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Ten years in the shadows
Buried among the myriad commentaries reviewing (surprisingly few could be characterized as “celebrating”) the ten year anniversary of Putin’s rise to power in Russia, one evaluation of the period seems particularly resonant: “[Putin] had a vision of what needed to be done, and certainly, he did not show this vision until the moment when this could not fail to be noticed with the naked eye.” (1)

The Russian state Putin eventually was handed by its long distracted and ailing leader was a perplexing hybrid of fledgling democratic institutions, oligarchic state structures, weak and divided state security services (with some strong, professional elements in “private” service), prolific media (segments of which seemed to thrive by serving personal-oligarchic interests in “kompromat” battles), a disheartened military damaged by mismanagement and ill-use, and very real, if later “embellished,” security threats emanating primarily from its southern territory, specifically an unresolved Chechen conflict.

In order to address any of the difficulties of governance in this atmosphere, Putin would rely on subterfuge to keep the many competing interests off balance long enough to accomplish his objectives. As Putin gradually solidified his power base, and demonstrated his ability to exert himself over previously independent or anarchic sectors, his reliance on secrecy to achieve his aims seems not to have abated.

During the last year or more of his presidency, Putin chose to envelop in secrecy his choice of a successor whose rise to the presidency, while nominally
accomplished via elections, would be guaranteed only with the endorsement of Putin. Throughout the autumn of 2008, Putin confronted the succession issue in a seemingly piece meal but dramatic fashion (from radical changes in the composition of the government, a snub of the presumed heir apparent, an intra-clan war among siloviki, and a leap into the legislative arena through leadership of the largest political party), each move sprung as a surprise that left a lingering question over the amount of planning involved in “Operation Successor.”

With more than a year of “diarchical” rule in Russia, even the politically-engaged elites are distracted by the clandestine arrangement that seems to govern the operation of the tandem. Where once Putin was seen as acting purposefully, but surreptitiously, to disarm a potential political faction or foe in furtherance of his ambition to forge stability from the chaos of the 1990’s, now the question of his intent centers on he extent of his personal ambition, and, at times perhaps, his greed. In such a scenario, Medvedev appears as a convenient place-holder, waiting for an auspicious moment to augur Putin’s return to the Kremlin.

Among the retrospectives of Putin’s ten years in power (even back as prime minister, whence his real ascent started), are mixed calls (and from remarkably well-connected sources) for Putin to give Medvedev his chance to rule independently: “Putin must give President Medvedev the opportunity to be a strong and, who knows, maybe great president.” (2) There are appeals to clarify the relationship between president and prime minister, as well as the system for naming a successor: “The reasons for and consequences of any actions by the president of Russia will remain unclear until a transparent and legitimate mechanism for transfer of supreme power appears in the country.” (3) More generally, there is a frustrated expression of confusion as to what purpose drives the behavior of president or prime minister: “We do not know if Dmitriy Medvedev really plucked up his courage and began removing Putin’s people and is even trying to dismantle some institutions of the Putin regime…or if these action are fully coordinated with the prime minister.” (4)
In the early phases of Putin’s political career, it may well have been shrewd to cloak intent until aims were achieved. After all, Putin had a weak hand to play and the possibilities for success were enhanced by his ability to keep potential foes off balance, unable to align against him. Putin as a leader developed and changed with the circumstances. As Gleb Pavlovsky, who has, at times, been very closely connected to the Kremlin, notes: “Putin was planned as a construct, but he turned out to be living, real. At the same time he drew into his orbit the detritus of the artificial construct and handles it freely.” (5)

Circumstances were key to Putin’s development as Russian leader, and circumstances well may spur the Medvedev-Putin tandem to resolve the political power tension in order to move forward. In addition to a growing list of social problems brought on by economic crisis, the regime currently has a very serious set of challenges to confront in its southern regions again (specifically Ingushetia, Dagestan, and Chechnya—for more information, please see “Caucasus Region” below).

There also are suggestions that glints of a new Oligarch War are rising along the horizon line. In the wake of a social protest in the town of Pikalyovo, where Putin stepped in to negotiate an agreement to rescue an enterprise owned by Oleg Deripasko, who he then publicly harangued, the Russian government’s fiscal support of oligarchs has garnered significant criticism. Indeed, several articles have seen fit to point out that Putin and other government members have rather cozy relationships with some of the oligarchs who have received the benefits of state support for the enterprises. In some respects, this is a familiar critique throughout the west, where government bail-outs of private corporations represent a significant burden on over-taxed budgets. In Russia, however, where the political system retains its highly-personalized character, any attack on government policy lands as a direct attack on the person leading the regime. At this point, public opinion still views Putin as that leader. Those looking for a
wedge that Medvedev might use to separate Putin from power would find that the prime minister seems rather vulnerable both on general economic issues, as well as his involvement in floating loans to favored oligarchs.

Russia currently has several serious issues with which to contend, and whether it is in the economic or security sphere, the opportunity for positive results are likely to improve if the political leadership is capable of moving public opinion to support their efforts. Despite the precedents of the recent past, Russia’s twist on the “invisible hand” of government no longer seems to produce confidence in the country, and clearly it is seen as detrimental by the political elites. After a decade of Putinism, perhaps it is time for Medvedev to stand alone.

