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Putin's Soul

In an address to the justice ministry board at the end of last month, acting President Vladimir Putin pointed out that the machinery of state was "neglected, rickety and disorderly," and prescribed the creation of a "strong" state, defined as one which "upholds the rights and freedoms of the individual." (ITAR-TASS, 1025 & 1028 GMT, 31 Jan 00; FBIS-SOV-2000-0131, via World News Connection)

Putin further criticized the legislative chaos created by the melding of Soviet-era and post-Soviet laws, and called for a renovation of the legal framework to be facilitated by the judiciary.

These comments, along with some public ruminations on a possible referendum on land reform, thus far provide a scant basis for assessing Putin's political intentions. Little more is thought to be forthcoming, however, as candidate Putin has announced that he will delay issuing his electoral platform for fear of criticism of his policies. "As soon as you make it public, they will start gnawing at it and tearing it to pieces," Putin claimed. (IZVESTIA, 9 Feb 00; via Johnson's Russia List)

Despite the lack of information about his political affiliations, Putin still seems quite likely to win the March presidential elections. Earlier this month two potential challengers withdrew themselves from the race. Fatherland-All Russia leaders Yevgeni Primakov and Yuri Luzhkov both pulled out of the presidential poll, with Luzhkov taking a parting shot at Putin. "I am not running against
Vladimir Putin...," Luzhkov said, "but I am very worried for Russia's future under Putin." (AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE, 2 Feb 00; via C-afp@clari.net)

Luzhkov is not the only leading Russian figure with reservations about Putin's stewardship of Russia. As John Thornhill observes in The Financial Times (8 Feb 00; via lexis-nexis), there is a battle on for Vladimir Putin's political soul and many prominent Russian liberals are concerned that they are not winning the struggle. Andrei Piontkovsky, who heads the Center for Strategic Studies, observes, "People say Putin is the lesser evil but in what units can you measure evil?"

Piontkovsky elaborated on his concerns for a Putin regime by reviewing what Putin has undertaken thus far: "Putinism is war, it is national 'consolidation' based on hatred towards a particular ethnic group. It is attacks on freedom of speech and use of information to create zombies, it is isolation from the outside world and further economic degradation." (THE RUSSIAN JOURNAL, 14-20 Feb 00; via Johnson's Russia List)

The return of Yastrzhembsky
In compiling his presidential team, Vladimir Putin has, rather unusually, reached out to a former Yel'tsin apparatchik (and reputed close adviser) who was abruptly dismissed during the government crisis of 1998, following the devaluation of the ruble. Sergei Yastrzhembsky, Yel'tsin's press spokesman and a deputy chief of his Kremlin staff, has been named by presidential decree to oversee the press services of the armed forces, including the Chechen campaign, as well as other agencies. (INTERFAX, 1825 GMT, 20 Jan 00; FBIS-SOV-2000-0120, via World News Connection)

The appointment suggests that Putin has a great deal of confidence in Yastrzhembsky, as "managing" media coverage of the war in Chechnya has been a high priority of his administration and surely will continue to be so at least until the presidential elections. Yastrzhembsky was most recently a member of
Moscow Mayor Yuri Luzhkov's administration, and his appointment could possibly be viewed as conciliatory towards the mayor. It may, however, reveal more about the shift of importance in part of the "Family" within the Kremlin. Yastrzhembsky's ouster in 1998 was reputed to have been engineered by then-Chief of Staff Valentin Yumashev and Tatiana Dyachenko. (See EDITORIAL DIGEST, 16 Sep 98) It is unlikely that Putin sought their input into this latest appointment.

Borodin farce
The once powerful Kremlin economic manager, Pavel Borodin, seemed headed for his long-anticipated fall last month when press reports claimed that Swiss authorities had issued a warrant for his arrest in connection with the Mabetex corruption investigation. This is a story as muddy and complex as a money-laundering scheme itself, however, as in the days following the initial reports questions quickly surfaced about whether a warrant had been issued, or perhaps a secret warrant? Was Borodin to be arrested or merely brought in for questioning? Perhaps most crucial to Borodin is the issue of whether his new post as secretary of The Belarus-Russian State Council provides him with immunity from prosecution. Borodin categorically denied the warrant story: "There is no warrant for my arrest...", he said, "This is purely a political assassination attempt." (AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE, 0950 PST, 28 Jan 00; via C-afp@clari.net)

Putin himself is not unaffected by this development. His Kremlin career did begin, after all, in the economic management office as a deputy to Borodin. Dismissing Borodin from his Kremlin post was one of Putin's earliest moves as acting president, but by ensconcing Borodin at the new State Council, Putin created an aura of protection surrounding his former boss.

GOVERNMENT
Stepashin on war plans
It may be that Sergei Stepashin felt a moment of bitterness toward Putin in the initial aftermath of the Duma faction clash that produced an alliance between Unity and the Communists, but whatever his motivations or regrets he certainly dropped a bombshell last month when he confirmed what we long surmised: The Chechen war was planned long in advance of the alleged terrorist bombings in Moscow. (THE MOSCOW TIMES, 20 Jan 00; via lexis-nexis)

Stepashin claimed that the decision to invade Chechnya was made in March 1999 and planned for August-September. Stepashin, who was head of the MVD at the time and therefore certainly in a position to know, further claimed that Putin, as then-FSB chief, was fully aware of the military planning. While analysts within Russia commenting on this development are surprisingly few, there are those attempting to explain the ramifications of this information and its impact on a determination of the current leadership's character. Respected military analyst Pavel Felgenhauer (in the article cited above) warns: "In Chechnya, Putin has acted as an irrational warmonger.... It is possible that Putin -- the political unknown -- is in fact a Russian version of Milosevic, an aggressive, irresponsible nationalist armed with thousands of nuclear warheads."

