PRESIDENCY

Miscommunication?

The president's press service has barely attempted to explain why Boris Yeltsin seems to believe he recently had a phone conversation with Bill Clinton. During a Kremlin meeting with European Union leaders, Yeltsin not only warned the West that Russia would not "let Kosovo be touched," but emphasized that he had conveyed this position to President Clinton both "in a letter and by telephone." (NTV, 1100 GMT, 18 Feb 99; BBC, 19 Feb 99/nexis) The problem is, the conversation never happened. Worse yet, the White House (DC) spokesman didn't even bother to use diplomatic sugarcoating in response, claiming instead to be "confused" by the comments and adding that "[w]e are seeking clarification from the Russian government." (Agence France-Presse, 18 Feb 99; nexis)

It is clear, of course, that Yeltsin's grasp on day-to-day governance is weak at best and, even when in better health, he has been prone to unusual gaffes in unscripted exchanges with the press. However, did the Clinton White House really need to underscore this situation by airing its concerns over his remarks publicly rather than privately? Perhaps the administration is signaling both its realization that Yeltsin is growing increasingly irrelevant in Russian politics and its support for that faction of Russia's political elite that would like to see Yeltsin distance himself yet further from the management of state affairs.

Further health woes follow an announcement of job security

As has been widely reported, President Yeltsin is back in the hospital for treatment of his ulcer. Doctors blame the exacerbation of his ailment on Yeltsin's
refusal to follow the recuperation regimen set out for him. (AFP, 0552 PST, 28 Feb 99; clari.net) Other physicians suggest that "emotional-psychological stress" may have played a role.

Just prior to this most recent hospitalization, Yeltsin and Yevgeni Primakov made a joint televised appearance to announce that they were in agreement on at least a portion of the controversial political accord. "We have two firm positions," Yeltsin stated, "for me to work until 2000 and for him to work as premier until the presidential elections." (AFP, 1116 PST, 25 Feb 99; clari.net) While this statement and the joint appearance of the president and prime minister seems to have been intended as a rebuff to the rumors of a rift between the two, it leaves many questions unanswered. Chief among them are the status of negotiations with the Duma on the political accord proposed by Primakov, and fine-tuned in the Security Council (see previous digests), as well as the issue of the voluntary suspension of constitutional authority on the part of the president.

Further clarification of the situation will have to wait, however. In addition to Yeltsin's latest sidelining for medical treatment, the prime minister has left the capital for a vacation in Sochi. (AFP, 0712 PST, 28 Feb 99; clari.net)

**GOVERNMENT**

**Democracy is a messy business**

On a recent visit to St. Petersburg, the prime minister reaffirmed his deeply held commitment to democracy by suggesting that Russia's regional governors should no longer be elected to office, but rather appointed, in order to reestablish "a rigid vertical system of authority." (The Moscow Times, 23 Feb 99) His proposed scheme to accomplish this would maintain a thin veneer of democracy: The president would nominate candidates for governor and then the "local elective bodies" would "elect governors" from that list. I have seen little reaction to Primakov's suggestion from the current regional governors, but perhaps they are
concerned that criticism would keep them off the president's nomination lists come 2000.

The prime minister has also approved an interesting government decision that would allow only Primakov himself, his spokesperson and the government information department to provide "official" government information to the media. All other government members must have approval from the prime minister to issue statements, or must inform the press that their views do not represent the government's. (ITAR-TASS, 1247 GMT, 16 Feb 99; FBIS-SOV-1999-0216) Primakov's chief of staff, Yuri Zubakov, who is credited with drafting this decision, cites the current "unsystematic and abrupt character" of the transmittal of information from the government to the media as his impetus.

Russian Federation: Foreign Relations
By John McDonough and Sarah Miller

Bad timing? Talbott in Moscow as 'recess' called at Rambouillet
A US delegation headed by Deputy Secretary of State Strobe Talbott traveled to Moscow on 23 February to participate in a strategic planning group co-chaired by Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Georgi Mamedov and Talbott. According to news sources, Prime Minister Yevgeni Primakov also participated in the planning group discussions in addition to holding a closed door session with Talbott. (Jamestown Foundation Monitor, 25 Feb 99) Although details of the closed door discussions were sketchy, the situation in Kosovo, the Anti-Ballistic Missile treaty and Iraq were among the items that the two discussed. (Interfax, 1120 GMT, 23 Feb 99; FBIS-SOV-1999-02)

Whether any real progress was made concerning any of these issues remains to be seen. Unfortunately for the US, the recess at Rambouillet occurred on the same day as the closed-door session, most likely serving to strengthen Russia's
position on any number of the issues on the agenda. With the score card at Rambouillet reading Serbia 1, Russia 1, Kosovo 1 (maybe), and the US 0, the Russian prime minister had a solid diplomatic victory in his corner going into the session with Talbott. Unless Talbott was a little more forceful than Secretary of State Madeleine Albright on the United States' desire to move forward with a revived ABM program (see Editorial Digest, 15 February 99), the US delegation may have ended up with something less than "friendly and constructive" talks in Moscow.

**Russia and Iran, a growing commitment**

Russia and Iran continue to reinforce their growing relationship while simultaneously assuring the world that this budding commitment is based on mutual cooperation and understanding between two peace-loving nations. The latest round of Russian-Iranian mutual assurances occurred in the form of an Iranian-Russian conference in Tehran that focused primarily on trade and economic issues. This meant that the usual statements assuring the world of the peaceful nature of the Iranian-Russian alliance were absent from the latest official press releases out of Moscow and Tehran.

During the economic and trade conference in Tehran, the head of the Asia Department in the Russian foreign ministry, Alexander Alexeev, pointed to the high level of trade turnover between the two countries. Other conference participants stated that trade and economic cooperation were key elements in political relations between the two countries. (ITAR-TASS World Service, 1708 GMT, 17 Feb 99; FBIS-SOV-1999-0218)

These inter-ministerial contacts and the press releases that accompany them have become a visible theme in Russian-Iranian relations over the past several months. Although many of the contacts appear to have substance, some may be designed in part to deflect or downplay the repeated accusations of cooperation
between the two countries concerning the alleged Iranian weapons of mass destruction (WMD) program.

In a related story, Iran's ambassador to Moscow, Mahdi Safari, told Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Viktor Posuvalyuk in Moscow early in February that, as the chairman of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC), Iran welcomes cooperation with Russia to solve the ongoing crisis in Iraq. (Iran News, 4 Feb 99, p. 2; FBIS-SOV-1999-0212) The fact that Iran is welcoming any movement that might alleviate the international pressure directed against Iraq, even if it is partially designed to denigrate US influence in the area, may be an ominous sign of things to come. Any warming in relations between Tehran and Baghdad, although unlikely in the near future, would most assuredly be sponsored by Moscow with Russia reaping untold rewards for its efforts.

