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Russian Federation: Executive Branch
By Susan Cavan

The mockery of democracy
In December 2007, then Russian President Vladimir Putin announced his intention to leave the presidency as constitutionally-mandated in favor of a chosen successor, Dmitri Medvedev. He then assumed leadership of the majority party in the Duma and declared his willingness to serve as prime minister, should the incoming president so choose. There was substantial relief that Putin had decided against amending the constitution to permit himself a third term (an option favored by a faction of his siloviki friends). There was little suspense that Russian political life would not proceed as Putin had suggested, but a great deal of bandwidth was consumed, and ink spilt, over the possibility that Putin's successor to the presidency would have enough independence to make his own mark on Russian politics. In December 2008, it seems clear that there are answers for any lingering doubts.

While the Russian presidential election this year provided little uncertainty over the choice of the electorate with the anticipated victory of Putin's chosen successor, there were moments, many forcefully conveyed by Medvedev himself, that suggested the powers awarded to a Russian president by the Constitution would not be wasted on a Putin puppet, but rather would result in a dynamic, if occasionally tense, tandem of leadership.

The choice of Medvedev as successor had seemed a resounding defeat of the Sechin faction of the powerful siloviki clan around Putin, and as such seemed to mark a change of fortune for some apparatchiki, as new opportunities opened from the previously clenched siloviki fist. The emergence of Sechin and other
"defeated" faction members in the governmental structures appeared quite possibly as a face-saving sop to previously powerful figures. However, events belie that interpretation. Sechin, particularly in key Russian economic sectors, such as the oil and gas industries, seems fully in control of policy and indispensable to the "art of the deal" for any new initiatives.

For a few months after the presidential elections, the dynamics of the Putin-Medvedev tandem were suitably inscrutable: Medvedev made few moves that seemed inconsistent with a new president settling into power, and Putin appeared to be occupied with governmental and party affairs. Despite allegations that Putin had grown "bored" with the work of the government and was conducting affairs without the traditional weekly cabinet meetings (1), Putin did soon reassert himself into the affairs of a mining company, Mechel, whose stock declined precipitously following the prime minister's remarks. (2)

The war in Georgia marked the decisive moment when the relationship between Medvedev and Putin became clear, and more importantly perhaps, the real seat of power in Russia was revealed. The incident, broadcast on Russian Television, occurred on August 10th, when Putin, having abandoned the idea of heading directly to refugee camps and hospitals in North Ossetia, now reported to President Medvedev. Instead of a chronicle of events and recommendations, Putin directed Medvedev (as one might a subordinate) to issue the relevant decrees: "I think it would be right for the President to issue this instruction to the Military Prosecutor's Office." (3)

The negotiations for a ceasefire in Georgia, conducted with the French President Nicolas Sarkozy, did little to dispel the notion that Medvedev was not in charge: Repeated statements by the Russian President that troops were withdrawing and the conditions of the ceasefire were being implemented were proven wrong by facts on the ground, leading the US Secretary of State, Condoleezza Rice, to assert that "the word of the Russian president needs to be upheld by his forces."
(4) It quickly became clear that there was not a disconnect between the Russian military and the political establishment, leading to the supposition that the President's word was not the final word in Russian affairs. It takes little effort, then, to isolate the actual seat of authority in Russia.

Without concern for properly functioning institutions or constitutionally-delineated authority, the Putin-Medvedev diarchy still could have functioned easily, despite the exposure of the relative power status of the tandem members. However, the economic crisis, the gravity of which became clearer in September and October, posed a challenge, particularly to Putin. As prime minister, Putin is nominally in charge of the Russian economy and financial system. As the worldwide financial crisis is felt in Russia, particularly through steep stock market declines, falling energy prices, and currency devaluation, someone will have to shoulder responsibility for failed policies and resign. In the Russian system devised by the Yel'tsin team with its strong presidential authority, the prime minister had proven remarkably dispensable. The Putin-initiated shift of authority from the Kremlin to the White House poses a thorny challenge in difficult economic times: with a financial crisis in full effect: who shall be held responsible through resignation?

By late October, the President's scheduled address to the Federal Assembly was inexplicably postponed. When it was at last delivered, Medvedev had included a call for a constitutional amendment to lengthen both presidential and parliamentary terms. (5) The parliament moved quickly to approve the amendments, as analysts recognized a clear channel was being created for Putin to return to the presidency – perhaps in early elections. Even absent early elections, recent months have seen a decisive shift in the focus of power from the Kremlin to the Prime Minister as a personality. As one commentator observes: "Today's prime minister in Russia is more than a prime minister. He is the brand of the regime, its mind, honour, conscience, and in recent years also the sex symbol of his era. For now he is in total denial of reality. He reacts
extremely painfully and sharply to attempts by his subordinates to acquaint him with the current moment." (6)

It seems difficult to imagine that a scarce year has passed since Putin won praise for not circumventing the constitution to secure a third term in the Kremlin. And yet, the information gained in this year about the character of the current Russian political system is immense. Where any doubt existed about a special path for Russia's "transition to democracy," there is now a clear map for an authoritarian ruler to cling to power, and the means (economic, social and media) to convince the population that this is for the best. Sadly, Russia has put its own twist on democracy.

Source Notes:
(1) "The Government in a 'Velvet' Regime," Report by Igor Naumov, Nezavisimaya gazeta, 8 Sep 08; BBC Monitoring International Reports, 26 Sep 08 via Lexis-Nexis Academic.
(2) See The ISCIP Analyst, Volume XV, Number 1, 18 September 08, Domestic Issues.
(3) "Beginning of working Meeting with Prime Minister Vladimir Putin, 10 Aug 08 via http://www.kremlin.ru/eng/speeches/2008/08/10/0343_type82913_205084.shtml.
(5) "Russian president Medvedev's first annual address to parliament," 5 Nov 08, Rossiya TV via Johnson's Russia List (JRL), 2008-#202, 6 Nov 08.
(6) "Putin's 3 July," by Andrei Piontkovsky, Grani.ru, 7 Nov 08; BBC Monitoring via Lexis-Nexis Academic.
Journalism: Still Russia’s most dangerous profession

Mikhail Vasilyevich Beketov is the founder, editor-in-chief and only reporter of the Khimkinskaya pravda, a sporadically-published newspaper covering social political life in Khimki, a small suburb of Moscow. Although the paper was only two years and 19 issues old, Beketov, a 50-year old local, had built a reputation as a dogged reporter committed to “[writing] what he thought” and battling the municipal administration over environmental concerns. (1) Beketov was best known for his crusade to protect the Khimki forest. Since the Kremlin announced two years ago that it planned to demolish sections of the 2,400-acre forest, in order to build a highway between St. Petersburg and Moscow, Beketov, despite repeated warnings to stop, had written a stream of angry articles criticizing the plan and calling for the preservation of the forest. Unfortunately, not everyone appreciated his boldness. In May of last year, someone set Beketov’s car on fire. Not long after, a local official approached him while he was the featured speaker at a rally protesting the highway. According to Beketov’s friends and family, the official warned him that if he wanted problems, he would find them. (2)

This “promise” was realized on November 12 when Beketov was attacked and severely beaten outside his home. He was taken to the hospital after lying on the ground for more than a day and has since lost his right leg to gangrene. Beketov remains in a skull fracture-induced coma and doctors currently refuse to comment on whether or not he is expected to wake anytime soon or, indeed, if he is likely to survive at all. (3)

A week after Beketov was attacked, the chairman of the media commission of Russia’s Public Chamber announced the organization’s plan to work more with
local and regional officials, in order to prevent further attacks against journalists. It also plans to establish “a center for the protection of journalists, a kind of service for emergency help to which media workers will be able to turn if they feel they are in danger.” (4)

This gesture is too little, too late. Since the early 1990s, the media environment in Russia has become increasingly repressive. For a brief period immediately before and after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the burgeoning independent media and a new emphasis on freedom of expression helped propagate the hope that affairs were changing for the better. However, if media transparency is an accurate indicator of the level of freedom and human rights overall, things in Russia may be moving backwards, not forwards.