SECURITY SERVICES
Where is Babitsky?
Radio Liberty correspondent Andrei Babitsky has been missing in Chechnya since the middle of January. Various sources have claimed since his disappearance that he was arrested by Russian forces for aiding Chechen rebels, was under house arrest and/or had been traded to Chechen rebels for three Russian soldiers. Recently, Federal Security Services Chief Nikolai Patrushev weighed in on the case by confirming to reporters that Babitsky was alive, but Patrushev would not elaborate on Babitsky's status or whereabouts. "I don't know where he is -- that is beyond our department," Patrushev claimed. (THE MOSCOW TIMES, 8 Feb 00; via lexis-nexis)
**Service rallies for elections**

Patrushev also recently held a collegium meeting in order to brief his personnel on their role in the conduct of the upcoming presidential elections. (MOSCOW NEWS, 26 Jan 00; via lexis-nexis) Patrushev highlighted the need for the FSB to target "dirty election technology," which he characterized as "mud slinging, illegally obtained facts, information about individuals' private life, and other types of sleaze." There were no recorded comments on the penalty for mud slinging, but the inherent threat will undoubtedly serve further to chill an already cowed media.

The meeting was also attended by Kremlin Chief of Staff Aleksandr Voloshin, who asked the service to focus on Article 11 of the Presidential Election Law, which deals with foreign influence on an election campaign. Voloshin's comments were seen as having a direct effect on media coverage of the Chechen war. Should any outlet change its reportage from a "Russian" interpretation to the more critical take of foreign media coverage in Chechnya, an investigation of foreign influence of that media outlet would surely follow.

**Russian Federation: Foreign Relations**

By Chandler Rosenberger and Sarah Miller

**Dr. Albright makes a house call**

Maybe history really has ended: Russian-US relations, at least, seem to be in a state of suspended animation. US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright's deeply pointless trip to Moscow in early February accomplished little that could not have been handled by FedEx -- with one caveat. By making a merely symbolic appearance in the Russian capital just as the Chechen capital Grozny fell, Albright again gave the Kremlin's vicious war the United States' seal of polite disapproval.
And yet the actions of Russian government recently indicate that history remains in motion, if only in reverse. The revelation of Russia's involvement in helping Iraq skirt sanctions on its oil, as well as deeper ties to anti-Western governments in Asia, hint that the new regime in the Kremlin is reading from a very old playbook.

Although they reportedly got along well personally, Albright and Russian Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov did little during Albright's recent visit to Moscow but return to tiresome go-rounds on Chechnya, the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty, Kosovo and Russia-NATO relations. Nothing of substance was accomplished on any front. The only two agreements signed, in fact, were minor: a protocol for how to recover American technology if a Russian rocket carrying an American satellite failed, and amendments to a previous agreement on monitoring nuclear threats. (INTERFAX, 1452 GMT, 27 Jan 00; FBIS-SOV-2000-0127, via World News Connection)

The Chinese are suspected of having stolen American missile guidance systems by blowing up such a rocket in 1996 (THE WASHINGTON POST, 8 Jul 98; via lexis-nexis), so the new missile security measures were a useful, if belated, measure to take. But given that these deals were about as complex as an apartment lease, Albright's trip to Moscow was merely symbolic.

Albright's trip, moreover, was symbolic in the worst possible way, undermining the weak criticism of the Chechen war that she offered. While in Moscow, Albright joined the foreign ministers of Israel, Egypt, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Tunis, Canada, as well as officials from the Palestinian Authority, the European Union, Japan, China and Switzerland at meetings on the Middle East question that the White House had helped Moscow to sponsor. (ITAR-TASS, 0801 GMT, 1 Feb 00; FBIS-SOV-2000-0201, via World News Connection) Albright later warned that Russia risked international isolation for pursuing its savage war in the
Caucasus. (THE WASHINGTON POST, 3 Feb 00; via lexis-nexis) Well, apparently not.

Albright arrived in Moscow unsure whether acting Russian President Vladimir Putin would be able to find time to meet her, but after a three-hour session with him on 3 February she was fulsome with her praise. The former KGB officer, Albright said, was "a very well-informed person, a good interlocutor, obviously a Russian patriot who seeks a normal position with the West." No, the Secretary of State and Putin had not agreed on Chechnya, the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty, Kosovo or Russia-NATO relations. But Putin had spoken without using notes.

"What is important," Albright added, "is to judge him by what he does." (THE NEW YORK TIMES, 3 Feb 00; via lexis-nexis) Which act had made more of an impression on Albright -- Putin's speaking without a script or his prosecution of the Chechen war? Prudently reserving judgment, the Secretary of State did not say.

**Judging him by what he does**

However, her emphasis on Putin's deeds rather than his words seemed especially justified after Putin addressed the diplomats gathered for the Middle East summit. Putin's struck an accommodating stance that was as remarkable for its moderation as it was for its insincerity.

In his first speech on foreign policy since assuming power on New Year's Eve, Putin declined to use some of the code words of anti-Westernism that had marked Yel'tsin's last years. He did not, for example, refer to Russia's ambition to help create a "multipolar world," and insisted instead that "we are not fighting for spheres of influence and we are not trying to compete with anyone." Criticism of NATO action in Kosovo, usually an explicit part of any Russian foreign policy statement, was limited to an oblique commitment to "forming a stable and
indivisible Europe built not on the (exercise) of force but on the principles of the United Nations (charter).” (UPI, 1258 GMT, 1 Feb 00; via lexis-nexis)

Instead, Putin insisted that Russia would cooperate with other world powers in tackling the problems of international terrorism, the proliferation of nuclear weapons, "aggressive separatism" and, in a new theme, the potential for conflict emerging from the growing gap between rich and poor nations. "Russia is a reliable, constructive and predictable partner in building Big Europe," Putin said. "Our policy will remain honest, open and transparent." (INTERFAX, 1019 GMT, 1 Feb 00; FBIS-SOV-2000-0201, via World News Connection)

The difference between Putin's words and deeds became apparent days after his talk, however, when US ships enforcing United Nations sanctions against Iraq intercepted a Russian tanker suspected of smuggling oil. The tanker had sought to evade the UN patrols by hugging the Iranian coast, but was caught off the United Arab Emirates as it passed through the Strait of Hormuz. State Department spokesman James Foley later said US officials had been warning Moscow about the activities of Russian-flagged ships for the previous month. (ASSOCIATED PRESS, 1217 EST, 3 Feb 00; via lexis-nexis) Illicit smuggling of Iraqi oil, Foley said, had increased sharply since autumn 1998.