Source Notes:
(4) Ibid.
(5) Pavlovsky Interview, kreml.org, ibid.
Economic update: what riots?
Two months ago, more than 400 striking workers in Pikalyovo blocked a federal highway to St. Petersburg to protest against wage arrears and mass firings that left more than one-fifth of the town’s working population unemployed. Like most of the smaller towns scattered across Russia’s non-metropolitan expanse, Pikalyovo was created to fill one specific need, in this case for cement and aluminum, by the then-Communist government; three factories soon employed most of the town’s residents. Twenty years after the country’s transition to capitalism, however, these cities, whose factories now are controlled by private investors, are suffering due to their lack of economic diversity. The situation in Pikalyovo was resolved only after Prime Minister Vladimir Putin intervened in person, chastising the plant owners and pressuring them to rehire many of the recently fired workers. His visit was also the impetus for the regional government to step in and provide short-term aid packages to the unemployed. (1)

At the time, it appeared that Putin’s visit was little more than a temporary fix, and that the Pikalyovo workforce soon would follow through on their threats of renewed protests if their government failed to develop a long-term solution. (2) Many considered it an early indicator of unrest that might soon engulf small towns across the country. It is possible, however, that the government may have taken another step towards silencing this threat for good. Last Friday, a joint commission comprised of members of Russia’s Finance and Regional Development Committee released a twofold plan that outlines how these “mono-cities” will be designated and how the primary ten billion-ruble aid package ($315 million) will be distributed.
According to the committee, a “population point” is a monogorod if more than one-quarter of its workforce works at one business, or at businesses that make up an interrelated “technological chain” and if more than 50 percent of the town’s production is tied to one business or ‘technological chain.’ (3) By these standards there are approximately 400 cities that will be eligible for financial assistance, but city officials must submit a proposal to the government in order to be considered. In reality, committee members admitted that they only expect to give money to approximately 200 cities, especially since many of the monogorody are built around energy production, which has been only slightly affected by the ongoing crisis.

There already are issues with the Regional Development and Finance Ministries’ proposed plan. Officials at the two ministries have admitted that their definition of what constitutes a monogorod is somewhat vague, especially because neither the term “technological chain” or “population point” is clearly defined, and this lack of clarity could lead to confusion over whether or not municipal areas in at-risk districts will be considered. Further, the plan includes no measures to ensure that the privately owned plants in “technological chains” will reach agreement as to how to spend the aid funding. Most importantly, when dealing with monogorody, a uniform approach would be impossible, as each region and each city faces its own individual set of challenges. This necessitates individual attention for each site that applies, which will greatly slow the process and require additional manpower to complete. (4)

Despite these concerns, it appears that the Kremlin acted relatively quickly to stem the rising tide of anti-government sentiment among one of the populations poised to suffer the most as effects of the waning global financial crisis continue to unfold. Even those who usually view the government’s actions with wary suspicion are having a difficult time finding a negative angle. At first, some complained that the money will be only a temporary fix for a pervasive problem, but this concern already had been addressed. The aid package, which is listed in
the 2010 federal budget as an emergency measure, comes from money that already was set aside to bolster regional budgets, a 58.2 billion ($1.8 billion) ruble pot that is backed by a separate 150 billion ($4.7 billion) emergency reserve. Subsequent budgets will include similar lines of funding for anti-crisis programs as a way of preventing further damage or similar issues in the future. (5)

In light of these pressing concerns, many other projects have halted completely. At Russia’s oil-fueled economic peak, the Kremlin and local governments turned their attention towards demonstrating wealth and power. In Moscow, for example, construction began two years ago on the Russia Tower skyscraper, which is intended to rival the Burj Dubai upon completion. Work on the tower ended last November after the project’s major investors realized the scope and potential length of the economic downturn. According to Vladimir Resin, Deputy Mayor of Moscow, it is likely that the tower never will be completed, as investors have been forced “to junk the superfluous.” (6) The project would have anchored a nearly 500 billion ruble ($15 billion) plan to create a new business district in Moscow. Although the project still is scheduled for completion in December 2011, with demand flagging, private investors overleveraged, the country’s migrant population returning home, and the government’s attention focused elsewhere, it is doubtful that it will come to light in the near future. (7)

This is a disappointment for some, especially Medvedev, who had been particularly vocal about his goal of turning Moscow into a “global financial center,” (8) but it is possible that this shift in priorities may be the reason why the government has seen little negative reaction from the Russian populace. It is widely believed that governments founded on the promise of security and economic prosperity, especially when their claims are used to justify human rights and basic freedoms, are particularly vulnerable to public opinion. At the start of the recession, many, including members of the liberal Kremlin elite, foreign governments, and preeminent western publications all predicted that the
financial crisis would result in “a round of crippling strikes” and other social upheaval that would result in reform and possibly even a change in leadership. (9)

In fact, the opposite appears to be true. One reporter who recently traveled across Russia noted that even in the smaller towns he visited, places he had assumed would have been “the very caldron of the percolating revolution,” (10) people were content, even pleased with the Kremlin’s response to the crisis. He found that most people remained employed in the same jobs they had held for years. Unlike the factory workers in Pikalyovo, wages paid to most middle-class professionals, like educators and members of the country’s security forces, have not been affected by the crisis. Thanks to the slowing inflation rate, the standard of living for most retirees actually has increased. (11)