According to the Committee to Protect Journalists, 49 journalists have been killed in Russia since 1992. This number places it in the top three most dangerous countries for reporters, behind only Algeria and Iraq. (5) These statistics raise the question of why, in a seemingly developed, educated, modern country, Russia is still such a dangerous place for journalists to work. Part of the answer is that traditionally, there has never really been freedom of expression in Russia. Since Vladimir Putin came to power in 2000, the Kremlin has taken control of public television and most of the print media, ensuring that dissenting opinions or independent media outlets, mostly newspapers and radio stations, are few and far between, without equal resources and protection, and under constant pressure to reform.

At the Kremlin’s insistence, the media also have fostered a climate of extreme nationalism and growing intolerance toward dissenters. On average, there are 80 attacks on journalists per year, leading some to compare the current atmosphere with that of the former Soviet Union. (6)
Legal controls have added to the pressure on journalists. According to Russia’s criminal code, anyone who criticizes the government can be prosecuted for extremism. (7) Inversely, there are no real laws or other legal protections that guarantee freedom of the media, (8) making those who speak out against perceived injustice even more vulnerable.

In order to continue to foster the impression that Russia is no longer a totalitarian state, the Kremlin has stopped short of completely shutting down the country’s independent media. Instead, it has opted to replace Soviet-era ideological control with subtler, but no less extreme, censorship and information control in the form of judicial pressure and intimidation that ranges from subtle threats to physical violence and murder. With these threats looming, most journalists choose to self-censor, avoiding topics like government corruption and the activities of the Federal Security Service (FSB), as well as issues concerning politically charged regions of the country, such as the North Caucasus. (9)

Those that charge ahead anyway, like Anna Politkovskaya, a Russian journalist who built her career writing about Russian war atrocities and human rights abuses in Chechnya, live with uncertainty. Politkovskaya, who worked at the small independent paper Novaya gazeta, was shot in her apartment building’s elevator on October 7, 2006. It was the 13th contract-style killing of a journalist during Putin’s presidency. Although four men, including Colonel Pavel Ryaguzov, a FSB officer who allegedly gave the killers Politkovskaya’s address, and a Moscow city policeman, have been arrested in connection with the event, neither the actual gunman nor the person who ordered the killing has been apprehended. (10) [See below.] This may not be an accident. As with the media, the actions of law enforcement personnel are monitored strictly. While “Russian authorities are very capable of investigating crimes, … the political will is not there.” (11) If even those who investigate crimes fear reprisal from a higher authority, how can anyone expect justice to prevail?
Last week, lawyers for the defense accused the Russian government of ignoring suspected gunman Rustam Makhmudov’s offer to return to Russia if he was guaranteed physical protection, amnesty for a previous kidnapping charge, and a public and fair trial. He is suspected to have fled the country and currently is living abroad. Although government representatives deny this claim, Makhmudov’s lawyers told the press that the offer, which was sent through relatives six months ago, was immediately refused. (12)

The Politkovskaya trial also reflects poorly on the effectiveness of the Russian judiciary. The trial was derided as a farce from the beginning because authorities gave it a green light, despite the fact that the official motivation for the attack has not been established, and the actual perpetrator remains at large. The trial, currently underway at the Moscow Military District Court because of Ryaguzov’s involvement, also has become a media circus. This is mainly due to Chief Judge Yevgeny Zubov’s constant waffling over whether or not the trial should remain open to the press, reportedly because the jurors “were afraid to enter the courtroom in the presence of mass media people.” (13) In mid-November the trial was suspended so that defense attorneys could participate in a different trial. Soon after, the prosecution demanded that the judge be removed for showing bias and for failing to follow correct procedures related to opening and closing the trial. (14) Although the request ultimately was denied, (15) these issues have taken the focus away from the victim and the real matters at hand, casting a shadow over the viability of the court system to dispense justice effectively.

Beketov and Politkovskaya are not alone. Most cases involving injured and murdered journalists remain unsolved and only partially investigated. (17) It is becoming increasingly apparent that the same people who are able to silence dissent are equally adept at preventing due process and fair trials.

Both Putin and current president Dmitri Medvedev are aware of the importance of an effective legal and judicial system. Putin came to power after promising to
bring “a dictatorship of the law” to the country, and Medvedev repeatedly has promised to respect the law and abolish “legal nihilism.” (16). Unfortunately, these words are meaningless without action taken to enforce them. As mentioned before, the common thread is political will: journalists must submit to it, the authorities lack it, and the Kremlin controls it. Until this changes, nothing else will.

Source Notes:
(1) “Russian state TV considers reasons behind attack on critical journalist,” Rossiya TV, 19 Nov 08; BBC Monitoring, 19 Nov 08 via Johnson’s Russia List (JRL), 24 Nov 08, 2008-#215.
(3) Ibid.
(4) “Russian state TV considers reasons behind attack on critical journalist,” Ibid.
(7) Ibid.
(9) “To be a journalist in Russia is suicide,” Ibid.
(11) “To be a journalist in Russia is suicide,” Ibid.
Korabel'nikov's resignation?
Early in November, GRU Chief General Valentin Korabel'nikov spoke to members of the domestic press, addressing issues such as Ballistic Missile Defense and the recent Georgian conflict, his comments were designed as a clear signal that GRU still has a leading role to play in Russia's defenses, and that those who might seek to overtake the agency face a difficult fight. (1)

On 29 November, several sources claimed that a number of Russia's senior military leaders had submitted their resignations to Minister of Defense Anatoli
Serdyukov, (2) in protest at the military reforms soon to be enacted. The officers named by the reports included General Vladimir Isakov, Deputy Defense Minister and Head of Logistics, Central Command Chief Vladimir Goshkoder, six heads of the General Staff's "operational departments," and General Korabel'nikov. (3) On the same day, Defense Ministry spokesman Colonel Aleksandr Drobyshevsky issued a statement to the effect that the resignation stories constituted nothing more than "brazen lies." (4) At the time of writing, no further statements have been made, and none of the resignations have been officially confirmed. (5)

It has at least partly due to Korabel'nikov's influence that military intelligence had been able to resist being taken over by the FSB—unlike a number of other security agencies. If Korabel'nikov has indeed resigned, GRU's fight to remain a separate entity may have been dealt a hammer blow.

**Litvinenko murder update**

For approximately one year, the Litvinenko murder case has been frozen at an impasse. In November 2007, instead of re-filing an extradition request against their prime suspect, Andrei Lugovoi, British authorities asked Russian prosecutors to investigate the case themselves, so as to assist Scotland Yard's efforts to gather more evidence. This olive branch was rejected out of hand with Prosecutor General Yuri Chaika arguing that no "proof" of Lugovoi's guilt had been provided, and insisting that British law-enforcement authorities first should publish their evidence before any further steps could be taken. In December 2007, Lugovoi obtained a seat in the Duma elections. By dint of this fact, the prime suspect received parliamentary immunity, theoretically making it impossible to prosecute him for the foreseeable future. (6)

During the last 3 weeks, the Litvinenko story has come to life again. On 16 November, Ren TV featured a documentary about the case, arguing that British forensic experts were withholding Litvinenko's autopsy file from publication because it indicated that he had come into contact with Polonium 210 (the
substance used to kill him) before meeting Lugovoi. (7) As he has done in the past, Lugovoi claimed that Litvinenko had set up their meeting in order to recruit him as a double agent for MI6.