Russia's deeper involvement in thwarting the sanctions comes less than a month after Moscow forced the UN to appoint its candidate to head the new Iraqi weapons inspection team. (See THE NIS OBSERVED, 18 Jan 00) At the same time Russia has been pressing for the appointment of new permanent member countries to the UN Security Council, and has said it will welcome changes among the current rotating members. (INTERFAX, 0908 GMT, 31 Jan 00; FBIS-SOV-2000-0131, via World News Connection) Russia is Iraq's largest creditor-nation, and has long sought to end sanctions in order to pursue lucrative contracts exploiting its oil reserves.
The Russian government denied that the privately owned tanker was smuggling but offered to cooperate fully with the investigation of the affair. Rossiyskaya gazeta, the government-owned daily, took the opportunity to strike a firmer stance against the West. The tanker incident, the paper said, had been sprung just after Albright left Moscow as part of a wider plan to "undermine trust in Russia" -- just as previous libeling of the Soviet Union had undermined its authority. (ROSSIYSKAYA GAZETA, 8 Feb 00; FBIS-SOV-2000-0208, via World News Connection)

The seizure of the Russia ship might well have been inspired by the political tussle between Russia and the US over sanctions against Iraq, but the marked increase in Russian smuggling would seem to put the blame for escalating tensions with Russia, not the US. And whether Putin makes explicit reference to a "multipolar" world order or not, his actions in the Far East (see below) indicate that his government remains committed to building strong military and diplomatic ties to Asian nations -- especially China -- with their own grievances about US dominance.

The explicit comparison, moreover, of Western criticism of Russia now and its previous criticism of the Soviet Union -- published in a government newspaper -- indicates how far the Kremlin has slipped back into its old world view. Putin has already retired the Yeltsin nostrum that the Soviet Union was not Russia. His foreign policy deeds, if not his words, show the decree to which he also equates Russia's orientation in the world with that of the empire it supposedly abandoned.

'Tacit' multipolarism

Russia's Asia policy got a boost from Deputy Foreign Minister Gregori Karasin on 8 February in a speech outlining Moscow's three main goals in East Asia. All three aims were predictable, focusing on international security, bilateral confidence-building and political-economic development. (RFE/RL NEWSLINE, 8 Feb 00) Karasin's comments clarified acting President Vladimir Putin's foreign
policy speech from 1 February and anticipated Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov's East Asia trip this week.

In his speech, Putin omitted any mention of Russia's "multipolar policy," which has guided Russia's attempts to improve relations with non-Western countries over the past few years. (Jamestown Foundation MONITOR, 2 Feb 00) However, Karasin's remarks a week later reveal that, despite Putin's omission, little change is likely in Russia's Asia policy. Putin may indulge in fewer rhetorical flourishes as he attempts to establish himself as a competent statesman in the runup to the presidential election; however, that should not be mistaken for a genuine shift in Russia's Asia policy. It seems that a newly reinvigorated "tacit multipolarism" may pick up where the previous government's largely successful "multipolar policy" left off.

In this context, Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov's trip to North Korea (DPRK), Japan and Vietnam this week indicates Russia's renewed energy for tackling issues that were shelved due to Yel'tsin's illnesses and the urgency of other concerns such as Kosovo and Chechnya. During his stay in the DPRK, Ivanov will sign the new Russia-DPRK Friendship and Cooperation Treaty which has been on hold since last spring when Karasin initialed it in Pyongyang. (REUTERS, 7 Feb 00; via RussiaToday.com) Russian relations with the DPRK were strained in the early 1990s by Russia's warming ties with South Korea, but the new treaty and a good trip for Ivanov will signal an improvement in relations. In addition to the bilateral benefits of warming relations with the DPRK, better ties will suit Russia's long-term diplomatic goals on the peninsula. For some time Russia has expressed interest in six-way talks to conclude a peace treaty between North and South Korea. Russian involvement in arranging peace talks on the peninsula would be a timely diplomatic gain for Moscow, and the new Friendship Treaty is the first step towards this goal.
Although the Kurile Islands and peace treaty issues remain unresolved with the Japanese, Ivanov's trip may yield more results than his trip to Tokyo last spring. This may be due to the more pragmatic approach that Russia has been taking towards Japan. At this point, these two subjects continue to plague relations since Japan still hinges the Russo-Japanese peace treaty on the resolution of the Kurile Islands issue, while Russia is unwilling to give up its control over the islands. Although these obstacles, as well as US National Missile Defense plans, have thwarted Russo-Japanese relations in the past, Ivanov's trip will likely focus on the more positive aspects of Russo-Japanese relations such as economic cooperation. Japan remains Asia's economic powerhouse and provided Russia with much-needed loans even after the Asian financial collapse, when other lenders refused. Although Ivanov and his Japanese counterpart inevitably will discuss the outstanding territorial issues, Russia seems prepared to intensify relations in other realms. This decision will not solve the problems in Russo-Japanese relations, but for the time being it will give Russia an opportunity to strengthen important economic ties. (ITAR-TASS, 0929 GMT, 28 Jan 00; FBIS-SOV-2000-0128, via World News Connection)

Economics have been the driving force behind Russia's relations with Vietnam for some time. Beginning with arms sales, Russia has sought out profitable deals with the Vietnamese that are now expanding into the energy and technology sectors. According to the Vietnamese, Russia is their country's eighth largest investor, but several new projects may propel Russia to the top of the list in the near future. In addition to the bilateral economic situation, Ivanov's visit will prepare the grounds for April's ASEAN business forum, at which Russian companies will have a chance to meet with ASEAN members. (ITAR-TASS, 1907 GMT, 3 Feb 00; FBIS-SOV-2000-0203, via World News Connection)

None of these developments should surprise Western politicians, since Russia has openly warned the West of its intentions in Asia for months. Now that a new, healthier leadership seems poised to replace formally the old, ailing one, Russia
appears to be revitalizing its Asia policy. For some time, Russia's multipolar policy has focused on increasing and improving Russian partnerships in Asia. In light of Russia's increasingly frail relations with the West, it is natural that Russia pursues these economic and security partnerships. But even though there are economic benefits to be had, Karasin's remarks and Russia's current international situation suggest that geopolitics remain the driving force behind Putin's "tacit multipolarism." As such, the major thrust of the policy seems aimed at the West.