This week, Russia marks the eleventh anniversary of the collapse of its economy, when the government was forced to default on more than $40 billion of domestic debt. The same experts that foretold mass rioting and domestic upheaval predicted that the situation in modern-day Russia would soon resemble that of a decade ago, but a recent survey by the Public Opinion Foundation found that approximately 40 percent of Russians believe that they have not been affected by the current economic crisis. Most attribute this to a stronger, more proactive government. (12)

Inexplicably, the 1998 crisis actually may have helped to put Russia’s middle-class in an advantageous situation. Russian citizens are in a unique position among their global counterparts because most have refused to reenter the financial market in the past decade, i.e. they do not resort to credit cards or other personal loans and do not invest in the stock market. (13) In fact, the most obvious signs that the country still is suffering from an ongoing recession include less traffic, stagnating inflation rates, and fewer illegal immigrants, all seemingly positive benefits. (14)
It is hardly surprising, then, that the approval rating of the Putin and President Dmitry Medvedev team has held relatively steady over the past year, dropping to 56 percent from a 63 percent high last May. Individually, both men continue to enjoy high popularity ratings, with Medvedev at 68 percent and Putin at 77 percent approval. (15) It remains to be seen whether the government will be able to continue placating the population by focusing its attention on solving problems only as they spring up, especially since most experts are predicting that the recovery will be a lengthy process. For now, however, it appears that the Russian people are willing to wait and to trust that the government has their best interests at heart.

Source Notes:
(2) Ibid.
(4) Ibid.
(5) Ibid.
(7) Ibid.
(8) Ibid.

(10) Ibid.

(11) Ibid.


(14) “For Russians, What Recession?” Ibid.


Russian Federation: Security Services

By Fabian Adami

**Politkovskaya: No new investigation**

Six months ago, three individuals accused of participating in the Politkovskaya assassination were acquitted by a Moscow court. In May, prosecutors filed an appeal against the verdict with the Supreme Court. The Supreme Court’s ruling effectively rendered the previous process a mistrial, with the panel deciding that a new trial should take place beginning early in August. (1)
Politkovskaya’s family has maintained a consistent position throughout the trial and appeal. They believe that the three defendants were part of the murder conspiracy, but that the primary focus of any investigation must be geared towards uncovering the assassination’s sponsor. In line with this stance, the family filed its own petition in the first week of August, requesting that the case be sent back to prosecutors, so that the “mastermind” could be found. Politkovskaya family lawyers argued that the case makes “no sense” as it stands, because it “does not answer a single question: either about the mastermind, or even the question of who perpetrated the crime.” (2)

After the Moscow Military Court rejected the petition, Politkovskaya family attorneys held a press conference. Anna Stavitskaya simply claimed that the case was “totally pointless” as it stood, (3) while Karina Moskalenko was more outspoken. Moskalenko pronounced herself perplexed by the “sensational” decision (4) adding that the case clearly had not “been solved”—something that “honest investigators” should admit. (5) Moskalenko also expressed doubts over a new trial, claiming that the jury might come under “pressure” in the search for a verdict. (6) The family is to take its petition to the Supreme Court, but fears that the case will not be heard before the 7 September start-date of the new trial. (7)

It is impossible to argue with Moskalenko’s logic, or with that of Politkovskaya’s former editor Sergei Sokolov, who claims that people at “high levels” know “all the names” and details of the murder, but that it would be “too dangerous to announce them.” (8) Although no announcement has been made at the time of writing, it is likely that the new trial will be closed to the public and to the press, so that the judge can issue the jurors with a firm set of instructions in order to attain the goal of a conviction “at any cost,” (9) allowing the state to argue—albeit nefariously—that the case is solved and closed.

**Borders Update: South Ossetia & Abkhazia**
During the early months of 2009 Russia took (what were transparent) steps to consolidate the territorial gains made a year ago in the Georgian war. In April, President Dmitri Medvedev signed an agreement with the supposedly sovereign, independent states of South Abkhazia and Ossetia, under which Moscow agrees to protect their borders until such time as they can set up their own protection agencies. Within days of the agreement being signed, FSB troops were being poured southward. Clearly worried about the public impact of the agreements, the Kremlin attempted to justify the deployments retroactively by claiming that Border Troops were delivering humanitarian aid to conflict refugees and carrying out vital anti-arms smuggling tasks. (10)

In late July and early August, Vladimir Pronichev, Head of the Border Guards Service traveled to South Ossetia as part of a larger delegation. The purpose of the trip was to decide on future measures to improve or build from scratch facilities from which the borders of the secessionist regions can be monitored. The border project in Georgia’s secessionist regions promises to be a major expense. According to press statements made during the delegation’s visit, Russia is considering the construction of new railway links and bridges (11) to ease Russian-Abkhaz and Russian-South Ossetian traffic, as well the construction of some twenty “modern border facilities,” five of which are to be completed this year. It would seem that construction of living quarters, in particular, is urgent. At present, troops are billeted in large “tent encampments,” which obviously will not suffice for the harsh Caucasus winter. (12) The Border Guards Directorate also intends to begin training South Ossetian service personnel and civilians at “military higher education institutions” as soon as possible. (13) Presumably these institutions will be FSB schools and officer academies in Russia proper.