Nine days after the documentary aired, Lugovoi participated in two further interviews. Speaking to Interfax, he claimed that the "British judiciary" was at fault for the lack of progress, due to their refusal to "meet with us," their failure to propose "anything" constructive. His attempts to "establish" good "cooperation" with British authorities had "hit a wall of misapprehension." Lugovoi stated that he had "urged the gentlemen in London to finally get down to the investigation…in their territory," and alleged that this was not happening because "it looks like the British state machine is directly involved in the Litvinenko murder." (8) Speaking to Ekho Moskvy, Lugovoi claimed that he would be willing to travel to the United Kingdom to assist authorities there in expediting the case, if "the British Prosecution Service behaves decently" (9) and guaranteed him full immunity. (10) The reason for the documentary and the interviews is that the two year anniversary of Litvinenko's death occurred on 22 November, with a memorial rally held in Moscow that day. (11)

British authorities have shied away, at least officially, from implicating the Russian state in the murder, instead portraying it as a personal vendetta on Lugovoi's part. Lugovoi's tactics are strange. On the one hand, his comments seem designed as an attempt to force British authorities to up the ante—to answer his allegations by claiming that Litvinenko's murder was ordered by the Kremlin, thereby making it even less likely that he will be extradited. On the other hand, his assertion of willingness to travel to the United Kingdom may be a manifestation of fears for his own safety, and his insistence on immunity a signal that he will spill the whole story if his safety (read asylum?) is guaranteed. If this is the case, Lugovoi is playing a very dangerous game of chess, and he is not playing it well. Threatening the Russian State—particularly from within Russia—is hardly conducive to one's personal safety.
Politkovskaya trial drama

Three weeks ago, the trial of three men accused of complicity in Anna Politkovskaya's murder began in Moscow. Early in the proceedings, the presiding judge ruled that the courtroom would be open to the public, and that journalists would be permitted to attend. (12) Later the same day, the judge reversed his decision, ruling that the case should proceed in secret. According to Judge Yevgeni Zubov, the volte-face occurred because he received notification from the jury that they "would not enter the courtroom before all print and broadcast journalists" had left. (13)

Reaction to the judge's decision ranged from resignation, with Karrina Moskalenko (attorney for Politkovskaya's family) noting that "I could expect this if there were a threat to the jury," (14) to outrage from Dmitri Muratov, Editor in Chief of Novaya gazeta, who commented that the ruling was "a disgraceful, secret, backroom decision, which will prevent society from getting acquainted with how the case was built." (15)

The most surprising reaction to Zubov's ruling however, came from the jury itself. On 20 November, Yevgeni Kolesov, one of the jurors involved, spoke to Ekho Moskvy Radio. Kolesov claimed that pressure had been exerted on the group by a "court official" to agree to a statement that "we wanted to bar the media because we were afraid." The jury not only refused to do so, but also sent a letter to the judge "denying" that they wanted reporters removed. Authorities, so Kolesov stated, "made a laughing stock of us." (16)

Given that Zubov's opening remarks at the possibility of a closed trial, in the event that the jury felt threatened, (17) it seems clear that authorities ran what Muratov has called a "special operation," designed to legitimize a secret hearing. (18) If Muratov's theory is correct, and there is no reason to doubt it, Kolesov's interview has thrown a serious wrench into the plan. On 26 November, reports
emerged that the Prosecutor General's office had asked Judge Zubov to recuse himself from the case, because his actions hinted at outside "interference" in the trial. (19)

Zubov refused to step down, instead announcing a ten day recess, and reversed his decision to close the proceedings. Once the trial restarted, jurors heard testimony from Politkovskaya's two children and were presented with "forensic evidence" in the form of "fibers" linking the putative trigger-man (and brother of 2 defendants), Rustam Makhmudov, to the getaway vehicle. At the time of writing, the trial has been moved into closed session for a temporary period, while classified evidence is presented to the jury. (20)

It must be stated that the jury showed remarkable courage in stepping forward to contradict the judge's explanation. But the way in which the fallout has been handled again demonstrates that adverse publicity does not really concern the authorities. If the desire to remove Zubov and to have a "clean" trial for public relations purposes had been real, his superiors simply could have ordered him to step down. The fact that he has been allowed to continue to run what must now be viewed as an utter sham, demonstrates once more that those in positions of power in Russia have no real interest in seeing the Politkovskaya murder solved.

Source Notes:
(1)"Russian Military Intelligence Watching World Situation Closely," ITAR-TASS, 4 Nov 08; OSC Summary via World News Connection.
(2) "Russia's Top Brass To Resign Over Military Reform As Discontent In Army Grows-Newspaper," Ekho Moskvy Radio, Moscow, in Russian, 29 Nov 08; BBC Monitoring via Lexis-Nexis.
(3) "Defense Ministry Denies Reports on Resignation Of Top Military Officials (Part 2)," Interfax, 29 Nov 08; OSC Transcribed Text via World News Connection.
(4) Ibid.
(5) "Russia's Top Brass To Resign Over Military Reform As Discontent In Army Grows," Ekho Moskvy Radio, 29 Nov 08; OSC Translated Text via World News Connection.

(6) See The ISCIP Analyst, Volume XIV, Number 7 (31 Jan 08).

(7) "Russian TV Casts Doubt On UK Theory of Litvinenko's Death," RenTV, 16 Nov 08; OSC Translated Excerpt via World News Connection.

(8) "Lugovoi Urges Britain To Busy Itself With Investigating Litvinenko Murder," Interfax-AVN Online, 25 November 08; OSC Transcribed Text via World News Connection.

(9) "Russia: Litvinenko Case Suspect Says Britain 'Refuses To Cooperate,'" Interfax, 25 Nov 08; OSC Translated Excerpt via World News Connection.

(10) "Lugovoi Offers To Go To UK Over Litvinenko Murder," Interfax-AVN Online, 24 Nov 08; OSC Transcribed Text via World News Connection.

(11) "Rally In Memory Of Former Security Officer Held In Central Moscow," Ekho Moskvy Radio, 22 Nov 08; OSC Translated Text via World News Connection.

(12) See The ISCIP Analyst, Volume XV, Number 5 (20 Nov 08).

(13) "Russia: Watchdog Condemns Court's Decision To Close Politkovskaya Trial," Committee To Protect Journalists Press Release, New York, in English, 19 Nov 08; BBC Monitoring via Lexis-Nexis.


(16) "Juror Defies Russian Court's Attempts to Close Trial; Judge in Case of Journalist's Slaying Had Said Panel Requested Move To Avoid Media Attention," The Washington Post, 21 Nov 08 via Lexis-Nexis.

(17) Ibid.

(18) Ibid.

Russian Federation: Armed Forces

By Lt. Col. Erik Rundquist

Russian military reform: still on track?
The Russian military continues its transformational journey to become a more agile force to meet 21st century requirements. Unit restructuring and troop downsizing comprise the centerpiece of the military’s reform. In addition, the Russian armed forces’ ability to execute basic and advanced combat training, in the presence of a severe force drawdown, has grabbed headlines with the closing and/or shifting of military training programs. (1) Finally, the voice of “loyal opposition” continues to resonate with politicians, generals, and pundits sounding off against Defense Minister Anatoli Serdyukov’s plans.