Russian Federation: Media
By Jonathan Solomon

The real information war
In 1999, being an independent journalist in Russia was hardly the safest of professions. Twelve journalists were murdered last year and many more were assaulted, according to Alexei Simonov, president of the Fund for Defense of Glasnost. (ITAR-TASS, 2129 GMT, 12 Jan 00; FBIS-SOV-2000-0113, via World News Connection) On the night of 29 November 99, unknown assailants severely battered Igor Rostov, general director of the Kaskad TV and radio company of Kaliningrad. In a letter to Interior Minister Vladimir Rushailo and Acting Prosecutor General Vladimir Ustinov protesting the attack, the president of the National TV and Radio Association, Eduard Sagalaev, directly linked the incident to the Duma campaigns. "Against the complicated background of the election campaign, correspondents and chiefs of regional mass media bodies daily become a direct object of pressure and threats on the part of persons carrying out the dirty political struggle," Sagalaev declared. (ITAR-TASS, 1535 GMT, 3 Dec 99; FBIS-SOV-1999-1204, via World News Connection)

Many press offices came under attack as well. On 1 December, the Interfax agency reportedly received a bomb threat just prior to a press conference with
Anatoly Chubais and Union of Right Wing Forces leader Sergei Kirienko. The agency received a nearly identical threat the next day as well. While the occasion gave Interfax the opportunity to declare that the news agency has "never been and will never be politically engaged," it was typical of attempts by varying factions to exert physical pressure in efforts to influence the mass media’s reporting, as well as who they let speak. (INTERFAX, 1130 GMT, 2 Dec 99; FBIS-SOV-1999-1203, via World News Connection)

The situation deteriorates the farther away from Moscow one travels. In the Maritime Krai, a feed cable of the radio station Lemma, which gave a voice to opponents of the region's governor, was cut in December. There one must receive 14 separate authorizations to set up a mere newspaper stand, while in Sakhalin the government demands four, which almost seems fair in comparison! Most regions are lucky if they have an independent news outlet, and it must be considered that the majority of printing presses and broadcast centers which the independent media in Russia use are leased from the state. (OBSCHCHAYA GAZETA, 9 Dec 99; FBIS-SOV-1999-1209, via World News Connection)

And you complained about campaign mudslinging in New Hampshire?
Whereas some used violence, or at least the threat of it, to affect coverage of the campaigns, the oligarchs and the blocs relied on other means. On 3 December, Moscow's Mayor and Fatherland-All Russia (OVR) leader Yuri Luzhkov won a libel lawsuit against Boris Berezovsky's state-managed ORT TV network and one of its prominent anchors, Sergei Dorenko. ORT was forced to pay 50,000 rubles and Dorenko R100,000 due to the "moral damage" done to the mayor. (ITAR-TASS, 1915 GMT, 3 Dec 99; FBIS-SOV-1999-1203, via World News Connection) But strangely (or not so strangely) enough, three days later reports surfaced that Dorenko had been appointed deputy director general of ORT. For its part, ORT neither confirmed nor denied the apparent promotion. (INTERFAX, 1612 GMT, 6 Dec 99; FBIS-SOV-1999-1206, via World News Connection) But the propaganda attacks by those in the Kremlin's pocket were seemingly successful in propelling
the Unity bloc to victory over OVR. Berezovsky, by then a newly elected Duma representative, openly declared that Dorenko "is an indefinitely talented person," and that Dorenko's actions bore "a plus rather than a minus sign. Dorenko's role was enormous." (INTERFAX, 1102 GMT, 22 Dec 99; FBIS-SOV-1999-1222, via World News Connection)

From 28 November through the election, the European Institute for the Media, under the auspices of the OSCE, monitored the press coverage of the campaigns. According to the institute's Gillian McCormack, OVR "and its leaders, Yevgeny Primakov and Yuri Luzhkov, received the most negative coverage of any party during the campaign." She declared the pro-Kremlin ORT and RTR networks "the worst offenders," and noted that the media war was fiercest between Berezovsky's Kremlin-allied outlets and Vladimir Gusinsky's OVR-allied outlets. Stations owned by both blatantly promoted their respective blocs in reports that aired under the pretense of being actual news pieces, according to McCormack.

McCormack took ORT and the RTR network to task for several reasons. First, as they had the "greatest national audience reach, (they) had a particular responsibility to provide impartial information about the political choice on offer to the electorate." Their coverage, heavily biased against OVR and for Unity, "failed to meet standards set in Russian law and in international agreements and conventions signed by the Russian Federation." Feeding off Vladimir Putin's popularity, the networks would often combine coverage of his actions in government with that of Unity's campaigning. She noted that Dorenko's Sunday night news analysis program on ORT was the most popular such program in Russia leading up to the election, and condemned him for using "his position to call Luzhkov everything from a supporter of evil sects to a murderer."