**Moscow snubs US again, continues to support old Soviet allies**

Syria, a longtime friend of the Soviet Union and now one of the Russian Federation's most trusted Mideast allies, continues to strengthen its relationship with Moscow. The Syrian foreign minister recently concluded an official visit to Moscow in which a broad range of issues was discussed, including the strong military ties between the two countries. According to ITAR-TASS, military sources indicated that the question of the Russian-Syrian military-technical cooperation was raised at negotiations with Syrian Foreign Minister Faruq al-Shar'. On the agenda was the implementation of military agreements which include the supply of over $2 billion worth of Russian armaments. These agreements were apparently finalized in November when Russian Defense Minister Igor Sergeev visited Syria. (ITAR-TASS, 1740 GMT, 16 Feb 99; FBIS-SOV-1999-02)

Apparently absent from the "constructive and friendly" talks were discussions concerning the payment plan for the latest round of Russian weapons deliveries to Syria. Although Moscow must have worked out an equitable payment
arrangement for the Russian defense industries, considering the billions in dollars that Russia owes to western creditors, no mention was made concerning the monetary specifics of the agreement. Perhaps the IMF was informed of the Syrian payment schedule for the latest deliveries as well as the payment schedule for the billions of dollars in defense-related debts that Syria owes Moscow from decades of previous unpaid arms deliveries.

They're my islands, mine, mine, mine!
Despite attempts to paint a pretty picture of cooperation, the results of Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov's four-day trip to Tokyo looked more like finger paints than Picasso. The meeting yielded no change in either country's policy. Japan is unwilling to negotiate a peace treaty before the territorial issue is resolved; Russia is unwilling -- according to Prime Minister Primakov -- to give up Russian sovereignty over the islands. (Interfax, 1056 GMT, 22 Feb 99; FBIS-SOV-99-0222) Meanwhile, the millennium clock is ticking away and the two sides seem no closer to a treaty than they were a year ago.

Reality aside, diplomatic niceties continue. In a letter hand-delivered by Ivanov to Prime Minister Obuchi, Yel'tsin said he was "highly satisfied" with the progress made in Russo-Japanese relations. (RFE-RL Newsline, 23 Feb 99) Neither side has given up on "talking it out" yet either. Over the next two months, First Deputy Prime Minister Yuri Maslyukov, Ivanov and Japanese Foreign Minister Masahiko Komura will complete trips to Japan and Russia, respectively. Also, Yel'tsin's attendance at King Hussein's funeral prompted Prime Minister Obuchi to invite Yel'tsin to Japan. Despite Yel'tsin's poor health, Primakov has expressed uncharacteristic optimism. He seems confident that Yel'tsin will be able to accept Obuchi's invitation to visit Japan, and maintains the hope that Obuchi might respond to the standing Russian proposal during such a visit. (Reuters, 22 Feb 99; Russia Today)
In light of the 1997 US-Japanese Defense Pact, Russia certainly has a stake in cooperation with Japan. The pact commits Japan to assist the US in regional emergencies. The former commitment has caused the most worry for Russia. Moscow has said that it expects the pact to remain defensive and transparent, apparently fearful of the regional repercussions of US involvement. (Jamestown Foundation Monitor, 12 Feb 99) Conversely, Japan has equally compelling reasons for cooperation, not the least of which is domestic opinion. (See Editorial Digest, 15 February 99)

**Russian Federation: Domestic Issues and Legislative Branch**

**Duma moves to charge fees for leaving Russia**

The State Duma has passed a bill proposing a fee for persons and conveyances exiting Russia. Denominated in terms of the national minimum wage, it is proposed that individuals be assessed an amount equal to 80 percent of the minimum wage, cars an amount equal to one minimum wage, and trucks and buses an amount equal to two minimum wages. The fees would not be paid at the border; rather, the bill requires that the assessed amount be paid to a bank not earlier than three months before the person, car, or truck is scheduled to leave the country. Proof of payment is to be presented to the authorities at the border. (Interfax, 1353 GMT, 10 Feb 99; FBIS-SOV-1999-0210)

Being unable to collect taxes efficiently at home, the Duma is prepared to place the burden on the movement of goods and persons out of the federation. This is a venerable source of governmental income dating from the earliest of human settlements. But it has two very serious problems. The first is psychological. Although not part of the original idea of what constitutes a free society, the "iron
“curtain” concept of the Cold War has meant that the freedom of individual movement is a basic human right and an indicator of a free society. This legislation, while not preventing movement, impedes it. Second, the legislation will not work and will most likely end up costing the government in the end. Exit fees would be an irresistible source of corruption at the border and would require yet another army of bureaucrats to administer the project. Banks and border control agents would have to be monitored, and in a time when the state is becoming increasingly reliant on administrative and financial assistance from the regions, the regions themselves would have to be monitored, and in effect, asked to take on this additional burden. If Moscow has not yet learned that the regions are loath to surrender federal tax receipts to the federal treasury, this would be yet another reminder.

Also, by legitimizing the practice of charging for the right to leave the federation, border control agents could simply refuse to recognize the validity of proof of payment, as the legislation envisions, and demand cash on the spot, or they could impose their own fee. Even better, a border control agent may demand payment in foreign currency, which he would then pocket. Of course speculation is to some degree an idle exercise, but this legislation is bad in all senses.

REGIONS
Lebed plans dissolution of Krasnoyarsk Krai
It is now clear, even to Aleksandr Lebed himself, that his national political fortunes are waning. So, in order to reinvigorate his potential candidacy for the Russian presidency, the Krasnoyarsk Krai governor and former aide to President Yel’tsin has suggested merging the krai with neighboring Khakassia, thereby creating a new Krasnoyarsk Republic. The suggestion is made more interesting by the fact that Lebed's brother Aleksei is the governor of Khakassia.

Lebed's suggestion will most likely go nowhere, but his purpose is not really to merge the two entities of the federation, it is to distract attention away from his
present difficulties in the krai. Lebed's autocratic tendencies have, again, become visible and he has engendered a considerable amount of criticism within the krai. For instance, he has picked a fight with his former ally, Krasnoyarsk Aluminum Plant Director Anatoli Bykov, and is now feuding with virtually the entire business and political elite in the krai. Lebed also recently dismissed three of his deputies at the same time: Vasili Kuzubov, Vladimir Ishchenko, and Sergei Mutovin, which means that there are hardly any locals left in Lebed's team (most are from Moscow and Novosibirsk), and his administration is increasingly being viewed as an occupation force sent from the hated center.

To add to Lebed's future troubles, the Krasnoyarsk parliament is much stronger than those in most regions, and with a two-thirds vote, Lebed could be removed from office. Lebed needed a big issue around which the citizens could rally -- and behind which evidence of his incompetence as governor could be concealed. This is where the suggestion for a Krasnoyarsk Republic originated. If Lebed cannot retain support through excellence in office, he will appeal to Krasnoyarsk "nationalism" by promising a "greater" Krasnoyarsk.

But Governor Lebed has other tricks up his sleeve. He retains the support of Boris Berezovsky, and through him, potentially the Kremlin. Hope springs eternal, but Lebed and Berezovsky may be hoping that Yel'tsin will summon Lebed unto him and anoint him tsarevich in order to annoy Luzhkov and Primakov. But until such time, Lebed, and Berezovsky's wallet, will run a campaign to re-unite Krasnoyarsk and Khakassia, for under the Soviet Union, Khakassia was an autonomous oblast within Krasnoyarsk Krai. A referendum on the issue is scheduled for May. If he wins, Lebed will try to dissolve the hostile Krasnoyarsk legislature and prepare elections for the new republic. The only question is where to put the capital. (Moskovsky komsomolets, 16 Feb 99, pp. 1, 2; FBIS-SOV-1999-0218)

**Regional branches of a federal investment bank discussed**
Finally recognizing that the centralized administration of Russian banking has been a problem, the chairman of the Federation Council, Yegor Stroev, has proposed the construction of regional branches of a federal investment bank which would provide liquidity for Russia’s regions. The kernel of such a system is already visible: AK BARS in Tatarstan, Bashkreditbank in Ufa, and the Bank of Moscow.