Unit restructuring and troop downsizing
To support Serdyukov’s cuts, the Russian Air Force plans to reduce its officer corps by nearly 50,000 members, staffing certain positions with civilians by 2012. (2) The Russian Air Force also is restructuring its forces to focus on smaller squadron-level operations (versus division or regiment) and spread throughout 55 air bases. These units will be structured under major organizations such as strategic command of air and space defense, a nuclear-equipped strategic aviation force, a military-transport command, and air defense commands. (3)

The navy continues to follow suit with its force reductions, as sources recently identified cuts for officers aboard its nuclear submarines. Many of the officer positions are centered in and around the nuclear reactor and engineering operations, such that a sub crew of 73 may lose up to seven officers, possibly to
be replaced by contract servicemen. (4) This announcement was made on the heels of the 8 November 2008 submarine accident aboard the Nerpa, when freon gas swept through two compartments killing 20 and injuring another 21 crew members. (5)

Combat service support cuts also have been more clearly defined. The head of the main Military Medical Department of the Russian Defense Ministry, Major General Vladimir Shappo, acknowledged that 30 percent of Russian military medical structures would be cut, noting, “The issue is about specialists working in narrow fields.” (6) One can infer that the intent of these reductions is to strip some advanced surgical care capabilities from front line units, although Shappo added that medical care for soldiers will not be degraded. (7)

Like their combat maneuver brigade counterparts, logistical support forces are being changed. Lieutenant General Fedor Aleksakov, Chief of the Russian Defense Ministry’s Central Automotive Department, identified nine motor transport brigades that would be eliminated as part of the reform, while two battalions would be delivered to each military district, with a focus on maintaining a similar number of automotive troops. (8) While mathematically it appears that this measure cuts the number of transport units by at least half, General Aleksakov adds, “In my view, these forces are quite sufficient for conducting any resupply operation.” (9)

The commander of the Russian Strategic Missile Troops (RVSN), Colonel General Nikolai Solostov, also is leading a massive force drawdown and restructuring effort of the forces under his command. He remarked that the vacated officer posts would be filled by trained sergeants and civilians. In addition, the RVSN’s reform measures include refitting and upgrading nuclear security systems and would be completed by 2015. (10) Solostov also identified his force reduction numbers, “As of 1 January 2009, the RVSN will consist of three missile armies and 12 missile divisions, while it is planned that as of 1
January 2016 the RVSN’s combat strength will consist of two armies and nine divisions.” (11)

Reform impacts on training
With a smaller army, the need for enhanced training is paramount. However, part of the reform measures call for a large cut in the military tutor program. According to sources, the Main Department for Tutorship will be placed under the Main Personnel Department and the number of tutors will go from 17,500 positions to approximately 5,000 tutors by the end of 2009. (12) The percentage decrease of military tutors is close to 70 percent, which outpaces the overall military drop. In fact, Lieutenant General Anatoly Bashlakov, head of the Department for Tutorship, is likely to resign. (13)

Despite the decrease in the number of military tutors (likely to affect individual training and professional development), Russian military leaders hope that team and tactical training exercises will continue at a vigorous pace in 2009. There are currently 40 division/brigade exercises, 700 battalion exercises, and 400 command drills scheduled for next year. (14) A spokesman for the Training and Service Department noted, “Despite serious reorganization, the intensity of combat and tactical training this year must not be lower than last year.” (15) Complex tactical exercises may be hamstrung if particular brigades are still in the process of relocating and bedding down their units, upgrading their equipment, or in the midst of training enlisted troops to fill the vacant posts of the recently-ousted junior officers.

War of words
Change inevitably brings about opposing views and the Russian military reforms are no exception. According to some reports, senior military leaders are departing in droves. The Deputy Chairman of the State Duma Committee on Security, Gennadi Gudkov, commented in an interview, “I can say that many generals have recently resigned voluntarily. They resign because they disagree
with the reforms that are being carried out or will be carried out. At least, as I understand, these reforms were not discussed even with the generals.” (16) Some sources corroborate this fact, reporting that several senior generals have tendered their resignations, including General Valentin Korabel’nikov, head of the General Staff’s Intelligence Division (GRU). (17)

In addition, retired officers and “military experts” have entered into the public fray and are interviewed regularly on Russian media programs to blast reform plans. The former commander-in-chief of the Russian Air Force, Petr Deynekin noted that the military reforms are taking place “secretively,” with the public completely unaware of the proceedings. (18) In the same interview, former Defense Ministry Press Secretary Viktor Baranets added, “… we are not dealing with a serious military reform but with some kind of Bolshevik adventurous scheme.” (19) Other retired senior officers have added to the public rhetoric by calling for the Defense Minister’s resignation and have warned of the possibility of an “open revolt” if the reforms are not altered. (20)

Defense Minister Serdyukov is not taking these charges lightly and is attempting to blunt these attacks and allay the public’s fear of change. Defense Ministry spokesmen have issued statements emphatically denying that senior leaders are resigning. In addition, deputy ministers were dispatched to all of the military districts on an “information campaign” to better explain the impending reforms to all servicemen. (21) The Defense Ministry promptly denied reports that “gag orders” had been enacted by the Chief of the General Staff, in order to prevent news of the military reform measures from being disseminated to the public. (22)

These reforms are pushing ahead in the midst of a precarious global economy. With the projected loss of thousands of officer positions, the exodus of experienced generals, the high costs of new military infrastructure and advanced systems, and the need for realistic training, Defense Minister Serdyukov likely will be an extremely busy individual. His next test is to report the status of the reform
to the Federation Council of the Upper House of Parliament on 17 December 2008. (23)

Source Notes:
(1) See The ISCIP Analyst, Volume XV, Number 5 (20 Nov 08).
(2) “Air Force reform will result in reduction of over 50,000 officers’ positions,” Interfax News Agency, 21 Nov 08 via Lexis-Nexis.
(3) Ibid.
(5) See The ISCIP Analyst, Volume XV, Number 5 (20 Nov 08).
(7) Ibid.
(8) "Russian army’s motor brigades to be transformed into battalions," Interfax-AVN, 21 Nov 08; BBC Monitoring Former Soviet Union – Political, 30 Nov 08 via Lexis-Nexis.
(9) Ibid.
(11) Ibid.
(12) “Tutors in army to be cut drastically (Part 2),” Interfax-AVN, 1 Dec 08 via Lexis-Nexis.
(13) Ibid.
(14) “Russian Army to have about 40 tactical division, brigade drills in 2009," Interfax News Agency, 1 Dec 08 via Lexis-Nexis.
(16) “Russian army hit by top officer resignations over military reform – senior MP,” Ekho Moskvy Radio, 29 Nov 08; BBC Monitoring Former Soviet Union – Political, 29 Nov 08 via Lexis-Nexis.

(17) “Russia’s top brass to resign over military reform as discontent in army grows – newspaper,” Ekho Moskvy Radio, 29 Nov 08; BBC Monitoring Former Soviet Union – Political, 29 Nov 08 via Lexis-Nexis.

(18) “Russian pundits slam forthcoming military reform on Ren TV,” Ren TV – Moscow, 1 Dec 08; BBC Monitoring Former Soviet Union – Political, 2 Dec 08 via Lexis-Nexis.

(19) Ibid.


(22) “Russian Defence (sic) Ministry denies ban of telling media about reform,” RIA Novosti, 29 Nov 08 via Lexis-Nexis.

(23) “Russian DM to report on military reform to senators Dec 17,” ITAR-TASS, 26 Nov 08 via Lexis-Nexis.

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Russian Federation: Foreign Relations

By Shaun Barnes

**NATO summit is a mixed bag for Russia**

On December 3rd, the NATO foreign ministers’ meeting in Brussels decided gradually to resume the alliance’s consultative ties to Moscow that have been frozen since Russia’s invasion of Georgia in August. This move and the foreign
ministers’ failure to grant membership action plans (MAPs) to Georgia and the Ukraine were hailed as victories by Russian officials. However, the NATO meeting also resulted in several pronouncements that are not as positive, from Moscow’s point of view.