In McCormack's opinion, the problems of the Russian media stem from the nature of their ownership and the absence of political interest in protecting
journalists, not to mention a general lack of journalistic ethics, integrity and depth. Indeed, she observed that "the absence of any real analysis of the Chechen conflict" is partly the cause of its high popularity among Russians, not to mention the fact that this popularity directly transferred to Putin and Unity. (MOSCOW TIMES, 29 Dec 99; via lexis-nexis) It must seem absolutely ludicrous, then, that Putin "expressed hope that journalists will do their utmost to ensure an 'honest and clean' campaign" in the March presidential race. (ITAR-TASS, 1211 GMT, 13 Jan 00; FBIS-SOV-2000-0113, via World News Connection)

**Trouble at NTV**

Heaven forbid anyone should question the speed of Putin's rise to power and popularity or his background! The "Voice of the People" program on Gusinsky's NTV did just this, and received the wrath of state-run media as a result. In an editorial shortly afterward, Rossiyskaya gazeta implied that those on NTV who questioned Putin were "yesterday's men, who still dream of returning the country to its 'radiant past.'" Indeed, why should these issues "be discussed in the premier's absence, if he demonstrates day in, day out his openness and readiness to give public replies to the most pointed of questions?" (ROSSIYSKAYA GAZETA, 20 Jan 00; FBIS-SOV-2000-0120, via World News Connection)

On 21 January, NTV co-founder and general director Oleg Dobrodeev resigned without expressing a reason. Yevgeny Kiselev, chairman of the board of NTV and host of the "Itogi" program, took his place. The move was interpreted by the Moscow media as indication of "deep disturbances among television management as a result of political pressures associated with the election season and Chechen campaign." According to the St. Petersburg Times, a Western-owned English-language paper, Izvestia television critic Irina Petrovskaya interviewed Gusinsky at NTV's sixth birthday party. Gusinsky claimed that he and Dobrodeev were disagreeing over the coverage of Chechnya, and that he, himself, had insisted that NTV "not be a mouthpiece for
the Defense Ministry and that it report the tragedy of refugees and civilians as well as the military successes." Dobrodeev did not attend the party.

The Moscow media viewed Gusinsky's assertions cynically. Dobrodeev was the one who was pushing for more balanced coverage, they felt. At a press conference on 19 December, Dobrodeev appeared depressed by the partisan journalism during the Duma campaigns, saying "All television channels came out of this election campaign with huge losses to their reputations. I can only hope that we at NTV managed to minimalize them." Manana Alslamzian of Internews Russia summed up the concerns of the press: "Who will replace such people and how much lower will the ethical standards of our journalism drop?" (ST. PETERSBURG TIMES, 21 Jan 00; via lexis-nexis)

**A sign of things to come?**

What began as a freedom of the press issue has become the telling indicator of whether glasnost is truly dead under a Putin government. On 23 January, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty reporter Andrei Babitsky was arrested because he "broke the rules set for correspondents in the area of the anti-terrorist operation," according to acting Prosecutor General Ustinov. In Ustinov's 31 January announcement, he stated that Babitsky would remain incarcerated for at least the next 10 days. (INTERFAX, 1117 GMT, 31 Jan 00; FBIS-SOV-2000-0131, via World News Connection)

However, on 3 February the Russian government reported that he was traded to "Chechen rebels" for some Russian soldiers. The exchange was videotaped by members of the FSB, and aired on Russian television. An FSB spokesman confirmed on NTV that his service had made the tape, but said that "the question of the journalist's freeing and turning over should be addressed to the prosecutor's office and military command. The Russian Federal Security Service did not institute a criminal case, did not detain Andrei Babitsky, and had no relation to his detention and to what happened later." He added that the only
reason that the FSB made the videotape was that an "FSB worker proved to be the only one who had a video camera." (ITAR-TASS, 0839 GMT, 4 Feb 00; FBIS-SOV-2000-0204, via World News Connection) And just what was an FSB worker doing at the exchange of a Russian national with "terrorists," especially when the service "had no relation" to the affair at all?

Also on 4 February, reports circulated that the transfer had occurred at Babitsky's request. Sergei Yastrzhembsky, the Kremlin's spokesman on the Chechen War, displayed a copy of an agreement that Babitsky had supposedly signed to authorize the exchange. (MOSCOW TIMES, 4 Feb 00; via lexis-nexis) First Deputy Chief of the Russian General Staff Colonel General Valery Manilov commented at a press conference that "it would be okay, and even worth talking of gratitude or even an award, if there's no dark side to the question, which has been expressed by Andrei's willingness to go to the militants." (INTERFAX, 1447 GMT, 4 Feb 00; FBIS-SOV-2000-0204, via World News Connection) The possibility of gratitude for such a "criminal" as Babitsky?

Defense Minister Igor Sergeev had harsher words. "Babitsky is not [Arnold] Schwarzenegger and he's not a banker, so they must have valued him for his information, which suggests that the information he had been supplying was not always objective, mildly speaking .... I'd trade 10 Babitskys for one Russian soldier," Sergeev said in an interview on ORT. (MOSCOW TIMES, 4 Feb 00; via lexis-nexis)

According to the Moscow Times, the sister paper of the St. Petersburg Times, Babitsky was one of the few reporters whose coverage of the war ran contrary to the rosy picture put forth by the government-controlled media. It seems likely, then, that Babitsky's reports contained too much truth for someone in Moscow, and he was silenced.
Babitsky's wife was justifiably enraged and frightened. In an interview on 3 February, she related that the government had not let her talk with him at all prior to the exchange. "I don't even know if he is OK. If Yastrzhembsky says he's OK, I don't believe him. I don't believe that Yastrzhembsky." (MOSCOW TIMES, 4 Feb 00; via lexis-nexis) Do we?

Russian Federation: Domestic Issues and Legislative Branch
By Michael Thurman

DUMA
16 Duma deputies left without party affiliation
Among others, Roman Abramovich, Boris Berezovsky, Nikolai Gonchar, Mikhail Gutseriev, Alexander Korzhakov, Anatoly Kulikov and Nikolai Ryzhkov, have yet to announce to which party they will adhere.

Although the numbers fluctuate, the Communist Party will be the largest single faction in the Third Duma with 93 seats. The second largest party, Unity, has 81 deputies. Fatherland-All Russia has 46 deputies, the Union of Rightist Forces has 32 and YABLOKO has 21 deputies. The Liberal Democratic Party faction will be the smallest group with 17 members.