Stroev suggests that the proposed state regional banking system could be created on the basis of the eight existing inter-regional associations. At the 28 November meeting of the Chernozemye association, the participants, including Prime Minister Yevgeni Primakov, recognized the expediency of developing a system of regional investment banks. (Rossiyskaya gazeta (Electronic Version), 16 Feb 99; FBIS-SOV-1999-0216)

While providing liquidity is good and necessary, this particular proposal has two major problems. The first concerns the availability of funds. Just where are these banks to obtain the structural funds needed to provide enough liquidity to make a difference? Second, a federal system of investment banks would either sit side-by-side private banks, competing with them, or the federal system would co-opt them. Competition may cause the failure of some marginal banks, which is not necessarily a bad thing, but it may also limit the privatization of the banking system by "crowding out" the entry into the market of new, and potentially more efficient private banks. Co-optation, on the other hand, would most likely descend into cronyism with federal funds being placed in the banks of political friends. Again, the private banks would be guaranteed they would not fail, and thus, have little incentive to become efficient. In effect, a public system of private banks would be created and would have the worst of both worlds: a lack of efficiency of scale which a single state banking system would potentially have, and the profit taking, and corporate tax protection, of private banks. The hybrid system would be horribly inefficient.
Russian Federation: Armed Forces
By Lt. Col. Michael Reardon and LCDR Fred Drummond

S-300s to Crete, it's official ... well almost, kinda, maybe, sorta ...

The long-awaited deal to have Russian-made S-300 anti-aircraft missiles delivered to the Cypriots is at last reaching fruition. Cyprus Broadcasting Corporation (CyBC) Radio reported that Cypriot Defense Minister Ioannis Khrisostomis and representatives from Russia's premier arms exporter, Rosvooruzhenie, finally signed an agreement on 17 February. (CyBC Radio Nicosia, 0530 GMT, 18 Feb 99; nexis) Russian sources say these missiles may be delivered to the Cypriots as early as this month. (ITAR-TASS, 2326 GMT, 16 Feb 99; FBIS-SOV-1999-02)

Simple arms sale, right? No big deal, right? You may think so, but this one has been a real soap opera right from its very controversial start. The $500 million plus deal was originally signed back in January 1997. It provided for an 18-month delivery period, with a battery of 12 launchers and 48 missiles being delivered by Russia to be deployed in Cyprus. From the start, NATO countries frowned upon the deal, with the most obviously vocal opponent being Turkey. Of course, this was understandable since the military intention of deploying S-300s in Cyprus would be to hold off attacking Turkish aircraft. However, politically, Cyprus may have never intended to actually deploy the missiles, but rather may have planned to use them as a bartering chip to end or minimize a long-standing problem of Turks occupying the northern third of the island. At various times over the 18-month delivery period, Turkey vowed adverse repercussions if the missiles were delivered. During this time, officials in Russia stood fast, stating they would deliver the missiles when Cyprus was ready for them. The 18 months officially ended in July 1998.
Around that time, Cypriot officials came to the realization that tourists visit the island in the summer and so they asked that delivery be postponed. (At least that's their story and they're sticking to it!) Russia didn't disagree to the postponement but remained firm that it would fulfill the terms of the contract. And why not? This deal has great significance for Russia. Aside from the half-billion-dollar price tag, this deal would mean Russian arms had finally made it to the Mediterranean, the southern belly of NATO. But then it happened ... Glakos Kliridhis' knees apparently began to buckle under the pressure from the US and its NATO partners. While many around the world were awaiting the coming of the New Year, the president of the Republic of Cyprus was meeting with his counterpart in Athens. Then on 29 December 1998, he announced the S-300s that he had ordered would not be deployed on Cyprus, but rather on the island of Crete, 500 or so miles to the west. (Details on above history can be found in multiple previous Editorial Digests that have covered this fiasco since its inception.)

So here we are with a new, "official" agreement, almost 26 months after the original deal was signed; however, the details of the new agreement have yet to be released. A week before the deal became official, Moscow was providing three conditions which had to be included: The missiles had to be set up and operating on Crete, with Russian technicians on the ground, and with Cypriot military trainers on Crete to help the Russians train the Greeks. (I Simerini, 10 Feb 99, p. 1; FBIS-SOV-1999-02) Whether those conditions were met or some hybrid compromise reached is yet to be seen, but it appears appropriate that Russian and Cypriot representatives have signed on the dotted line (again) and the deal is "official." That means the arms transfer can now begin, right? Not so fast!

Remember, when this arrangement began, it was between two countries, the Republic of Cyprus and Russia. Now there is another major player -- Greece. Therefore, in addition to Cyprus and Russia agreeing on the details, Cyprus and
Greece must come to an understanding as well as Greece and Russia. From all accounts to date, Cyprus and Greece have settled on the major issues. Cyprus will pay for the missiles and launchers and will maintain ownership. Greece will have control over the operation. (ITAR-TASS, 16 Feb 99; nexis) Wow, what a deal for the Cypriots! They get to pay $500 million for a defense system that will be located 500 miles away from the territory it is suppose to defend. And as an added bonus, they don't even get to control its operation. It's similar to buying a home security alarm and then having it installed in your friend's house in the next county. Then when you are being burglarized, you have to pray that your friend will set off the alarm and send the police to your house.

The other pair that must come to agreement are Greece and Russia. One would think that should be easy, since Russia really wants to sell the missiles and Greece was a major influence in the Cypriot president's decision to change the location. Well, Cypriot Defense Minister Khrisostomis related early on that the Greek government accepted Moscow's condition that Russian technicians must maintain presence on the island of Crete. (I Simerini, 10 Feb 99, p. 1; FBIS-SOV-1999-02) Additionally, the Russian ambassador to Cyprus, Georgi Muratov, stated that "only minor details on technical aspects are pending discussion." (CyBC Television Network, 1830 GMT, 12 Feb 99; FBIS-SOV-1999-02) Furthermore, the Greek General Director of Arms Systems, Ioannis Sbokos, was present at the signing of the Russian-Cypriot agreement on 17 February, with no reported objections. (CyBC Radio Nicosia, 0530 GMT, 18 Feb 99; nexis) Then we're all systems go, right? Well, don't start the countdown yet! Two days after the agreement was signed, Grigoriy Rapota, general director of Rosvooruzhenie, told Interfax that Russia faces "quite intensive negotiations with Greece." He added that "in principle, the issue is solvable ... but work still remains to be done." (Interfax, 19 Feb 99; nexis) Let me put that in plain English -- the Y2K bug will be but a memory before S-300s ever reach the Mediterranean!"
I'll trade my VW for your Jaguar

Even if it takes a l-o-n-g time for S-300s to be delivered to Crete, it's pretty safe to say that there is virtually no chance they will end up on the island of Cyprus. So what will Cyprus do now to defend its sovereign territory? The S-300s deployed on Crete can provide only limited coverage. As one Russian military expert said, the location of the missiles on Crete puts them "out of harms way" for Turkey. (News, 16 Feb 99, p. 4; FBIS-SOV-1999-02) There are unconfirmed reports that Athens has offered Cyprus some of the TOR-M1s Greece has on order from Russia. Let me think ... pay $500 million for state-of-the-art missiles with a 1,500-km range and then take delivery of missiles with a range of less than 50 km. That sounds good, but the Cypriots think they can do better. While in Moscow, sources close to the Greek Cypriot delegation leaked an even better deal to the Russia media. They said, "the problem of the S-300s has been solved, TOR missiles ... will be bought instead." (Hurriyet (Ankara Edition), 16 Feb 99, p. 20; FBIS-SOV-1999-02) Ingenious -- pay $500 million for top-notch missiles and then pay again to obtain duds to defend your homeland. Now, that is the sale of the century! All is not lost though, as an added bonus; I hear both the Russians and Greeks are throwing in the Brooklyn Bridge as part of the deal.