After more than three months of being cut off from the NATO-Russia Council (NRC), the alliance’s formal liaison branch for Russian relations, Moscow is being granted access once again, albeit gradually. The representatives present expressed their ongoing displeasure with Russia’s actions in the Caucasus, as well as its recent threat to deploy offensive missiles in Kaliningrad, but still opted to move forward cautiously on the issue of consultation. Their statement read: “Taking [Russia’s actions] into account, we have agreed on a measured and phased approach: we have mandated the Secretary General to re-engage with Russia at the political level; agreed to informal discussions in the NRC; and requested the Secretary General to report back to us prior to any decision to engage Russia formally in the NRC.” (1) The timeline for resumption of formal engagement is as yet unclear, but informal discussions appear to be moving rapidly. According to Russian Deputy Chief of Staff Colonel-General Anatoli Nogovitsyn, Russia “immediately [sent] a high-ranking official of the Defence Ministry, Army Gen Aleksey Maslov […] to Brussels as the Russian Federation's chief military representative at NATO.” (2)

Nogovitsyn went on to say that the restoration of NATO-Russian ties was inevitable, given the West’s need for Russian cooperation in resolving a range of global security problems. (3) Interestingly, this interpretation was echoed by both the Russian Foreign Ministry, which welcomed NATO’s return to “realism,” (4) and NATO Secretary Jaap de Hoop Scheffer, who said “Russia is such an important factor in geopolitical terms that there is no alternative for NATO than to engage Russia.” (5)
The other important decision, from Moscow’s view, was the lack of action on providing MAPs for Georgian and Ukrainian accession to the NATO alliance. While not reneging on the pledge made in Bucharest to add these states to NATO, the conferees decided that both have “significant work left to do" before this can take place. (6) The two aspiring alliance members instead will be taken off the traditional membership path and special arrangements will be made with each to work toward accession. (7) Russia’s chief envoy to NATO, Dimitry Rogozin, was quick to claim victory on the issue, saying starkly, “In the end the alliance blinked - there is no other way to put it.” (8)

However, not all the developments in Brussels amounted to good news for the Kremlin. There are reports that American backing for re-engagement with Russia was granted only in return for a German pledge to support expedited preparation of Georgia and Ukraine for NATO membership. (9) The foreign ministers’ Final Communiqué is also unequivocal in its backing for America’s planned ballistic missile defense system in central Europe. Its offer of support for US-Russian “cooperation proposals” on missile defense may be small consolation for Moscow. (10)

While the results of the Brussels meeting offered Moscow some real gains in terms of re-opening channels of communication, in the final analysis, the results are mixed. Though there does seem to be lingering tension within NATO, given the compromise nature of the decisions on the NRC and MAPs, this did not prevent the conference from reaching a consensus. Support for further NATO expansion and the construction of a missile shield mean the rocky nature of NATO-Russian ties almost certainly will persist for some time to come.

**Russia continues drive for new security treaty**

Russia’s has continued its steady drumbeat for a new security arrangement in Europe that supposedly would protect its interests better. It is becoming
increasingly clear that apprehension about NATO’s moves is driving these calls, which amount to veiled attempts to constrain the alliance.

Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov raised the issue once more at a meeting of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) in Helsinki. Lavrov couched the need for a new treaty in terms of the failure of the OSCE, proclaiming, “[f]or us it is obvious that the present-day OSCE is not carrying out its primary assignment: ensuring equal and indivisible security for all.” (11) He reiterated the call frequently made in recent months by President Dimitri Medvedev for a new security framework that ostensibly would redress the supposed inequities of the present architecture. However, the OSCE’s press release on the meeting made no mention of Lavrov’s speech, nor did the members manage to agree to a joint political declaration. (12) So far the only solid backing for the Russian plan has come from the members of the Collective Security Treaty Organization, who recently reiterated their endorsement. (13)

It is increasingly apparent that this proposal is Russia’s attempt to restrain the NATO alliance in its efforts to incorporate new members and take other actions that Moscow portrays as inimical to its security. Prime Minister Vladimir Putin’s recent comments at the Conference on Questions of International Humanitarian Law make this clear. He articulated three underlying principles of the new framework: “Not to ensure our own security at the expense of the security of others [...] Not to allow actions that weaken the unity of the common area of security [...] [and] Not to allow the development and expansion of military unions to proceed to the detriment of other treaty participants.” (14) What these points, especially the third, suggest is that the proposed treaty would block any NATO action that Russia portrays as threatening its security. As Dimitri Rogozin put it, “the existence of NATO loses its current meaning” under this proposal. (15)

In this respect, it is not surprising that the measure did not receive a ringing endorsement by the members of the OSCE in Helsinki. If Russia takes the
opportunity to use its calls for a new framework as the basis for a legitimate
dialogue on a modus vivendi for European security, perhaps an effective
promise could be reached that would reduce the tensions of the last several
years. But, as long as Moscow persists in peddling a self-serving proposal as a
multilateral security initiative, the prospects for progress are remote.

Source Notes:
(1) “Final communiqué: Meeting of the North Atlantic Council at the level of
Foreign Ministers held at NATO Headquarters, Brussels,” 3 Dec 08, paragraphs
(2) “NATO cannot resolve world security problems without Russia – general
staff,” ITAR-TASS, 5 Dec 08; BBC Worldwide Monitoring via Lexis-Nexis.
(3) Ibid.
(4) “Russian MFA Information and Press Department Commentary Regarding
Decisions Adopted at NATO Council Meeting in Brussels,” Ministry of Foreign
Affairs of the Russian Federation, 4 Dec 08 via
http://www.mid.ru/brp_4.nsf/e78a48070f128a7b43256999005bcb3/a6ae4edbf9
238d0ec3257515005b8f3b?OpenDocument
(5) Erlanger, Steven, “NATO chief defends engaging with Russia,” The New York
Times, 4 Dec 08 via Lexis-Nexis.
(6) “Final communiqué,” 3 Dec 08, para. 18.
(7) Evans, Michael, “Friendly words, but no action for states seeking NATO role,”
The Times (London), 1 Dec 08 via Lexis Nexis.
(8) “Russia’s NATO envoy interviewed on brussels summit,” Moskovskiy
komsomolets, 5 Dec 08; BBC Worldwide Monitoring via Lexis-Nexis.
(9) Erlanger, Steven, “At meeting with allies, U.S. backs renewed talks between
(10) “Final communiqué,” 3 Dec 08, para. 32
(11) “Russian foreign minister addresses, chastises OSCE,” Ministry of Foreign
Affairs of the Russian Federation, 7 Dec 08; BBC Worldwide Monitoring via
Lexis-Nexis.
Eleventh-hour energy policy

On Monday, November 24, Ukrainian officials landed in Moscow for an emergency meeting to resolve another looming gas crisis. Russian President Dmitri Medvedev demanded repayment of Ukraine’s $2.4 billion debt for gas consumed in 2008 before Gazprom signs a new contract for gas deliveries to Ukraine in 2009. Without full repayment, Gazprom says, there will be no contract. Without a contract, there will be no gas. “We would like to avoid such a scenario, we would like to agree on everything before New Year, but as you understand, we cannot deliver gas without a contract,” said Gazprom spokesman Sergei Kupriyanov. (1)

The exact figures are in dispute. Gazprom puts Ukraine’s debt arrears at $2.4 billion, while Ukraine insists that it owes only $1.3 billion, and that the country is making good-faith efforts to pay off its debt, amid grave financial circumstances that necessitated a $16.4 billion emergency loan from the IMF earlier in November. (2)
Despite intense negotiations, the Ukrainian officials found their Russian colleagues unwilling to compromise. Choosing to ignore an earlier agreement between Prime Ministers Yulia Tymoshenko and Vladimir Putin that envisioned a gradual rise in gas prices from this year’s rate of $179.50 per thousand cubic meters to a market rate in 2011, Gazprom officials are threatening to more than double the price of gas for Ukraine to $400 per thousand cubic meters in 2009.