In addition to those parties that ran for office, there are three parliamentary factions: People's Deputy [sic] with 58 members, Russian Regions Group (the Union of Independent Deputies) with 39 members, and the Agro-Industrial Deputy Group with 37 members. (ITAR-TASS, 1919 GMT, 21 Jan 00; FBIS-SOV-2000-0121, via World News Connection)
The numbers Itar-Tass provides, when tallied, do not actually add up to 450, the number of members of the Duma. The discrepancy comes from the districts where elections were annulled due to too many votes in opposition to all the candidates and the vacancy of the Chechen Republic seat.

**Opposition boycott ends**

The Union of Rightist Forces, YABLOKO, and Fatherland-All Russia, whose members walked out of the Duma during its first session in protest of a collusive agreement between the CPRF and Unity, have returned. However, the three factions have as yet to take up the deputy speaker posts allotted to them. (BBC World News, 1131 CET, 9 Feb 00; via lexis-nexis)

The question remains whether the three parties will continue their coordination in opposition to the CPRF/Unity alliance. It is difficult to know for sure, although two recent developments suggest continued cooperation is unlikely. First, YABLOKO broke ranks and began negotiations with Unity prior to the opposition parties' return. Second, almost everyone in the Duma "supports" acting President Vladimir Putin, and by extension his Unity party. It appears that the imminent election of Putin to the presidency has made the parties that might have opposed him reluctant to do so, perhaps wanting to participate in the division of spoils after election day.

**REGIONS**

**Chechen process of 'normalization' begins**

It was only to be expected. Moscow is now beginning to reconstitute Chechnya as a region of the federation. Recently, a Chechen State Council was set up in Gudermes, tasked with the coordination of the area's re-building. (INTERFAX, 1017 GMT, 5 Feb 00; FBIS-SOV-2000-0205, via World News Connection)

Additionally, Chechens are to receive Russian passports. Over 100,000 blank passports are being sent to the police in "liberated" areas of Chechnya. The new
passports will be issued first to schoolchildren aged 14 and older, as well as persons who have temporary identification cards. (ITAR-TASS, 1351 GMT, 6 Feb 00; FBIS-SOV-2000-0206, via World News Connection)

And finally, Chechens will be allowed to vote for the next Russian president. Alexandr Veshnyakov, chairman of Russia's Central Electoral Commission (CEC), discussed the setting up of the Electoral Commission of the Chechen Republic (ECCR) which will be given the same power as similar commissions in Russia's other regions. Along with elections at the federal level, the ECCR is empowered to coordinate the holding of regional referenda as well as to prepare and hold elections to regional governing bodies. Veshnyakov also noted that until Chechnya has erected its own governing bodies, the process will be run from Moscow. (ITAR-TASS, 1341 GMT, 1 Feb 00; FBIS-SOV-2000-0201, via World News Connection)

It is going to take more than bricks, mortar, and elections to rebuild Chechnya and its relations with Russia. As the Chechen rebels withdraw into the mountains in the south of the republic, Moscow may claim victory for now, but winning the peace may be something else entirely.

**Russian Federation: Armed Forces**


**Russian arms industry's long-term prognosis**

Russia's arms industry is buzzing with excitement. Acting President Vladimir Putin approved a $2.18 billion defense procurement budget on 27 January, which represents a 50-percent increase from 1999. Conventional weapons will receive higher priority at the expense of nuclear forces, which consumed 80 percent of the procurement budget last year. (MOSCOW TIMES, 28 Jan 00; via Center for Defense Information Russia Weekly, No. 86) Russia's deputy prime minister, Ilya
Klebanov, who oversees Russian arms sales abroad, rashly predicts Russia will sell $4 billion of Russian weapons in 2000. This would surpass the $3.5 billion 1999 figure, a record in the post-Soviet era. (AFP, 8 Feb 00; via Johnson's Russia List) Some may believe Russia's arms industry, which has been starved for funds since 1991, is on the road to prosperity.

However, Russia's defense sector still has a rough future. The 50-percent procurement budget increase was due to a reallocation of funds, not an overall increase in the defense budget. (THE NIS OBSERVED, 1 Feb 00) If past history is any indication, the defense ministry will be fortunate to receive full funding. Despite Klebanov's promises to pay all arrears, the ministry received only 60 percent of funds for the 1999 budget. This is better than 1998, when only 12 percent of the procurement budget was funded. (MOSCOW TIMES, 28 Jan 00; via Center for Defense Information Russia Weekly, No. 86)

Russia's predicted arms export boom is just an optimistic forecast. Recent reports indicate Russia may be returning to Soviet-era plan targets. Russia's three main arms trading companies --Rosvooruzhenie, Promeksport, and Rossiyskie Technologi -- will be compelled by the government to "demonstrate convincingly exactly how they are planning to fulfill the declared plans." Some Western analysts have painted a less than rosy picture of Russia's arms exports. They highlight lost market shares in Eastern Europe and the fact that many former Soviet client states are too poor to purchase Russian weapons. Some experts even predict an eventual decline in Russia's lucrative arrangement with China and India as the two buyers increasingly move towards producing their own weapons or look to other suppliers. (Jamestown Foundation MONITOR, 7 Feb 00)

Russia's defense industry problems are far from over. The industry owes recent successes to technological advances made during the Soviet era. The collapse of state funding has halted development of any new discoveries, and many
engineers have left the defense sector for more lucrative positions in the banking and trade industries. The loss of engineering talent may be a root cause of recent quality problems. Sukhoi, one of Russia's leading aircraft manufacturers, suffered some serious setbacks in 1999 when a new Su-27 purchased by Ethiopia crashed. Five months later an Su-30 crashed at the Paris air show. India has suspended negotiations over the purchase of 300 T-90 tanks and a manufacturing license after the production model performed poorly during trials. (AFP, 8 Feb 00; via Johnson's Russia List)

The prognosis for Russia's arms industry is not good. The 2000 defense budget and arms export plan are desperate government measures to prevent a complete collapse of the arms industry and the associated political fallout.