Errant Russian nukes won't join Times Square celebration this year

The year 2000 (Y2K) bug has been receiving much concern worldwide as the end of 1999 approaches. One area that could have catastrophic consequences is control of nuclear weapons, or lack thereof. While most experts don't believe this Y2K bug would cause accidental launching of a nuclear bomb, associated computer glitches could produce a false indication that a nuclear attack had been launched by another country. This in turn could produce an accidental retaliation. Attempting to quell fear about how the bug may affect control over Russia's nuclear arsenal, Colonel General Vladimir Yakovlev, strategic missile troops commander, recently reported that "there is no ground for apprehension over Y2K, at least for now." (Voice of Russia, 1510 GMT, 19 Feb 99; nexis) I guess that's like the man who fell off the roof of a ten-story building saying as he passed
the second floor, "No problem yet!" Clearly in command of the obvious, Yakovlev later outlined his two-pronged, visionary plan to correct the problem. He told Interfax, "The first [phase] is the need to replace some of the hardware, and the second is the need to replace software." (Interfax, 25 Feb 99; nexis) Absolutely amazing, and so simple! You have a computer problem and all you have to do to fix it is replace the hardware and the software. I had problems starting my car this morning, maybe all I have to do to fix it is replace the engine and the chassis.

All kidding aside, though the probability of a nuclear holocaust shortly after midnight on 1 January 2000 may be small, the risk associated with such an outcome is unthinkable. Therefore, the US is leading a charge (including funding) to link US and Russian nuclear experts together in an ad hoc, joint early warning center. Though the location has not been definitely decided, the center is expected to be established in Colorado Springs, Colorado. The center will be stood up in early September 1999, because some fear the "seven nines problem" (0909:09 9/9/99) could also cause some computer malfunctions. The center operations would continue until February 2001, "because it is planned only for the critical period of time." (Interfax, 1328 GMT, 24 Feb 99; FBIS-SOV-1999-02) Hopefully, politics, rhetoric, and ideology will be cast aside during this crucial period of necessary cooperation for the common goal of averting disaster.

**A new year, a new missile system**

In February components for a new air defense missile system, the S-400 (a development of the S-300 system, known as the SA-10 in the West), were tested. Jane's Defence Weekly noted that a current S-300 missile was used to check out new "detection, guidance and control systems operating in a closed loop control." (Jane's Defence Weekly, 24 Feb 99) Correspondent Nikolai Novichov reported that the test was considered a complete success by the Fakel Design Bureau, which is responsible for the S-300 missile used in the test and is developing two new missiles specifically for the S-400. As we have noted before,
Novichov also reports for ITAR-TASS and Aviation Week and Space Technology. (Editorial Digest, 21 October 98)

Even though numerous media may report on the same item, Novichov, with his straightforward reporting style, can be counted on to provide more information or explanation than other sources. The JDW article is no exception: The reporter notes that the S-400 system is designed to counter stealth aircraft and also has had its anti-missile capabilities increased "to the limits defined by the 1972 US-USSR anti-ballistic missile treaty." This last point could be an interesting one to follow as the Clinton administration pursues its efforts to have that treaty modified to allow development and possibly deployment of an ABM system. The sophistication of the S-300 family, and now the developing S-400 system, along with the US Army’s Patriot PAC-3 system and the US Navy’s Aegis ship-borne system, begs the question of what may constitute an ABM system. These nominally tactical systems could easily be placed, fairly quickly, to defend vital areas.

Nezavisimoe voennoe obozrenie also reported on the testing. It did not use the S-400 designation but instead gave the name of the system as "Triumf." The article stressed the commonality of the new system with its predecessor, the S-300, noting that the 9M96Ye missile introduced last August is intended to be used in both systems. (See Editorial Digest, 21 October 98) The article closes with the announcement that foreign sales approval of the Triumf was granted by the Russian government. (Nezavisimoe voennoe obozrenie, 5-11 Feb 99; FBIS-SOV-1999-02) Unstated in either report, of course, are any comments on funding -- add this system to the Russian armed forces wish list.

The public release of the new system's successful first test could very well have another aspect altogether: Maybe it's a signal to potential S-300 buyers that the system will not be obsolete and, despite Russia's financial difficulties, weapons development and upgrading continues. That last point bears watching. The S-
300 family, which includes the SA-10 and SA-12, is a formidable weapons system, designed to counter virtually every type of air vehicle threat. Phased array radars with sophisticated processors are combined with several types of missiles of varying ranges. The resulting comprehensive air defense system can locate and shoot down small, hard to detect vehicles such as cruise missiles and stealth attack aircraft before they ever reach the target area, and do the same against large support aircraft such as AWACS that will be operating at the outermost envelope of airborne battlespace region. To put the capabilities of the S-300 and S-400 systems in perspective, older former Soviet surface-to-air missile systems such as what the US is flying against in Iraq have typical maximum engagement ranges of no more than 30 miles. The new systems push the effective ranges potentially out to 150-240 miles, based on Russian claims.

And I'd also like ...

It's never too early to be compiling your Christmas wish list for Santa: On the Russian armed forces list, in addition to the S-400, we might be looking to see a new ship, an old fleet, and a new army. ITAR-TASS reported on President Boris Yel'tsin congratulating the navy on its final tests of a new anti-submarine ship, the Admiral Chabanenko. Built in the Kaliningrad shipyards, the vessel is to join the Northern Fleet. (ITAR-TASS, 1524 GMT, 24 Feb 99; FBIS-SOV-1999-02) The ship is a destroyer, the lead and probably only unit of the Udaloy-II class. Numerous reports over the past few years have noted the cancellation of the second and third units; no one expects those to be revived. (From previous press reports, the chief modification between the Udaloy I and the Udaloy II is the substitution of a newer surface-to-surface missile system.) So, perhaps we'd better clarify our wish in regards to this ship: Let's ask for enough money to continue to man and operate this uniquely modified warship.

Good thing the Admiral Chabanenko is headed to the Northern Fleet; conditions in the Black Sea Fleet are not good at all. ITAR-TASS quoted Russian State Secretary and First Deputy Defense Minister Nikolai Mikhailov as bemoaning the
state of that fleet, so much so that he raises the warning of the force being "not combat-ready." (ITAR-TASS, 1515 GMT, 10 Feb 99; FBIS-SOV-1999-02)

Mikhailov cited the lack of signed agreements on the Black Sea Fleet between Russia and Ukraine as being part of the problem. Russian navy life in and of itself is hard enough; life in Sevastopol for Russian forces is all the more difficult. Add the maintenance of the Black Sea Fleet to the list.

Defense Minister Igor Sergeev, as befitting his job as head of the armed forces, wishes for a "new Russian army of the 21st century," according to Interfax. (Interfax, 1830 GMT, 15 Feb 99; FBIS-SOV-1999-02) Sergeev addressed an audience in the Kremlin marking the tenth anniversary of the Russian withdrawal from Afghanistan. Prime Minister Yevgeni Primakov shares a similar wish. Speaking in Moscow on Fatherland Defender's Day, Primakov stated his desire to make the armed forces "undefeatable." (ITAR-TASS, 1825 GMT, 22 Feb 99; FBIS-SOV-1999-02) Both leaders' messages included in effect the self-exhortation for the government to support the country's armed forces. Do we need to ask the next obvious question? No, let's just put these wishes on the list too.