(3) In a live broadcast televised on December 4, Putin derided Ukrainian pleas to hold gas prices at 2008 levels. “Our partners are telling us: Leave this year's prices for us. How can we leave this year’s prices if today our Ukrainian partners are still receiving gas at almost half the European price,” Putin said. Switching to Ukrainian, he added (in typical “Putinese”), “are you crazy, or what?” (4)

The current dispute raises a specter of a drop in gas deliveries across Europe during the winter holiday season, a replay of the 2006 crisis that reduced gas pressure in some western European countries by up to 50 percent. Russia supplies over 40 percent of the EU’s gas imports; more than 80 percent of that total passes through Ukraine. (5) Putin would not discount the possibility of shutting off the taps to Ukraine, if its outstanding debt was not repaid by the New Year, though he did promise to warn the EU in advance if a shutoff was imminent. For her part, Tymoshenko sought to reassure EU countries, declaring that “Ukraine is a reliable partner and transit will be carried out.” (6)

The current crisis cannot have come as a complete surprise to European leaders in Brussels. Weary of eleventh-hour consternation over the security of energy supplies to the Continent, in late fall the EU sent Energy Commissioner Andris Piebalgs to Sungurlu, Turkey, to revive interest in its Nabucco gas pipeline project. (7) The project, aimed at diversifying European gas imports by tapping into Central Asian volumes and bypassing Russia, has been languishing for nearly five years as its backers in the EU try to resolve fundamental problems—such as finding 31 billion cubic meters of gas by 2020, when the pipeline is projected to reach full carrying capacity. Even in the short-term, security of
supply has been thrown into jeopardy as Azerbaijan, the pipeline’s main supplier, weighs competing EU and Russian bids for its gas volumes in 2012, the year Nabucco is expected to come on-line.

In tandem with Turkish and Azerbaijani talks, the European Commission has launched a proposal for an Eastern Partnership that will deepen bilateral relations and guarantee foreign aid totaling over $775 million to six eastern countries in Russia’s traditional ambit: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine. (8) The Partnership, a plan that is expected to be high on Brussels’s agenda when the Czech Republic assumes the EU presidency in January, was proposed earlier this year by Poland and Sweden to address, among other issues, European energy policy.

But as Eastern European countries push for greater independence from Russia, their Western European partners tug EU energy policy in the other direction—back toward Moscow. By forging ahead with a plan to lay the Nord Stream pipeline across the Baltic seabed, Germany was rewarded in October with a lucrative stake in Yuzhno-Russkoye gas fields of Siberia. (9) In his live television appearance, Putin praised Western European leaders for their cooperative spirit while berating the anti-Russian “phobias” of “the so-called new Europeans,” in Eastern Europe, where opposition to Russian-dominated energy policy remains strong. (10) If European leaders are unable or unwilling to commit to a common energy policy in the long-term, the Continent will be forced to keep scrambling for its gas supplies at the eleventh-hour.

Source Notes:
(3) “Putin threatens to cut off the gas for Christmas,” The Daily Telegraph, 5 Dec 08 via Lexis-Nexis Academic Universe.
(9) “Germany Aims to Guide the West’s Ties to Russia,” The New York Times, 1 Dec 08 via (http://www.nytimes.com/2008/12/02/world/europe/02germany.html?pagewanted=1&_r=1&sq=Russia%20Europe%20energy&st=cse&scp=1).

Newly Independent States: Caucasus
By Robyn Angley

GEORGIA
Georgia shuffle
The end of the NATO summit seems to have been a trigger for yet more changes in President Mikheil Saakashvili’s cabinet, this time accompanied by the movement of senior officials elsewhere. Foreign Minister Eka Tkeshelashvili, Defense Minister Davit Kezerashvili, Economic Minister Eka Sharashidze, and Education Minister Ghia Nodia all have lost their positions through recent cabinet
changes. Kakha Lomaia of the National Security Council also appears to be on his way out.

Georgia’s government has experienced considerable turnover since the August war with Russia and “South Ossetia.” In addition to the most recent cabinet reshuffling, in the last four months, Saakashvili has named a new prime minister, culture minister and environment minister, and accepted the resignation of Badri Bitsadze, chief of Georgia’s border police and husband of former Saakashvili ally Nino Burjanadze. The major exception to these personnel changes is Interior Minister Vano Mirabishvili, who has shown impressive staying power, despite being consistently vilified by Georgia’s non-parliamentary opposition. Neither Saakashvili nor Prime Minister Mgaloblishvili has given a definitive reason for the extensive adjustments in the government, although personnel changes in Saakashvili’s administration are certainly not a new phenomenon. For example, Tkelashvili’s replacement as foreign minister will be the fourth foreign minister Tbilisi has had this year.

The new foreign minister will be Grigol Vashadze, who just last month was named Culture Minister. Prior to that appointment, Vashadze had been the deputy foreign minister responsible for relations with Russia. As his first order of business, Vashadze has called for all deputy foreign ministers to submit their resignations. Vashadze holds dual citizenship in Georgia and Russia and worked in the Soviet Foreign Ministry for seven years in the 1980s. His appointment may be intended as a signal to Russia that Georgia is willing to take steps toward a less hostile relationship with its large northern neighbor.

Replacing Vashadze as Culture Minister will be Nika Rurua, an influential legislator who is part of Saakashvili’s inner circle and has long held a prominent position on parliament’s defense and security committee. Rurua served as deputy chair of that committee until his recent appointment.
Georgian Ambassador to the United States David Sikharulidze has been named new Defense Minister. Although coming directly from his post in Washington, Sikharulidze has a long history in security-related issues. As a parliamentarian, he also played a prominent role in the legislature’s defense and security committee. Following that post, he led Georgia’s mission to NATO, before working as a First Deputy Defense Minister. His appointment—clearly a signal of Georgia’s pro-Western intentions and continued NATO aspirations—may be an attempt by Saakashvili to balance Foreign Minister Vashadze, whose history in the Soviet Foreign Ministry and other Russian connections could be interpreted by critics as leaning too far to the north. (One of Vashadze’s first moves in his new position was to give an interview with Russian newspaper Kommersant.)

Former Defense Minister Kezerashvili’s dismissal comes as no surprise given the disorganization and defeat sustained by the Georgian armed forces in the August war with “South Ossetia” and its Russian “protectors.” Although the Georgian army hardly could have hoped to crush its Russian opposition, the less than stellar performance of Tbilisi’s military makes the dismissal of Kezerashvili not unexpected, despite his status as a member of Saakashvili’s inside circle. The acting minister, Kutelia, also has very close ties to Saakashvili.

Nika Gvaramia, former Justice Minister and former parliamentarian, will step into Ghia Nodia’s shoes as Education Minister. Nodia, formerly of the Caucasus Institute for Peace, Democracy, and Development, a prominent Georgian think tank, was a staunch supporter of Saakashvili in the Rose Revolution and beyond.