**All indications are that the dominoes will keep falling**

The shake-up of the Russian military leadership is continuing. In the last two months acting President Putin has replaced two senior field commanders in Chechnya and the commander-in-chief of the interior ministry troops. Now there are rumors that the replacement of military leaders has reached the highest levels -- Defense Minister Igor Sergeev and, by extension, those officers close to him.

It is anticipated that Putin will, shortly after the presidential elections, move quickly to replace the senior leadership in the top echelons of the armed forces. This decision will include the defense minister, probably the chief of the General Staff, and possibly, commanders of the various service branches. (DEFENSE AND SECURITY, 26 Jan 00; Jamestown Foundation MONITOR, 8 Feb 00)

Reasons for these anticipated changes should not come as a surprise. Putin has not been pleased with the military reforms instituted over the last two and a half years. Sergeev has met calls for much-needed reforms with largely superficial actions, primarily supporting improvements in the Strategic Rocket Forces -- all
at the expense of the disintegrating conventional forces. Corruption is pervasive and increasingly threatens to rent the fabric of military discipline and capabilities permanently. According to most reports, the maltreatment of troops is rampant. Finally, Putin must consider his political future and decide whether it would be advantageous, once he wins the elections, for him to leave in place those Yeltsin-appointed senior military officers to whom he owes much of his success to date, since they could call in their markers at any time. As evidenced in the current Chechen War, Russian military leaders have shown an increasing willingness to use their weight in presenting demands of the political leadership.

Two main contenders for the defense minister position most often mentioned are the current chief of the General Staff, army General Anatoly Kvashnin, and chairman of the Duma's Defense Committee, retired General Andrei Nikolaev. General Kvashnin was appointed by Yeltsin in May 1997 and has been described as an "effective ... backroom operator whose political skills may exceed his abilities as a commander." (Jamestown Foundation MONITOR, 8 Feb 00) He is considered the author not only of the deployment of Russian peacekeepers into Kosovo but also of the aggressive military strategy in Chechnya. It is rumored that Kvashnin and Putin have developed a close working relationship. It is also claimed that the two men struck a deal last September in which Kvashnin promised a military victory in Chechnya that would insure Putin's popularity and political success. In return, Putin would approve a large increase in the military budget and essentially a free hand for the military in their conduct of the Chechen War. (GLOBE AND MAIL, 3 Feb 00; via lexis-nexis) This apparent close working relationship and Kvashnin's support of Putin's objectives in Chechnya would bode well for Kvashnin's selection as the next defense minister. However, many experts feel that Kvashnin's star has passed its zenith. Also, once Putin is president, Kvashnin could prove to be a political liability: He represents the "old" establishment; and, if Russia declares the Chechen War a victory, then Kvashnin holds one of Putin's IOUs.
More and more talked about as a successor to Sergeev is retired Russian General Andrei Nikolaev. He is a former first deputy chief of the General Staff, and is currently the chairman of the Duma's Defense Committee. He was reportedly considered in 1997 by Yel'tsin for the position of chief of the General Staff. (Jamestown Foundation MONITOR, 8 Feb 00) Nikolaev is said to share Putin's ideas on military reforms and has a connection to the Federal Security Services as former commander of the Border Troops -- a plus on Putin's list. He is a long-time opponent to the reforms advocated by Sergeev, saying that they address only the mechanics of reducing the armed forces rather than the necessary reevaluation of basic roles and missions. His views on Chechnya are also said to be very close to Putin's. Sources close to Nikolaev say that, when Putin was forming his Chechen policy, he took Nikolaev's views as his starting point. (DEFENSE AND SECURITY, 26 Jan 00) However, like Kvashnin, he is considered a political animal with ambitions and political loyalties, and a penchant for confrontations.

So who is it to be, Kvashnin or Nikolaev, or somebody else out there still unseen in the wings? Nobody is a clear winner. Most analysts are still trying to figure Putin out and he is holding his cards pretty much to his chest.

**Newly Independent States: CIS**

*By Sarah Miller*

**Going, going, GUUAM**

In the flurry surrounding the CIS Moscow summit in late January, GUUAM never surfaced. GUUAM, an "economic" grouping of Georgia, Ukraine, Uzbekistan, Azerbaijan, and Moldova, has been a second "pole" in the CIS against Russia's dominance ever since it first emerged as GUAM in 1996. But as of late January 2000, GUUAM's influence in the CIS seemed nonexistent, as its members one by
one acquiesced to Russia's dominance in the CIS. (See THE NIS OBSERVED, 1 Feb 00)

If GUUAM is disintegrating, then it is doing so with barely a whimper. The first evidence of the alliance's potential demise as a CIS bloc was the cancellation of the GUUAM defense ministers' meeting scheduled for the CIS summit sidelines. (ITAR-TASS, 1408 GMT, 30 Jan 00; FBIS-SOV-2000-0130, via World News Connection) The cancellation was quietly announced by the Russian news service ITAR-TASS several days after the Moscow summit. None of the GUUAM presidents or defense ministers made any public comments about the cancellation. The events at the summit indicate that CIS member states will place bilateral concerns with Russia above all else, instead of strengthening the one organization that gave them a voice in the CIS. Even if GUUAM doesn't entirely disintegrate, its future as a bloc in the CIS is doomed if its members do nothing to revive it. Unfortunately, GUUAM members face a difficult situation: Independently they are vulnerable; together, they invoke Russia's suspicion. But with no international assistance to help them maintain their independence, GUUAM and all CIS member states are forced to follow Russia's rules. This is precisely the scenario that played out at the CIS summit in January.

Newly Independent States: Western Region

By Tammy Lynch

UKRAINE
Showdown at the OK Corral
In what seems like a scene out of an old cowboy movie, 100 members of the pro-presidential parliamentary majority burst into the parliament chamber last week, taking control of the speaker's rostrum and the power that goes with it. Despite their valiant attempts, members of the leftist minority -- formerly the majority --
were unable to beat back the invaders. After a few scuffles, order was as restored to the degree possible, given the circumstances.