Why ask why?

Why does the Russian leadership desire all of the above? One hint may be gleaned from another ITAR-TASS report on NATO exercises in Ukraine. An unnamed Russian general was quoted as being just a little concerned about NATO potentially training in western Ukraine. The general noted that the range could be used for "exercising in the conditions of the Balkans," and that it could "become a bridgehead for a massive tank assault" against "the East." (ITAR-TASS, 0902 GMT, 11 Feb 99; FBIS-SOV-1999-02)

The general's mindset was most likely reinforced by other recent actions. ITAR-TASS put out a short release noting NATO naval exercises taking place north of Norway. (ITAR-TASS, 1344 GMT, 11 Feb 99; FBIS-SOV-1999-02) Not to worry,
though: The Northern Fleet was monitoring NATO's activity, and the "necessary precautionary measures" were being taken. Northern Fleet headquarters is then quoted as saying: "Apart from that, the fleet's combat readiness is being maintained at its usual level." That statement ought to help Russian citizens sleep better at night.

At about the same time the NATO exercises were ongoing, US "combat planes" were training in airspace near the Komanadorskie islands in the Bering Sea. (ITAR-TASS, 0745 GMT, 12 Feb 99; FBIS-SOV-1999-02) This report was provided to ITAR-TASS by the Federal Border Guard Service, whose personnel closely monitored the US aircraft. The service noted that the "US pilots have already demonstrated their skills in group flights on February 7 when they never trespassed into Russia's air space." Whew. Just goes to show that you can never let your guard down.

We wonder if Armenia's neighbors are feeling secure at night now that Russian aircraft have started an "experimental" duty in flying "purely defensive weaponry" to help "ensure there are no uninvited guests" in that area. (ITAR-TASS, 0911 GMT, 18 Feb 99; FBIS-SOV-1999-02) Maybe that's why the American aircraft were flying over the Aleutians.

Perhaps knowing all of this background information may help Santa decide whether Russia has been naughty or nice, and which presents it may expect to receive. On a more serious note, the comments by Primakov and Sergeev are entirely understandable: What else can they do but look towards the future and the eventual rebuilding of Russia's collapsed armed forces, and at least try to sell the military and the public on the government's commitment to its forces. The challenges facing the Russian military are daunting: still outstanding back wages, dramatic troop reductions, the ongoing problem of dedovshchina -- the "grandfathering," in reality the often-times brutal treatment of young recruits by senior personnel. The other press releases demonstrate that the old Soviet
mindset still exists, and will for some time. Primarily for us, though, they provide entertaining reading during February's winter days.

**It came out of the sky**

Bet Broderick Crawford or Ponch and Jon never had this problem. Traffic cops in Bataisk in the Rostov region found a fully fueled Mi-8 helicopter in a building owned by a "local brick works." (NTV, 1300 GMT, 19 Feb 99; FBIS-SOV-1999-02) Naturally they towed it to the local car pound. Speculation on how the helicopter got there centered on two likely possibilities: The first is that it was stolen directly from the military; the second is that it was bought "by a rich man as a status symbol." Sure trumps the neighbor who has the Mercedes 500 SEL. The same NTV broadcast also reported on pieces of air-to-surface missiles found in a village that coincided with a flyover by a military aircraft. The missiles were described as "making hissing noises and coiling in the air" as they rained down upon the unsuspecting villagers. Officials later stated that a Sukhoi aircraft had encountered problems and that the "pilot merely dropped part of the missiles and the equipment" as he apparently dealt with his inflight emergency. It is standard procedure for a military aircraft in extremis to jettison its loadout if that is required to help keep the aircraft in the air. Ideally such a drastic action is not undertaken near populated areas; at least in this instance no one was injured.

**Newly Independent States: CIS**

By Sarah Miller

**Join now, and you could receive your very own S-300 air defense system!**

Russia has offered CIS Collective Security Treaty members a new incentive to extend the treaty: S-300 missile systems. According to the Russian Air Force, the air defense system will be made available to signatories, upon request. (Agence France-Presse, 23 Feb 99; Russia Today) The Russian government also has announced that Armenia will become the newest member of the "CIS Antiaircraft
Missile Defense Network," a three-nation network (Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan) of S-300-equipped states. (Interfax, 1039 GMT, 18 Feb 99; FBIS-SOV-99-0218) Armenian membership in the Collective Security Treaty allows Russia to install openly the S-300s as well as to sell MiG-29s and other hardware to Armenia. Russian concern about Turkish designs on the southern CIS borders and NATO maneuvers in Iraq reportedly prompted the decision. (Snark, 0900 GMT, 18 Feb 99; FBIS-SOV-99-0218) However, when coupled with the S-300 offer to other member nations, it seems that Russia is simply attempting to consolidate support for the Russian-dominated treaty while simultaneously ensuring its presence in CIS border states.

These events are part of the larger collective security issue that has beleaguered CIS relations since January. The treaty, signed in 1992-93, comes up for renewal in May, but the membership is falling. The main complaints have come from Azerbaijan and Uzbekistan, which have withdrawn completely from the treaty. (See Editorial Digest, 15 February 99) Russian military involvement in Armenia is most upsetting to Azerbaijan, which cited Russian arms transfers to Armenia as one of its main reasons for withdrawal. Although several current members have indicated their support of a collective security arrangement, they have expressed disapproval of the treaty's redundancy and inefficiency. Once again, it seems that practice has not met theory's demands.

Newly Independent States: Western Region

By Tammy Lynch

UKRAINE

Sailors: 1, Tatars: 0

The sailors of the Russian Black Sea Fleet can breathe a preliminary sigh of relief now that the Russian Federation Council has moved the "Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation and Partnership between the Russian Federation and
Ukraine" one step closer to ratification. (ITAR-TASS World Service, 0915 GMT, 17 Feb 99; BBC Summary of World Broadcasts/nexis) The sailors had been suffering through long stretches of time with no running water or electricity, as the fleet became a Ukrainian "chip" in the debate over the treaty ratification. (For background, see Editorial Digest, 15 February 99)

As the day of the ratification vote arrived, most of the nationalist rhetoric ignited by Moscow Mayor Yuri Luzhkov had died down, and the debate had seemingly been reduced to two positions: "No ratification of our territorial integrity, no ratification of your Fleet agreements," said Ukraine. "No ratification of our Fleet agreements, no ratification of your territorial integrity," responded Russia.

The Federation Council found a tidy compromise, however, by, in effect, post-dating the Friendship Treaty's ratification. When Ukraine endorses all three Black Sea Fleet agreements, the treaty recognizing Ukrainian territorial integrity will take effect. This "compromise" was suggested by Russian Prime Minister Yevgeni Primakov. "The ratification of the treaty with Ukraine is important," he said, "in order to remove obstacles between us." (ITAR-TASS, 17 Feb 99; nexis)

Thanks to this compromise, the Black Sea Fleet's sailors have, at least for the time being, been rescued from frequent water and power losses. It should be noted, however, that Russia has made no statements about when it plans to pay the over 15 million rubles it now owes for electricity supplied to the fleet.