Kakha Lomaia, head of the National Security Council, also is expected to be transferred to an unspecified diplomatic posting, according to an announcement made by Prime Minister Mgaloblishvili. (1) Lomaia, a longstanding member of the Saakashvili group and former director of the Open Society Georgia Foundation, served as Education Minister before switching to national security issues. His replacement has not yet been named.
Apart from the dismissals of senior officials, Georgian ambassador to the UN, Irakli Alasania, also has resigned from his post. In the days following his resignation, Alasania was reported to be conducting negotiations with the New Rights and Republican non-parliamentary opposition parties. Alasania has not revealed the reasons behind his resignation, other than to state that he had delayed his announcement intentionally until after the NATO summit. A November statement, in which the former UN envoy called for the establishment of a decision-making system that would “rule out unilateral decisions and will reduce threat of Georgia’s involvement in provocations,” (2) would seem to indicate that Alasania’s political actions in Tbilisi may be oppositional rather than otherwise.

Possibly smoothing the way for future cooperation, the New Rights and Republican parties announced on 8 December the formation of an opposition alliance. During their announcement, these parties stated that they would look favorably on Alasania as a coalition leader. They also declared that they would not work with former Prime Minister Zurab Nogaideli’s new political organization, but that cooperation with former Speaker of the House and Saakashvili ally Nino Burjanadze was possible if she did not pursue the presidency. (3) Alasania has not announced an intention to work with the new coalition, but has deferred statements on his political plans until his upcoming return to Tbilisi.

Prior to serving at the UN, Alasania was the deputy security minister from 2002-2004. Afterwards, he held the post of chair of the Abkhaz government-in-exile and presidential aide for the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict. He was named to the New York position in June 2006. Alasania is known as a skilled negotiator who was received with goodwill by both the Abkhaz and Georgian sides of the conflict.

Source Notes:
Newly Independent States: Central Asia

By Monika Shepherd

Turkmen elections: quantity, not quality

Preparations are underway in Turkmenistan for parliamentary elections scheduled to take place just a few days away, on December 14. The Turkmen government is portraying the upcoming vote as a leap forward in its march toward the development of a democratic and politically open society, placing heavy emphasis on the fact that for the first time since Turkmenistan’s independence, multiple candidates will be running for each of the 125 seats (there are 288 registered candidates). Indeed, the Central Election Commission (CEC) views this fact as clear evidence that the election process has been “widely contested, open and transparent, and is characterized by high civic engagement of people.” In an effort to dispel any misgivings that the international community might have about the integrity of the election process, President Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedow has invited elections observers from various international bodies to monitor the polling stations. (1)

The UN Secretariat will send three of its staff members to act as observers, a number of CIS observers arrived on November 25 and a group of election experts from the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) arrived in Ashgabat on December 6. The December 14 elections thus also will mark the first time that representatives of international organizations will
be permitted to monitor Turkmen elections, another milestone which is being much touted by the president and CEC representatives. (2) The European Union’s special envoy for Central Asia, Pierre Morel, added his voice to the chorus of praise when he lauded the Turkmen government’s endeavors to conduct “more open elections” and commended President Berdimuhammedow for the “impressive opening up of the country.” (3) The EU’s ongoing, and thus far unsuccessful, efforts to persuade the Turkmen president to funnel some of his country’s vast natural gas supplies toward Europe surely played no role in Monsieur Morel’s evaluation of the Turkmen government’s progress on such issues as political pluralism and human rights. OSCE officials, however, seem to harbor no illusions regarding the elections, stating in a report released in October that genuine political competition currently is not possible in Turkmenistan as long as only candidates from pro-government organizations and the country’s single registered political party are allowed to participate. (4)

In addition to the Democratic Party of Turkmenistan (DPT), (5) the national trade unions, the Women’s Association of Turkmenistan, the War Veterans’ Organization, the Magtymguly Youth Organisation, and a number of other NGOs have been permitted to register candidates in the elections. The NGOs chosen to field candidates in the December 14 polls all belong to the National Galkynys (Revival) Movement, (6) an umbrella organization created by the government that seems to work in close tandem with the DPT. Roughly ten percent of the candidates represent state-sanctioned NGOs, the rest represent the DPT and all campaign funding is issued by the government; private campaign funding is banned. Interestingly, although the President Berdimuhammedow has vociferously welcomed international election monitors, Western journalists, on the other hand, will not be allowed to cover the elections process. (7)

Candidates from groups that do not enjoy the regime’s official support have been shut out of the elections wholesale. One potential candidate, Gurbangurdy Durdykuliev, was barred from registering for the ballot by local election officials.
who told him that he had missed the registration deadline by three days, when, in fact he turned in his paperwork three days early. In addition to lacking the support of a state-approved NGO or party, Durdykuliev was incarcerated in a psychiatric hospital for two years under President Saparmurat Niyazov’s reign, as punishment for submitting a written request to Niyazov to hold a peaceful, anti-government protest. (8) Another critic of the regime, Sazak Durdymuradov, also was denied registration in the elections and reported having received death threats targeting both himself and his family. (9) Durdymuradov worked as a journalist for Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty until June 20, 2008, when he was seized by the state security services, beaten and tortured until he agreed to sign a letter stating that he would no longer work for RFE/RL, and then subsequently imprisoned in a psychiatric hospital until early July. (10) Despite his vows to institute greater transparency in Turkmenistan’s political process, President Berdimuhammedow seems to share his predecessor’s allergy to even mild criticism of that process, nor does he seem eager to provide his citizens with the information they would require in order to participate in their country’s political life.

Turkmen state media did not begin publishing the names of the parliamentary candidates until just three weeks prior to the elections and even then, the lists for some districts were not complete. (11) This week, the Altyn Asyr state television channel permitted some of the candidates to give four-minute synopses of their election platforms, although an unidentified employee at the television station reportedly told the opposition website chrono-tm.org that many of the candidates were completely unprepared to give even brief presentations and Altyn Asyr staff had to write their speeches for them. (12)

This is not the mark of a regime which genuinely desires the participation of its citizens in the political process, in fact it seems to constitute quite the opposite. President Berdimuhammedow is to be commended for breaking with his predecessor by restoring parts of the country’s much needed educational and
public health systems, however on the issues of political openness and human rights, he is holding steadfast to the path blazed by Turkmenbashy. The quantity of political candidates may have increased, but the quality of the election process itself has not – all of the candidates have been pre-approved by a regime that does not even see fit to provide voters with information about those for whom they will be voting.

Source Notes:
(1) “Turkmen parliamentary polls to be widely contested – agency,” 4 Dec 08, ITAR-TASS; BBC Worldwide Monitoring via Lexis-Nexis Academic.
(2) “UN observers to monitor Turkmen parliamentary poll,” 5 Dec 08, Turkmen government website; BBC Worldwide Monitoring via Lexis-Nexis Academic.
(4) “Democracy groups to assist Turkmen elections,” 19 Nov 08, Associated Press via Lexis-Nexis Academic.
(5) The Democratic Party of Turkmenistan was founded at the 25th Congress of the Communist Party of Turkmenistan (CPT) in December 1991, when the CPT decided to change its name and confirmed Saparmurat Niyazov as party chair; via Country Studies website at <http://www.country-studies.com/turkmenistan/political-parties.html>, accessed 11 Dec 08.
(6) “Turkmen parliamentary polls to be widely contested – agency,” 4 Dec 08, ITAR-TASS, Ibid.
(7) Lomov, “Turkmen vote seeks new openness, West unconvinced,” 11 Dec 08, Ibid.
(9) “Turkmen Activist's Candidacy For Parliament Rejected,” 5 Dec 08, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Watchdog via
UKRAINE

Tymoshenko makes her move; Yushchenko flat-footed

On Tuesday, 9 December, Ukraine’s parliament elected Volodymyr Lytvyn to the speaker’s position in a surprise move that seemed to stun a good portion of the deputies present. (1) It is a return engagement for Lytvyn, who previously served as speaker from 2002-2004.