On 11 August, the FSB announced that it had purchased 6 KA 226 twin-engine light utility helicopters (NATO reporting name Hoodlum) for the Border Service. Four aircraft have been delivered so far, with the remaining two to be handed
over at an unspecified date in the future. (14) According to an article published in Avianpanorama Magazine, the aircraft currently are being tested—with "excellent results" in "extreme conditions in a mountainous area in the country’s south," (read the Caucasus region). Helicopters clearly constitute a vital tool in patrolling Russia’s porous southern border, but this story stirs memories of 1992-1993, when the “Abkhaz air-force” was found suddenly to be in possession of high-tech MIG fighters.

In a final development Russia has stopped referring to the idea of “Peacekeepers” in the secessionist regions: the “Peacekeepers” have been “replaced” by “our” Border Guards. (15) This step is important because it constitutes a vital diplomatic signal that the Georgian territorial losses of last fall are irreversible. What the language leaves open is the following question: will one or both of the breakaway regions become “independent” states in line with the so-called Kosovo precedent, or will they be subsumed into the Russian Federation as Republics?

Source Notes:
(1) See The ISCIIP Analyst, Volume XV, Number 14, (30 Jul 09).
(2) “Politkovskaya’s Relatives Disappointed With Court’s Decision,” ITAR-TASS, 7 Aug 09; OSC Translated Text via World News Connection.
(4) Ibid.
(7) Ibid.
Russian Federation: Armed Forces

By Dan Vladimer

Russian & Chinese Peace Mission 2009: More than a military exercise

“Soldiers exist for war,” says Senior Colonel Lu Chuangang, Head of the Exercise Directorate Command Group for Peace Mission 2009, “yet peace is a soldier’s highest reward.” (1) That reward is the stated objective of the joint anti-terrorism military exercise conducted by the People’s Republic of China and the Russian Federation in July. The exercise, named Peace Mission 2009, was a five day strategic operations drill, which was intended to sharpen both countries’ anti-terrorism concepts, campaign command, and tactical action skills. (2) These maneuvers come on the heels of a spring season in which Asia has seen growing violence by separatist groups and nuclear saber-rattling by North Korea.
China and Russia have stressed, however, that these drills are not directed at any third party or its interests. (3) Still, the exercises bear deep military and political implications, despite assurances that this is simply a training drill, and not preparation for war with another state. For Russia, there are several situations that might be considered relevant to Peace Mission 2009: the separatists in the North Caucasus, American policy toward Eastern Europe and the militarization of Asia all pose threats to Russia’s interests and national security.

China and Russia can learn a great deal from each other on the subject of separatists, and this may have been a key motive for Peace Mission 2009. China is cracking down on ethnic minority groups such as the Uighurs. (4) Russia has its own nationalist problems, particularly in Chechnya, where two full-scale wars were fought against separatist forces following the collapse of the Soviet Union. Even after the Russian government’s announcement this year that its decade-long counter-terrorist operation in Chechnya had concluded, there continue to be frequent clashes, (5) as witnessed in late July when authorities killed six rebels connected to an illegal armed group. (6) Peace Mission 2009 may very well have been related to the unrest in the North Caucasus; the armed forces were able to practice combat operations aimed specifically for guerrilla warfare, thereby sending an intimidating message to separatist movements.

There also may have been a political motive behind the military exercises. For what seemed like a simple exercise focusing on the command aspect of an armed conflict, Russia transported a tremendous amount of heavy equipment to China. Knowing the media attention Peace Mission 2009 would attract, Moscow took pains to create an impressive display of tanks and armored vehicles. According to Alexander Khramchikhin, the Director of the Institute for Political and Military Analysis, “We want to show it to the USA that Russia… will not be following the USA’s directions. Moreover, Russia is ready to demonstrate that it is following a different political course.” (7) This can be seen in other actions
Moscow has taken, including the patrols of two Akula-class nuclear powered submarines off the east coast of the U.S. in early August. (8)

The third and final possible motive behind Peace Mission 2009 may have been the anticipation of a regional conflict. One report detailing the exercise describes four of the drills that were implemented: joint blockade and sealing off, three-dimensional breakthrough, mobile annihilation of the enemy, and surrounding and destroying elements in the enemy’s depth. (9) It also was reported that T-80 tanks, armored vehicles, fifteen fighter planes and five helicopters represented Russia in the drills. (10) The maneuvers and equipment employed seem inappropriate to the stated objective. It may be that both armies are responding to the increasingly unstable situation in Asia; if Japan and South Korea are responding to North Korea’s saber-rattling, this in turn would cause Russia and China to flex their muscles. (11) Lu Chuangang puts the circumstances into good perspective, “the greatest danger is often not that there are no forces to deal with a crisis, it is the lack of awareness that a crisis is approaching.” (12)

Peace Mission 2009 is obviously more than a military exercise; an American defense official stated, “it is Russia again trying to assert its influence and trying to show they have a relevant military.” (13) In the coming months Russia may display more of its military might.

Source Notes:
(2) Ibid.
(3) “In the military maneuvers, Russia and China are working out large scale tasks concerning the battle against separatists,” Nezavisimaya, 28 Jul 09.
(5) “Four rebels kills in Chechen capital,” Agence France Presse, 16 May 09.
Ours and theirs: Gas for Russia’s Far East
On July 31, in the far eastern city of Khabarovsk, before a crowd of dignitaries assembled to celebrate the launch of a new gas transmission system from Sakhalin to Vladivostok, Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin demonstrated his workman-like skill as a welder, fusing together the first joint of the pipeline. (1) Besides delighting the crowd, Putin’s presence at the ceremony underscored the importance of the project for the economic development of Russia’s Far East and for the viability of the country’s energy sector in years to come.