While the fortunes of the sailors have been enhanced, it appears that the Crimean Tatars may be the biggest losers in the ratification game. Their chips appear to have been sold right out from under them. Now that the Friendship Treaty has been ratified, it is highly unlikely that the Ukrainian parliament will review the new constitution of the Crimean region. That constitution was rushed - - some would say rammed -- through the parliament shortly after Speaker
Oleksandr Tkachenko returned from Moscow, where he had been campaigning for the Friendship Treaty's ratification.

Somewhere in the rush to ratify the constitution, the right to learn and transact business in the Crimean Tatar Language, and a guarantee of representation in the Crimean Parliament for Tatars, were dropped from the document. Those two rights had been granted to Tatars in the previous constitution, in effect since 1996. (For further background, see ITAR-TASS, 1820 GMT, 4 Jan 99; FBIS-SOV-99-004)

Almost immediately after the Crimean constitution's ratification, Ukrainian deputies began talking about revising it, with more protection for the Tatars. Now, it seems that this scenario is unlikely. Apparently the Crimean constitution was one of the chips played by Russia -- with Tkachenko's help.

I want to be in A-mer-i-ka
The ultra-leftist Ukrainian nationalist Pavlo Lazarenko has suddenly discovered that he loves the USA.

On 17 February, the Ukrainian Parliament finally stripped the former prime minister of his parliamentary immunity, and Lazarenko began "yearning to be free." The head of Hromada has been a target of several probes for a variety of offenses, including money laundering and embezzling. He was arrested on 2 December 1998 in Switzerland for using a false passport, and is under investigation there for having improper Swiss bank accounts. He was freed on bail of $2.8 million. (Deutsche Presse-Agentur, 1326 GMT, 20 Feb 99; nexis) Until this month, however, parliament had steadfastly refused to lift his immunity. (See Editorial Digest, 7 December 98)

Shockingly, after his immunity was lifted and an arrest warrant was issued, Lazarenko couldn't be located. He had left the country to "consult his lawyers" in
Greece, said his friends in Hromada, but had become "very ill" and would not be returning. (ITAR-TASS, 19 Feb 99; nexis)

Lazarenko apparently recovered quickly. Just days later, on 21 February, he was arrested by immigration officials at JFK Airport in New York, where he tried to enter the country without a visa. (Agence France-Presse, 1823 GMT, 21 Feb 99; nexis) He didn't complain of any maladies. Lazarenko has now asked for political asylum, which could take several years to investigate. After that, who knows? There's always Nairobi.

**That's one way to get attention**

On 10 February, miners throughout the Donetsk Region began striking over $657 million in wage arrears owed them. (Agence France-Presse, 2317 GMT, 19 Feb 99; nexis) After President Leonid Kuchma announced that a new cabinet council would be formed to deal with the arrears, the miners trade union suspended the action. At the time, however, a union official noted that the miners were running out of patience. (ITAR-TASS World Service, 1947 GMT, 16 Feb 99; BBC Summary of World Broadcasts/nexis)

He was right. On 18 February, apparently not satisfied with the government's action, six miners "cut their veins" in a suicide attempt, while 20 other miners locked themselves in a pit and threatened to do the same. The suicide attempts were unsuccessful. (UNIAN, 1800 GMT, 17 Feb 99; BBC Summary of World Broadcasts/nexis, and Agence France-Presse, 2317 GMT, 19 Feb 99; nexis) In a frightening precedent, the attempts resulted in an agreement being reached between that particular mine and its management. (Deutsche Presse-Agentur, 2016 GMT, 19 Feb 99; nexis) Although the trade union has said the strike is suspended, many miners throughout Donetsk remain idle, presumably acting on their own accord.

**BELARUS**
Countdown to High Noon

It took over a month to do it, but Aleksandr Lukashenka finally cracked down on the "shadow parliament" this week, as 16 of his most vocal opponents were arrested. The opposition, which early in 1998 had become anemic under Lukashenka's dictatorial policies, was reinvigorated by the signing of the Russia-Belarus Union declaration on 25 December. Since that time, the most prominent opposition leaders have been increasing their protests and have begun making public statements calling for Lukashenka's removal. (See Editorial Digest, 15 February 99)

In fact, on 28 January, Samon Sharetski, chairman of the disbanded 1996 parliament, told a crowd of protesters, "Favorable conditions have now developed in Belarus for overthrowing Aleksandr Lukashenka's anti-people dictatorial regime, and this chance should not be missed." (Belapan, 1605 GMT, 29 Jan 99; FBIS-SOV-99-030)

Sharetski and the rest of the disbanded parliament (the 13th Supreme Soviet) created a "Central Commission for Presidential Elections" earlier this year, and announced that, according to the constitution of 1994, the next presidential elections in Belarus would be held on 16 May 1999. Lukashenka does not subscribe to the 1994 constitution, and at that time, his prosecutor general said that the scheduling of elections is "an attempt to seize power by unconstitutional means, destabilize the society, and provoke widespread unrest." (Interfax, 1356 GMT, 12 Jan 99; FBIS-SOV-99-012)

At the end of February, as the Election Commission began setting up procedures to register presidential candidates, government statements against the opposition became more hardened. On 22 February, the KGB issued a "warning" to Sarhey Abadowski, who is a member of the commission and also a legal advisor to the Free Trade Union. The KGB charged Abadowski with activities that "destabilize the sociopolitical situation," and "conspiracy with a view to seizing state power."
(Belapan, 1810 GMT, 22 Feb 99; BBC Summary of World Broadcasts/nexis) Also around that time, the OSCE arrived in Belarus to attend a meeting of the Election Commission, while the KGB began warning of a "coup attempt." (Interfax, 20 Feb 99; nexis)

After a month of not reporting on the opposition's activities, Belarusian TV also began denouncing the Election Commission. The opposition was planning "the use of arms," the television "news" said, and the leaders of the opposition have been "allocated a salary. They have a good range." (Belarusian TV, 1800 GMT, 21 Feb 99; BBC Summary of World Broadcasts/nexis)

Finally, on 25 February, 16 opposition members were arrested during a meeting in a cafe, where they were being observed by reporters. Three members of the commission were sentenced to five days in prison, three were issued warnings, and 10 were given varying fines. Among the arrested was Viktor Honchar, the former deputy prime minister. Honchar was released, but quickly re-arrested on his way to certify the registration of two candidates in the presidential election.

The commission proceeded without Honchar, however, and announced that two candidates -- former Prime Minister Mikhail Chigir and Zenon Poznyak, leader of the Popular Front -- would run for president. (Deutsche Presse-Agentur, 1950 GMT, 1 Mar 99; nexis)

The ball is in Lukashenka's court now, and the clock is about to strike High Noon.

**Us against the world**

Alarmed by Western statements about Kosovo, Aleksandr Lukashenka has decided that he simply must act. He has called for an alliance against the West. The alliance is needed "not to bring on a head-to-head confrontation with NATO, but to save civilization, to save the planet," he modestly pointed out. It would be, he said, "a powerful military, political, and economic center to balance out the
current situation, and which will be taken seriously by NATO and the United States." So, he has invited Russia, Iran, India and China to join him in creating the new world order. They have so far not responded. But, have no fear, "We will get there sooner or later," Lukashenka said. "Otherwise we may face disaster." (Interfax, 23 Feb 99; nexis, and Associated Press, AM cycle, 22 Feb 99; nexis)

Undoubtedly, Lukashenka would also welcome Serbia into this alliance, given the support that he and his fellow members of the Russia-Belarus Union have given the country. The Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (Serbia) has been granted observer status in the Russia-Belarus Union Parliament, and several representatives of that parliament recently went to Belgrade to express their support for the Serbs. Yuri Kuznetskov, representing Vladimir Zhirinovsky's Liberal Democratic Party of Russia, told the Serbian media that a NATO attack on Serbia would "meet with a Russian response," and that "numerous Russian patriots would come to Serbia as volunteers." (Beta, 1242 GMT, 18 Feb 99; BBC Summary of World Broadcasts/nexis) It should be noted that no official representatives of either Russia or Belarus were sent to Belgrade.