Lytvyn said the moment marked the creation of a new parliamentary majority coalition that includes his bloc (BL), the bloc of Prime Minister Yulia Tymoshenko (BYuT) and President Viktor Yushchenko’s Our Ukraine-People’s Self Defense (OU-PSD). “A formal coalition agreement will be signed within days,” he announced to parliament. (2)

It seems, however, that someone forgot to tell Yushchenko and his closest allies. Just 40 out of 72 members of OU-PSD voted in Lytvyn’s favor. This gap in votes
was filled by the Communist Party, which unanimously backed Lytvyn, but which is not a coalition member. (3)

Moreover, following the vote, several influential OU-PSD members claimed “falsification” of the signed memorandum declaring the three parties’ intentions to form a coalition. (4) “There is no signature of the faction leader,” OU-PSD’s Ksenia Lyapina said. Her statement was echoed by fellow member Andriy Paruby after the vote. “Lytvyn announced [the formation of the coalition] too early,” he told reporters. (5)

These statements do not appear to correspond entirely with events. On the morning of the vote in favor of Lytvyn, a statement from OU-PSD confirmed that 41 members—a majority—had “signed a statement for a coalition with BYuT and the Bloc of Lytvyn.” (6) According to Ukraine’s constitution and accepted parliamentary procedures, only parties or blocs may form coalitions. If a majority of a bloc’s members sign a statement in favor of a coalition, it is considered approved.

Moreover, 55 of 72 OU-PSD members voted to open “official talks with BYuT and the Bloc of Lytvyn about the creation of a coalition.” (7) Five hours after this vote, the coalition was announced by Lytvyn.

Given past actions, it is likely that OU-PSD members who oppose a coalition with Tymoshenko and Lytvyn had hoped to drag out coalition talks, while undermining support for such an idea. During 2006 and 2007, OU-PSD insisted on lengthy negotiations with Tymoshenko as parliament attempted to form majority coalitions. Each time, Tymoshenko charged that these negotiations seemed specifically designed to delay an agreement – or perhaps avoid one, altogether. It is no secret, after all, that Tymoshenko and Yushchenko do not get along. They are expected to be intense rivals in the December 2009 presidential
election – although her support far outstrips his (she occupies first place according to most polls at approximately 20% compared to his 5%).

The current political crisis was created when Yushchenko's bloc summarily withdrew from the coalition created in 2007, following BYuT's support for legislation that limited presidential power.

The President has been unable to forge a replacement coalition since his bloc withdrew. Most recently, he has suggested that the parliament continue without a formal coalition. Tymoshenko has charged that this would create further instability, leaving the government with no clear legislative support.

But, while it was too soon for a minority of members within OU-PSD to declare a coalition, the timing was just right for Tymoshenko and her allies. It is perhaps not coincidental that the announcement of the vote for speaker, as well as for the coalition, came when neither Yushchenko nor his most powerful allies were in Ukraine. On that day, Yushchenko traveled to Lithuania for an official visit, his chief-of-staff began what has been announced as a vacation, and the head of his National Security Council traveled to Moscow for the funeral of Patriarch Alexei II. It appears that no announcement was made about the coalition or the vote for speaker until all three had left Kyiv.

What a must be cause of concern for the President is the fact that within hours of his leaving Kyiv, the majority of his own bloc chose to back a speaker and coalition he clearly did not support. Just over one week earlier, at a meeting chaired by the President, OU-PSD had voted to support another candidate—Ivan Pluishch—for speaker. (8)

Perhaps seeing the writing on the wall, within hours of their charges of falsification, OU-PSD’s dissenters began backtracking. The three blocs began reconfiguring the cabinet to provide several posts for Lytvyn’s Bloc. As of
Thursday, several media sources reported that the transportation minister would revert from BYuT's portfolio to Lytvyn's, resulting in the dismissal of Yosef Vinnsky from the post. (9)

Ironically, Vinnsky was one of the first politicians to stand up against the oppressive methods of former President Leonid Kuchma. Moreover, he was one of the first to demand Kuchma’s resignation after recordings were released in 2000 that appeared to suggest Kuchma’s compliance in the kidnapping and murder of investigative journalist Georgiy Gongadze. (Kuchma vigorously denies this charge.)

Eventually, Vinnsky, Tymoshenko, numerous other opposition politicians and Gongadze’s family members also accused Lytvyn of complicity in the murder. According to those who have listened to the tapes, what appears to be Lytvyn’s voice is heard encouraging Kuchma to “let loose” the Interior Minister “to use alternative methods” on Gongadze. (10) (Lytvyn denies this is his voice and strenuously denies any part in the murder.) Five Interior Ministry officers have been found guilty of carrying out the journalist’s murder.

As usual for Ukraine, as circumstances change, so do alliances and so do enemies. Nevertheless, probably it will not be lost on Vinnsky that he will be replaced by a member of Lytvyn’s Bloc.

Despite this apparent agreement on staffing issues, a minority of OU-PSD members continues to attempt to extend the negotiations or undermine an agreement. Lyapina, for example, first demanded that BYuT give up the Finance Ministry. Since BYuT is by far the largest party in the coalition (156 seats, compared to OU-PSD’s 72 and Lytvyn’s 20), that suggestion quickly failed. Reportedly Lyapina and her allies also are attempting to include wording that would guarantee Ukraine’s continued path toward a NATO MAP and would restrict Russian language usage. Since BYuT receives far more support in the
Eastern part of the country than OU-PSD or Lytvyn, it is unlikely the bloc would agree to allow these items to be enshrined in the agreement. The 2007 agreement does contain a provision favoring NATO entry, but following Ukraine’s recent rebuff, the issue has far less urgency.

Missing in all of this discussion is the man who began it all by removing his bloc from the previous coalition – President Viktor Yushchenko. As of Thursday evening in Kyiv, Yushchenko had not made any statement about the coalition. Indeed, he waited until 10 December before publicly congratulating Lytvyn on his election. (11)

It appears that the President has not only lost his ability to influence the formation of the coalition, but may lose a number of allies he had appointed to prominent positions, thanks to an earlier agreement with Tymoshenko. The coalition announced on Thursday that the head of the State Property Fund—Yushchenko’s strong ally—would be replaced with a member of BYuT. BYuT also claims to have received consent from OU-PSD to remove Yushchenko’s Justice Minister, although this claim is curious since it is a position constitutionally guaranteed as a presidential appointment. Yushchenko’s ally at the National Bank also appears to be in trouble. (12)

In an address to the country on Wednesday, Tymoshenko made clear that she had renewed her ties with OU-PSD, but not with Yushchenko. “You know that the situation in Ukraine was recently complicated by a consciously created amoral political crisis,” she said. “I want to thank all political forces, factions, people deputies, who by their voting yesterday ended this political disgrace and created a coalition. All these positive steps were made not with the aid of the President, but in spite of his active opposition to the creation of the coalition.” (13)
The question now is whether this new coalition, which includes a small but very significant group of dissenters, can function in an environment of continuing animosity between the prime minister and president.

BYuT is taking no chances and has warned that it will push for simultaneous parliamentary and presidential elections if the coalition fails.

Source Notes:
(1) “Lytvyn elected as Speaker of Ukrainian parliament,” UNIAN News Agency, 1804 CET, 9 Dec 08 via www.unian.net/eng.
(2) “Ukraine’s new governing coalition formed,” Xinhua News Agency, 10 Dec 08 via China Daily.
(5) “Ukraine’s new governing coalition formed,” Xinhua News Agency, 10 Dec 08 via China Daily.
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