The Sakhalin-Khabarovsk-Vladivostok gas transmission system is, in fact, an extension of an existing pipeline built in 2006 by DalTransGas, a subsidiary of Russian state-controlled oil major Rosneft. That pipeline carries gas from Sakhalin Island, 277 miles south to domestic energy markets in Khabarovsk. (2) Rosneft commissioned the pipeline with an eye toward the Chinese export market, but that plan was scuttled by Rosneft’s rival, state-controlled gas giant...
Gazprom, which jealously guards its monopoly on Russian gas exports. In 2007, the Russian government charged Gazprom with coordinating and executing a national development project known as the Eastern Gas Program, that aims to provide underserved regions of Russia’s Far East with natural gas supplies. Thus, acting as a de facto government agency in its relations with other oil and gas companies, Gazprom insisted that the DalTransGas pipeline would have to serve domestic consumers who pay state-capped energy prices, whereupon Rosneft lost interest in the project and sold its stake to Gazprom in 2008. (3)

In pursuit of domestic gasification in line with the Eastern Gas Program, Gazprom has pushed ahead its plans for a vast complex of pipelines that will link together to form a unified gas delivery system serving the country’s eastern regions, while, on the sidelines of the domestic project, the company has been engaged in on-going discussions aimed at finding new opportunities to export its gas to consumers in Asia-Pacific countries. (4) In spite of Putin’s call for domestic energy needs to take priority over exports, it appears that Gazprom is ultimately unwilling to dedicate the company’s own gas volumes to the cause. (5) For domestic need—so the reasoning at Gazprom goes—Russia has the Exxon Mobil Corporation.

Exxon Neftegas Limited, an affiliate of Exxon Mobil, operates the Sakhalin-1 oil and gas project on the northeast shelf of Sakhalin Island. (6) Exxon Neftegas has been supplying gas from Sakhalin-1 to the Khabarovsk region since 2005, with deliveries totaling about 3 billion cubic meters last year. (7) At the July launch of the Sakhalin-Khabarovsk-Vladivostok pipeline, Deputy Chairman of the Gazprom Management Committee Alexander Ananenkov told Putin that the Russian gas monopoly will require Exxon Neftegas to deliver eight to ten billion cubic meters in order to fill the completed pipeline in 2011. (8) Exxon already promised those volumes to China in a deal struck earlier in the year, and the company continues to deny reports that it has agreed to sell Gazprom additional Sakhalin-1 volumes of gas. (9) Nonetheless, the pressures that will be brought to bear on Exxon
Neftegas to supply the Russian domestic market, from the government and from Rosneft, the company’s junior partner in the Sakhalin-1 Consortium, are likely to prove irresistible in the end.

The outcome of heavy-handed negotiations between the Russian state and a foreign energy major is not really a question; it is rather why Russian state-controlled energy majors, Gazprom being the most obvious culprit, cannot meet the needs of the domestic energy market?

The answer will reveal much about the misguided priorities of state-corporations such as Gazprom, which was given a monopoly on Russian gas exports to subsidize unprofitable gas sales to the domestic market, but has neglected its obligations at home while it exploits its privileges in lucrative foreign markets.

Source Notes:
Chechen activists’ deaths send pointed message
The bold murders of two NGO workers in less than a month raises concerns about the future of humanitarian aid in Chechnya. Natalia Estemirova, an activist for the human rights movement Memorial, was abducted and murdered in July. Three weeks later, on 10 August, Zarema Sadulayeva, who worked with children affected by the Chechen wars, was kidnapped and killed, along with her husband.

Abductions and subsequent murder, sadly, are not unusual in Chechnya. Such actions formerly were the purview of separatist rebels eager to collect ransom money, particularly during the period between the two most recent Chechen wars. Within the last five years, however, Chechen President Ramzan Kadyrov and his followers seem to have cornered the market on that particular brand of terror.

While Estemirova was an outspoken critic of the Chechen President, collecting data regarding abductions and other human rights violations, the second victim, Sadulayeva, evinced little political activism. Estemirova’s death, though unconscionable, follows a certain twisted logic – the same logic that resulted in the killing of journalist Anna Politkovskaya and others. The fact that Kadyrov is intolerant of criticism is well established. Yet the Sadulayeva murder, following so
closely on the heels of Estemirova’s assassination, seems designed to send an even more explicit message: Human rights organizations, and particularly the Chechens (like Estemirova and Sadulayeva) who work with them, are no longer welcome.

It is ironic that, even as human rights defenders are dying, Kadyrov and his proponents are working industriously to recast Chechnya, and in particular Grozny, the capital, as a place made safe by the efforts of the young president. Kadyrov has embarked on an ambitious reconstruction program in Grozny, including what some claim is Europe’s largest mosque. Yet beneath this superficial prosperity is the message driven home by the deaths of his opponents – Kadyrov may have brought stability to Chechnya, but safety and liberty are different matters altogether.