The path of death
While Lukashenka has been very vocal about his proposed alliance, he has remained curiously silent about the trial of Anthony (Andrei) Sawoniuk. In fact, the Belarusian media have also remained silent about Sawoniuk, a 77-year-old Belarusian being tried in Britain for crimes committed against Belarusian Jews in 1942. Sawoniuk is now a British citizen.

On 15 February, for the first time in history, a British jury went abroad -- to Belarus -- to view the area where it is alleged that Sawoniuk helped to gun down almost 3,000 Jews. Sawoniuk is being tried, however, only for four deaths -- those whom he chased as they tried to flee the mass killing. In Belarus, the jurors heard from Fedor Zan, who said he watched as 3,000 people were gathered and killed in Domachevo, and then as Sawoniuk chased four fleeing people and killed
them, too. The trail along which people marched to their deaths is now known as the "path of death."

**MOLDOVA**

**Riding on the merry-go-round**

The search for a new Moldovan prime minister continues this week, after the first PM-designate, Serafim Urecheanu, was forced to withdraw. (Interfax, 1705 GMT, 17 Feb 99; BBC Summary of World Broadcasts/nexis) Urecheanu was simply unable to form a new government pleasing to the three leading non-communist parties that have formed a ruling coalition. Those parties -- Revival and Accord, Democratic and Thriving Moldova, and Party of Democratic Forces -- apparently held enough of their coalition together to force Urecheanu to resign. If just one of the parties from that coalition had joined with the Communists in support of Urecheanu, as it appeared might happen, the Communists would have become the ruling majority in the parliament. (For background on Moldova's political parties, see Editorial Digest, 15 February 99) The search for a new prime minister began on 3 February, when Ion Ciubic resigned, saying he was unable to overcome the economic crisis enveloping the country.

On 19 February, after Urecheanu withdrew, President Petru Lucinschi proposed Ciubic's former vice prime minister, Ion Sturza, as the new PM. It appears Sturza is more likely to be able to build a ruling coalition, and has announced that he is making good progress in putting together the new cabinet. (Deutsche Presse-Agentur, 1136 GMT, 19 Feb 99; nexis)

The choice of Sturza will likely get high marks from Western financial institutions, since he served as the minister of economy and finance under Ciubic. The IMF's representative for Moldova recently said that Ciubic's government "demonstrated the ability to effect reforms and enjoyed the backing of Western creditors." (ITAR-TASS, 12 Feb 99; nexis)
Newly Independent States: Caucasus

By Miriam Lanskoy

GEORGIA

What sort of return for refugees from Abkhazia?

Following the October 1998 meeting in Athens between Abkhaz and Georgian representatives, it seemed that the sides were very close to reaching agreement on the terms of the refugees' return to Abkhazia. It was anticipated that a document addressing the refugee issue, non-use of force, and economic rehabilitation for Abkhazia would be signed by the two presidents, Eduard Shevardnadze and Vladislav Ardzinba. That did not come to pass after the Abkhaz side abruptly withdrew from the negotiations citing a misunderstanding of the terms of the document.

Subsequently, Ardzinba refused to continue meeting with the Georgian side but offered to repatriate the refugees unilaterally. Not surprisingly, the Georgian authorities characterized this approach as "mere rhetoric." (United Nations, Report of the Secretary General Concerning the Situation in Abkhazia, Georgia, 20 January 1999, S/1999/60) However, on 20 January the Abkhaz government formed a commission to oversee the repatriation which was scheduled to begin on 1 March. (IRA news agency, 1408 GMT, 20 Jan 99; BBC Summary of World Broadcasts, 23 Jan 99/nexis)

The Georgian refusal to endorse a repatriation in the absence of an agreement stems from several important considerations. First, there are no security guarantees for those who are returning. This has led to problems in the past, as when tens of thousands of those who returned to Abkhazia informally were evicted from the Gali region in May 1997. Second, in the absence of specific Abkhaz promises, there is no reason to suppose that the refugees will be able to reclaim their homes and other property, which by now is no doubt occupied by
others. Finally, there is the fear that the returnees may have to take on Abkhaz citizenship and renounce their rights as Georgians. So far the Abkhaz side has failed to convince the Georgian side or the United Nations that they are able to resolve these difficulties -- or that they are even trying to do so in good faith.

In its resolution of 28 January the UN Security Council decided to extend for another six months the mandate of the United Nations Observer Mission in Georgia (UNOMIG), which has been monitoring the cease-fire and facilitating negotiations since the spring of 1994. Taking note of the collapse in the negotiations, the Security Council urged the parties to resume the bilateral talks and expressed its concern for the refugees and displaced persons, stating:

"The Security Council reaffirms the unacceptability of the demographic changes resulting from the conflict and the imprescriptible right of all refugees and displaced persons affected by the conflict to return to their homes in secure conditions in accordance with international law ... and calls upon the parties to address this issue urgently by agreeing and implementing effective measures to guarantee the security of those who exercise their unconditional right to return..." (S/RES/1225 (1999))

On 1 March some refugees protested the planned repatriation, seeking to prohibit traffic between the two sides by blocking the bridge over the Inguri river, which separates Abkhazia and Georgia proper. On 4 March they blocked the passage of the Georgian delegation to the regular quadripartite meeting of Russian, UN, Georgian and Abkhaz representatives. The protesters explained the forced Georgian boycott by saying that they had lost all confidence in the negotiation process. (Kavkasia-Press news agency, 1630 GMT, 4 Mar 99; BBC Summary of World Broadcasts, 6 Mar 99/nexis) Still, according to Abkhaz sources, 1,200 persons have already returned to the Gali District. The chairman of the Abkhaz commission, Otar Kakalia, told Kavkasia-Press that 200 refugees had returned via the bridge over the Inguri river, while the rest had forded the
river in another location. (Kavkasia-Press news agency, 1630 GMT, 4 Mar 99; The British Broadcasting Corporation, 6 Mar 99/nexis) Georgian sources only counted three persons successfully crossing the bridge. (Kavkasia-Press news agency, 1545 GMT, 1 Mar 99; BBC Summary of World Broadcasts, 3 Mar 99/nexis) Of course the negotiation process and the creation of a document outlining a safe and orderly repatriation process were meant to avoid precisely the kind of tumult that has now been unleashed.

