibid.
(14) Ibid.
(16) Lynch interview, Bloc of Yulia Tymoshenko Headquarters, Kyiv, Ukraine, 23 Dec 06.

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