**Escalating violence across North Caucasus**

While Ramzan Kadyrov seems to have established a monopoly on the use of force in Chechnya, other republics in the region have become vulnerable to an increasing number of attacks and the risk of further destabilization. This summer has seen an escalation in high-level murders and bombings. These incidents have not been confined to one particular region, but have been spread across Dagestan, Ingushetia and even into Kabardino-Balkaria.

On 5 June, Dagestani Interior Minister Adilgerey Magomedtagirov was killed when assailants opened fire on the restaurant where he was eating lunch. (1) Less than three weeks later, on 22 June, Ingushetian President Yunus-Bek Yevkurov was the victim of an unsuccessful assassination attempt in the form of a car bomb. On 12 August, Ingushetian Construction Minister Ruslan Amerkhanov was shot to death in his own office by an unknown assassin. (2)

These high profile strikes are accompanied by ongoing low-level incidents. To cite only a recent example, on 16 August alone, there were three different attacks
on Interior Ministry personnel. One policeman in Ingushetia was wounded when
his vehicle exploded. In Dagestan, three policeman came under fire while
guarding a hotel in Makhachkala. That same day, in Kabardino-Balkaria, police
were attacked with an automatic weapon, while in their vehicle. (3)

The most daring of the recent attacks, however, was the explosion of a suicide
bomber at a police station in Nazran, Ingushetia. The bomber drove a truck
loaded with TNT into the courtyard of the police station as the officers were
assembled for morning roll call. An estimated twenty persons were killed, with
another 138 wounded. (4)

The bombing, like other incidents before it, is assumed to be the work of Islamic
insurgents and represents a spillover effect of the Chechen war and subsequent
crackdown by the Russian army and the Kadyrovtsy. However, unusually for
terrorist activity, no group has stepped forward to claim responsibility for the
bombing. The increased violence in the North Caucasus is all the more disturbing
because it appears to be largely uncoordinated. It is unclear whether there is
centralized organization behind any or all of the attacks.

Ingushetian President Yevkurov identified Chechen separatist leader Doku
Umarov, among others, as the culprits in the attempt on his life. (5) Kadyrov also
linked the recent bombing to the Chechen separatist movement, specifically
separatist adherents of Wahhabism, a form of fundamentalist Islam. (6) Thus far,
however, officials have presented little evidence to support the proposal that
these attacks are coordinated or spring from a single source, much less that
there is a sole mastermind behind the violence.

The relatively far-flung nature of this low level insurgency makes it particularly
difficult to stamp out. Russian President Dmitri Medvedev fired the Ingushetian
Interior Minister after the bombing, and Russian Interior Minister Rashid
Nurgaliyev has called for the formation of special anti-terror police units made up
of officers with previous experience in counter-terrorism in the North Caucasus (i.e. Chechnya). (7) These are by no means the first attempts to address the surge in violence in the region. Indeed, Yevkurov’s presidency came about as an attempt to quell the escalating insurgency after Yevkurov’s predecessor, Murat Zyazikov, was deemed insufficient for the job. Attempts to deal with the insurgency also are frustrated by endemic corruption in the region. It is to be hoped, for the sake of the region’s inhabitants, that the new efforts to combat the violence are more effective than those of the past.

Source Notes:
(1) “Russia: Dagestan TV gives details of minister's assassination,” Russian RGVK Dagestan TV, 5 Jun 09; BBC Monitoring via Lexis-Nexis.
(2) “Russia: Ingush construction minister shot dead in his office,” Rossiya TV, 12 Aug 09; BBC Monitoring via Lexis-Nexis.
(5) “Yevkurov says attack on him was ordered by Doku Umarov,” Interfax, 17 Aug 09; Russia & CIS General Newswire via Lexis-Nexis.
(6) “Chechens, Ingushes share task of neutralizing common enemy-Kadyrov,” ITAR TASS, 17 Aug via Lexis-Nexis.
(7) “Anti-terrorist squads to be set up in Ingushetia – Nurgaliyev,” ITAR TASS, 18 Aug 09 via Lexis-Nexis.

Newly Independent States: Central Asia
By Monika Shepherd

CSTO meeting only deepens divisions between Bishkek and Tashkent
On July 31, the Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO), much heralded by Russian officials as constituting a future counterweight to NATO, suffered yet another setback, as the presidents of Belarus and Uzbekistan once again refused to sign off on the establishment of the Collective Rapid Reaction Forces (CRRF). Although Presidents Karimov and Lukashenko both support the creation of such forces, they are not in agreement with the rest of the CSTO members as to what types of troops the CRRF should include. (1)

However, not even the convivial and carefree atmosphere of the Lake Issyk-kul resort town where the summit was held proved sufficient to assuage President Karimov’s ire over Moscow’s most recent proposal regarding the CRRF’s deployment. The Russian and Kyrgyz governments are planning to establish a CSTO base on Kyrgyz territory, possibly in or near Osh. Even though the base officially has been deemed a CSTO facility by Russian officials, thus far all consultations regarding its construction have been conducted only on a bilateral basis, shutting out the other CSTO members. In fact, according to CSTO Secretary-General Nikolai Bordyuzha, the agenda for the July 31 summit was not slated to include any discussion of the base, (2) in spite of the recent media firestorm over the issue. Given these circumstances, the Uzbek government’s strenuous and vociferous objections to the creation of a new “CSTO” base on Kyrgyz territory should not have come as surprise to anyone, least of all to Kyrgyz and Russian officials.