Newly Independent States: Central Asia

By Monika Shepherd

TAJIKISTAN

Former UTO commander killed in escape attempt

Ravshan Ghofurov, a former opposition commander turned renegade, was killed in police custody on 10 February, as he attempted to escape. Ghofurov and other members of his criminal gang were arrested at the end of January, on charges of committing a number of contract murders, kidnappings, and robberies on the outskirts of Dushanbe. Shortly after being taken into custody, Ghofurov confessed to the shooting of Otakhon Latifi, one of the United Tajik Opposition's (UTO's) more prominent representatives on the National Reconciliation Commission (NRC) in September 1998. (TASS, 11 Feb 99; nexis)

As part of their investigation into one of Ghofurov's offenses, police transported him to the scene of the crime in Kofarnihon District (approximately 20 km outside the capital), in order to aid in their reconstruction of events. (Agence France-Presse, 0534 GMT, 11 Feb 99; nexis) A senior official in Tajikistan's interior ministry alleged that police first fired warning shots as Ghofurov began to break away, but when he ignored them, he was shot and killed. (TASS, 11 Feb 99; nexis)
Ravshan Ghofurov's death deprives the Tajik government of one of its major witnesses in the criminal charges being brought against the members of at least two prominent gangs that had been operating on the outskirts of Dushanbe. However, the details which have so far been provided about his death also raise a few questions about the circumstances which led to his shooting. Ghofurov should have been unarmed when the police drove with him to Kofarnihon District. If this was the case, it seems slightly odd that the police chose to kill him rather than disable him, considering what an important witness he was. It would not be at all surprising if Ghofurov had information about more than just the crimes of renegade UTO commanders. He may have also possessed knowledge which could embarrass and/or indict officials within the government or the UTO.

**Col. Khudoiberdiev rumored to be planning new invasions**

Hakim Hamidov, commander of the Khujand subunit of Tajikistan's border troops, told a private Tajik news agency on 17 February that, according to information he had recently received, Col. Mahmud Khudoiberdiev is planning another series of invasions into Tajikistan. Commander Hamidov reported that the renegade colonel is preparing to launch a number of attacks into Leninobod Province (Oblast') from training camps in Uzbekistan. The Tajik border troops were preparing to resist Col. Khudoiberdiev's forces and had begun calling up reserve units. The border troop commander did not mention a time frame for the planned offensives. (Voice of the Islamic Republic of Iran, 0230 GMT, 18 Feb 99; FBIS-SOV-1999-02)

Whether or not Commander Hamidov's information was accurate, it would be foolhardy for Col. Khudoiberdiev to invade Leninobod Province at any time in the near future, since this area of Tajikistan has undoubtedly been under the close scrutiny of the national security forces since the colonel's November incursion. On the other hand, it would not be at all unlikely for Col. Khudoiberdiev to stage another offensive into Tajikistan before next winter, with or without the direct aid of the Uzbek military. Recent Tajik government arrests and reprisals in
Leninobod have not succeeded in suppressing opposition to Dushanbe's policies. On the contrary, they have simply exacerbated resentment toward the central government and resulted in a wave of assassinations of provincial administrative officials. The real threat to President Rahmonov's regime in Leninobod is just as likely to come from inside the province, sparked by the population's rising anger and discontent at the way in which Leninobod's interests have been virtually ignored by the central government. The harsh measures currently being used to penalize Leninobod's population for Col. Khudoiberdiev's last incursion may only succeed in radicalizing large segments of society.

UZBEKISTAN

Uzbek government threatening to leave CIS Collective Security Treaty
On 3 February various officials in the Uzbek government announced that Uzbekistan was not planning to renew its membership in the CIS Collective Security Treaty, which was signed in Tashkent on 15 May 1992 by the presidents of all the former Soviet republics except for the Baltic republics, Turkmenistan, Moldova, and Ukraine. (Interfax, 1542 GMT, 19 May 97; FBIS-SOV-97-139) The treaty commits its signatories to defend each other in the event of an attack from an outside aggressor and will expire in April of this year. Bakhodyr Umarov, a spokesman for the Uzbek foreign ministry, told news agencies that the security treaty had not served its purpose and that it would therefore be of no benefit to his government to renew its membership. Umarov also stated that his government may cancel its bilateral military cooperation agreement with the Russian Federation, which was signed in May 1994. (Agence France-Presse, 1644 GMT, 3 Feb 99; nexis) An anonymous but highly placed source in the foreign ministry provided a more specific reason for Uzbekistan's considered withdrawal from the collective security pact: namely, that the Uzbek government disagreed with Russia's military actions in a number of other CIS countries. (Interfax, 1155 GMT, 3 Feb 99; FBIS-SOV-99-034) However, an official statement issued by the foreign ministry on 4 February denied that the decision not to renew Uzbekistan's membership in the security pact was in any way
related to the nature of its relations with the Russian Federation or other CIS countries. (ITAR-TASS World Service, 1246 GMT, 4 Feb 99; The British Broadcasting Corporation, 6 Feb 99/nexis)

There has been much speculation by various sources outside Uzbekistan as to the real reasons for the Uzbek government's threatened withdrawal from the CIS Collective Security Treaty. In an Izvestia article published on 4 February, one author attributed the Uzbek government's decision directly to its deteriorating relations with the Russian Federation and claimed that rumors of Uzbekistan's planned withdrawal had been circulating in Tashkent and Moscow since the beginning of this year. The author also put forward the argument that it was Uzbek President Karimov's growing dissatisfaction with the presence of Russia's 201st Motorized Rifle Division in Tajikistan and his dismay at plans for increased Russian-Tajik military cooperation that were the main sources of the Uzbek government's displeasure. Members of President Karimov's inner circle are alleged to have openly referred to Tajik President Imomali Rahmonov as nothing more than a pawn in the hands of Moscow and various "criminal clans." The author considers the Uzbek government's recall of its peacekeeping contingent from Tajikistan last November to have been a clear signal to Moscow of Uzbekistan's strong disapproval of Russia's presence in Tajikistan. (Izvestia, 4 Feb 99; The British Broadcasting Corporation, 6 Feb 99/nexis)

The Russian daily newspaper Vremya MN published an article on 3 February in which the Uzbek government's dissatisfaction with Russian policy vis-a-vis the CIS was attributed to Russian military cooperation with Armenia and the recent shipment of S-300 air defense missiles and modern fighter planes to the Armenian government. The article alleged that Tajikistan might receive similar types of military equipment from Russia, following the signing of military cooperation agreements between the two countries in April, and that the Uzbek government found this possibility not at all to its liking. (RFE/RL Newsline, 3 Feb 99)
There is no question that the Uzbek government has been battling to re-establish its influence over the Tajik government since President Rahmonov became the chief of state in late 1993 and began replacing administrative officials who were sympathetic to Uzbek interests with his own men. However, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan continued to enjoy at least superficially cordial relations until last November, when Uzbek military and security forces supported Col. Mahmud Khudoiberdiev's invasion of Tajikistan's Leninobod Province. Since then, both Uzbek-Tajik and Uzbek-Russian relations have deteriorated severely. But it is unlikely that it is just Uzbekistan's conflict of interests with Russian policy in Tajikistan that prompted the Uzbek government to announce its possible withdrawal from the CIS Collective Security Treaty. The Uzbek government has been seeking to establish itself as the leader of the Central Asian states for some time and thus has been drawn into a rivalry with the Kazakh government, which seems to be pursuing the same goal. Kazakhstan has been moving ever closer to Russia in terms of its economic and military policies and currently enjoys Russian support for its initiatives on CIS integration as well. The Kazakh military recently received shipments of Russian S-300 air defense missiles and seems to be a firm supporter of the planned collective CIS air defense system. Even the Kyrgyz government, which seemed to be a loyal follower of Uzbek President Karimov's policies, has agreed to participate in the CIS air defense system. Thus, perhaps the Uzbek government's threat to withdraw from the collective security pact was primarily intended to pressure the Russian government to alter certain of its policies in accordance with Uzbekistan's strategic interests. It remains to be seen whether President Karimov's regime wields sufficient leverage in order to accomplish this aim.