The official Russian and Kyrgyz press releases regarding the summit omitted all mention of the base, instead touting the CSTO members’ agreement to establish an information technologies center in Russia, in order to train security experts, (3) as well as their decision to create a “youth education centre” near Lake Issyk-kul. (4) These agreements seem to constitute the pinnacle of the summit’s achievements.
The building of a second Russian/CSTO military base on Kyrgyz territory may have failed to make the summit’s agenda, however it seems to have been the main topic of discussion at a side meeting between the Russian and Kyrgyz presidents on August 1. Medvedev and Bakiev signed a memorandum which extends Russia’s military presence in Kyrgyzstan for another 49 years, permits Moscow to deploy up to another battalion’s worth of forces at the Kant airbase and to set up a training center for both countries’ forces. The memorandum also notes “the expediency of working out and signing by November 1, 2009 of a Russian-Kyrgyz agreement on the status and terms of stay of a united Russian military base on the territory of the Kyrgyz republic.” (5)

The Uzbek government lost little time in publicly condemning the contents of the memorandum, issuing a statement via its foreign ministry declaring that the installation of a Russian military base in southern Kyrgyzstan would risk destabilizing the entire Ferghana Valley region: “The implementation of such projects on the rather complex and difficult-to-predict territory, where the borders of the three Central Asian republics directly meet, may render an impetus for strengthening the processes in terms of militarization and arousing various nationalistic confrontations, as well as the actions of radical extremist forces that could lead to a serious destabilization of the situation in the greater region.” The statement made specific reference to the memorandum signed between Bakiev and Medvedev on August 1, announcing unequivocally that “The Uzbek side does not see any necessity and suitability in implementing the plans in terms of deploying the additional contingent of the Russian armed forces in the south of Kyrgyzstan.” (6)

The Russian foreign ministry issued a statement of its own just days later, attempting to assure one and all that the new base would be purely defensive in nature and not constitute a threat against any other country. The statement also declared that a specific location for the base had not been decided and still was being discussed with the Kyrgyz government. (7) CSTO General-Secretary
Bordyuzha then sought to mollify President Karimov further by assuring his administration that both the Russian and Kyrgyz governments would take Uzbekistan’s concerns into consideration, even suggesting that bilateral talks on the matter could be held with Tashkent. (8) Unfortunately, the previous day, Kyrgyz ambassador to Russia Raimkul Attakurov had informed a press conference in Moscow of his government’s preference to have the Russian base located closer to the Kyrgyz-Uzbek border, (9) which may have robbed Bordyuzha’s words of their intended effect.

The Uzbek government’s objections to the plan for a new Russian base are quite understandable and even predictable. The proposed site for the base is in an area of Kyrgyzstan populated by a sizeable Uzbek minority, a region which, judging by its actions over the past decade, Tashkent seems to consider its backyard. Uzbek security forces have not been hesitant to cross into Kyrgyz territory when in pursuit of suspected criminals and Uzbek border forces have been very liberal in their interpretation of where Uzbek territory ends and Kyrgyzstan begins. Just as Russia has established a sphere of influence outside its borders, so has Uzbekistan; the construction of a “CSTO” base in Osh would constitute the most significant challenge to Tashkent’s authority that it has faced, to date.

Source Notes:
(1) “Summit In Cholpon-Ata Will Mull CSTO Military Base - Kremlin Aide,” 31 Jul 09, Russia & CIS Diplomatic Panorama; Interfax via Lexis-Nexis Academic.
(2) “Ex-Soviet states meet for 'Russian NATO' summit,” 31 Jul 09, Agence France Presse via Lexis-Nexis Academic.
MOLDOVA

Moldova’s politicians face crucial test

On 8 August, Moldova’s four opposition parties announced a new agreement to create a governing coalition, named the Alliance for European Integration (AEI). The announcement follows the country’s 29 July snap parliamentary elections, which provided opposition forces a majority 53 seats out of 101. The remaining 48 seats will go to the Communist Party of the Republic of Moldova (CPRM), which previously had controlled a majority 56 seats. (1) The coalition announcement sends an important signal that Moldova’s opposition politicians finally may be prepared to work together after years of infighting.

The first step toward this point occurred several months ago, when the opposition united following the regular parliamentary election in April. Suspected abuses
in that election spawned youth-driven protests that, in places, developed into violent riots and looting of state buildings. Students claimed massive voter fraud, media bias and intimidation against opposition parties. (2) While the country’s opposition politicians were caught off-guard and missed the opportunity to lead the protests in a positive direction, the uprisings appear to have provided the impetus for these newfound attempts at unity.

The protests also appear to have stunned—and perhaps frightened—the ruling CPRM into allowing a far more fair contest on election-day. While there was no pretense of a fair campaign, with all media fully in support of the ruling party, election-day itself went much more smoothly than in April. Violence was nearly non-existent and opposition parties expressed general support for the process. (3)

Vote counting also occurred transparently, efficiently and seemingly fairly, in contrast to the situation in April. Figures were updated steadily throughout the process, with the work of the Central Election Commission broadcast on television and over the internet through a special web feed. Turnout figures, which, curiously, kept changing throughout the count in April, remained steady and realistic. The entire counting process took a little over 24 hours to produce preliminary numbers, as opposed to the less than five hours it supposedly took to count every ballot and name a winner in the April election.

Most importantly, all parties readily accepted the results after they were announced. (4) Despite a few limited accusations of fraud, the general consensus among most politicians and observers is that the result likely constitutes a close approximation of the will of the people – give or take two-three percentage points. No one will ever know what the “will of the people” would have been with a fair pre-election media environment, but all parties are viewing that topic as a moot point – and one for the history books.
Moldova’s soon-to-be-former opposition politicians now must do something they have never done before – they must work together to create an effective government. Despite assertions from some Western media that Moldova’s Communist Party had remained in power since the country’s independence, in fact, during the 1990s, the old Communist Party was banished while “democrats” and “reform-oriented” politicians ran the country. (5) During this time, many of the same names now taking part in the new Alliance for European Integration sat in parliament or in government structures. Unfortunately, these politicians and their nascent political groupings proved unable to enact reforms efficiently and often appeared primarily concerned with turf battles and glory.

As the country’s economy nose-dived, its politicians occupied themselves by bickering for control or debating in a confused manner. Dozens of political parties competed for attention in a largely free media market, while political leaders switched their allegiances repeatedly, following ego-driven ambitions. Along the way, the country’s standard of living and gross national product plummeted.

It was little surprise, then, that approximately eight years ago the country’s desperate population turned back to a reconstituted Communist Party (now called the CPRM) – suddenly espousing its own unique brand of “national/social communism.”

But, the period of Communist rule did not prove to be more successful than that of the 1990s. In fact, in addition to the country’s ongoing economic struggles, under the CPRM Moldova gradually lost the media and political freedoms gained during that earlier period.

So this year, the “reformists” have been given another chance. To be sure, their majority constitutes only two seats and is precarious. But it provides an
opportunity to prove themselves to the population – and that is what they must do.

The first test will come during the week of 28 August, when the new parliament convenes and attempts to form a government. (6)

In Moldova’s parliamentary republic, a prime minister and cabinet must be confirmed by 52 of 101 parliamentarians. The Alliance for European Integration includes the Liberal Democratic Party of Moldova, the Liberal Party, the Democratic Party and the Our Moldova Alliance. All four have taken part in some form of “democratic” coalition or election alliance in the past, but none have held together. However, so far, this alliance seems more solid than any of the previous versions. The 53-member AEI should (just) meet the requirement to confirm a government – assuming all of its members remain as firmly on board as they now appear to be (a big assumption).

But, the president must be confirmed with 61 votes.

Therefore, the governing coalition will need help from eight CPRM members. Should parliament fail to elect a president in two attempts, current President Vladimir Voronin (CPRM) will continue in power for the next year. Although a snap election technically is triggered by two failed votes for president, the constitution also forbids two snap elections in a one-year timeframe. This 29 July election is the only snap election allowed this year.

Understanding this problem, the key member of the AEI will be former Speaker of Parliament Marian Lupo. Lupo resigned from the CPRM only after the April protests – when his party’s fortunes already seemed mixed at best, and when Voronin already had backed another as his successor.
However, the 37-year-old Lupo is popular and viewed as a leader of Moldova’s “next” generation. Before joining the Communist Party and gaining the positions and stature made possible by this choice, he served as the Executive Director of the EU’s Technical Assistance to the CIS (TACIS) program. He also studied at the IMF and WTO Institutes and is fluent in French and English. (7) His name, which was suddenly placed at the top of the Democratic Party following his split with the CPRM, is widely seen as the only reason the Party received almost 13% of the vote. (8) In April, sans Lupo, the Democratic Party earned 2.97% and was not able to enter parliament.

While his previous association with the Communists during a time of severe oppression creates concerns, Lupo recently has been vocal about the need for change. He has seemed firm in his rejection of overtures from some within the CPRM seeking a coalition government that includes all parties. “I believe such a coalition will preserve the current situation in the country,” he said, “which could never be beneficial.” (9)

Lupo also confirmed that he is approaching a number of Communists to support the AEI. “Please don’t be in any hurry to draw conclusions whether they [the Communists] are monolithic or not,” he said. “Many elements of their cohesion are being propped – and I am not afraid to say so – by repressive measures and fear.”(10)

It remains unclear, however, whether anyone can garner the 61 votes required to replace President Voronin. Furthermore, it remains to be seen what Lupo and the AEI are willing to give up to get rid of him.

Before a president can be elected, however, a cabinet must be named. Although Lupo would be an obvious choice for prime minister, the small size of his faction means that he cannot serve in that post. Removing the obvious choice, then, largely leaves the same “old” reform-oriented players to decide who will take the
position. Given the lack of past success, this prospect does not inspire optimism. Even if the parties are unified today, and on the day of the confirmation vote, how long with this collegial atmosphere remain?

Source Notes:
(1) For full results, see http://www.e-democracy.md/en/elections/parliamentary/20092/.
(3) “Moldovan Communist Party loses power,” Daily Telegraph, 31 Jul 09 via telegraph.co.uk.
(5) See, for example, “Moldova’s communists beaten,” The Independent, 31 Jul 09 via www.independent.co.uk. (“In Moldova … the Communists had continued in power – until yesterday.”)
(7) Biography of Marian Lupo via email.
(9) Vinieri, 31 July 09 via www.hotnews.ro.
(10) Reuters, 1 August 09 via www.todayszaman.com.