As previously reported in The NIS Observed, the parliamentary standoff broke out on 21 January when then-Speaker Oleksandr Tkachenko would not initiate a vote on a proposal to oust him and Deputy Speaker Adam Martynyuk. The vote had been requested by the newly formed pro-presidential majority. Majority members then attempted to approach the speaker's rostrum, and, when blocked, walked out of the chamber. (INTELNEWS, 20 Jan 00; BBC Summary of World Broadcasts, via lexis-nexis) They held an alternative session the next day in a nearby exhibition center, where they voted to remove Tkachenko and Martynyuk.

At the same time, Tkachenko and members of the four leftist parties supporting him set up 24-hour shifts to guard the parliament chamber against the entry of any "centrists," while calling on the international community to come to the aid of "democracy." Tkachenko had claimed that the vote to oust him was unconstitutional because it was held without his consent, and because a quorum consisted not of a majority, but of 300 members. (ITAR-TASS, 2105 GMT, 4 Feb 00; FBIS-SOV-2000-0204, via World News Connection) While the latter claim was dubious and quickly dropped, the former may in fact have merit. Tkachenko and his allies have asked the Constitutional Court to examine whether a vote can be held if not called for by the presiding speaker. The court will undoubtedly also look at the question of whether a speaker has the right to block a vote to remove him if it is supported by a majority of members, as this one was.

Regardless, after fighting their way into the chamber, lawmakers began securing the area. "We knew that more leftists would come to the parliament at about eight o'clock, so we had to act quickly," parliament member Taras Stetskiv told Reuters. (REUTERS, 8 Feb 00; via RFE/RL NEWSLINE) Leftist members responded by calling rival lawmakers "thieves." "This is sheer banditry," Communist leader Petro Symonenko said. "They seized the session hall and
paramilitary guards are everywhere." (REUTERS, 8 Feb 00; via America Online)
He did not explain, however, how the actions of the pro-presidential group
differed from the actions of the leftist group members who seized the chamber in
the first place.

As things settled down, the majority began discussing a few of the less-pressing
economic and agricultural reforms suggested by President Leonid Kuchma, while
leftists jeered and shouted.

Not surprisingly, by the following day most of the shouting had quieted down.
Although they were quieter, however, minority members continued to refuse to
register for the parliamentary sessions until finally succumbing to the inevitable
on 15 February. The parliament passed a zero deficit FY2000 budget on 17
February which should unclog the country's suspended loan tranches from the
middle of the IMF and World Bank pipelines. The government has also initiated a
massive debt restructuring to forestall default this year, and will need investors to
have faith in a stable government if the restructuring is to work.

While all of this infighting takes place between the two factions in parliament,
President Leonid Kuchma sits above it, looking down as he reels in the power.
Kuchma is still planning to hold a referendum asking voters for permission to
dissolve the parliament, change its format from unicameral to bicameral, limit the
immunity of deputies, and cut the number of deputies from 450 to 300. As voters
watch this fiasco on the nightly news, they must wonder why Kuchma didn't hold
a referendum sooner. The new majority undoubtedly understands that the future
political lives of its members may depend on its ability to form a stable, efficient
parliament, and most of all, on its ability to work with the president. The majority
must understand that Kuchma now holds all the cards. The only question that
remains is how far Kuchma will go in his consolidation of power. He now stands
at the threshold of autocracy. The parliament and the crises engulfing his country
have handed Kuchma the chance to dictate. Will he use his growing political
power to force the parliament to bend to his every whim, or will he step back and allow the legislative system to work as it is intended? Will he work constructively with the newly constructed parliament, or will he continue to rule by decree and sound bite? With an obstructionist leftist parliament, Kuchma had every excuse to use his power to rule autocratically. Without that parliament, the excuses are gone. The coming months will show what type of president, and what type of person, Leonid Kuchma really is.

MOLDOVA
Reality check
It has now been almost three months since news came from the Istanbul OSCE summit that Russia had agreed to remove its troops and weaponry from Dniestr by the end of 2002. The so-called agreement was much-heralded in diplomatic and media circles, as evidenced by its coverage in the press.

"Russia agrees to reduce troops in Georgia, Moldova," trumpeted the Reuters headline. "[Russian Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov] reached agreements with Georgia and Moldova to withdraw Russian forces from their territories in coming years," explained The New York Times. "If there had not been Western pressure over Chechnya," said one unnamed "senior Western diplomat," "the Russians would no doubt have continued to procrastinate on these two issues [Moldova and Georgia]." (AGENCE PRESSE-FRANCE, 1723 GMT, 19 Nov 99; via lexis-nexis) And, most significantly, the Istanbul Summit Declaration stated, "We welcome the commitment by the Russian Federation to complete withdrawal of the Russian forces from the territory of Moldova by the end of 2002."

My, how the bloom has come off the rose. Less than three months later, Russia has entirely backtracked on its commitment. The backstepping began in earnest shortly after the new year was rung in, and there was nothing ambiguous about the step. In a letter to the Tiraspol administration released on 4 January to
Basapres, Russia's foreign ministry explained, "Parallel to our commitment of a military withdrawal from Moldova before 2002, which we assumed during the OSCE summit in Istanbul [in November 99], Russia remains on its stance that the process of withdrawal of the troops and weapons must be accompanied by a political resolution to the Dniestr conflict. Thus, the term of withdrawal has a second meaning: the final political resolution of the Dniestr crisis." (BASAPRES, 1900 GMT, 4 Jan 00; FBIS-SOV-2000-0104, via World News Connection)

Later in January, Dniestr authorities refused a US request to allow an inspection of Russia's former 14th Army arsenals, even though at the Istanbul summit Russia had agreed to allow such inspections. "The military property of the Russian troops is the property of the former USSR and therefore belongs to the people of the Dniester region," the leader of the breakaway republic, Igor Smirnov, said. "We see no reason for evaluating this property by a foreign mission." (ITAR-TASS, 1526 GMT, 19 Jan 00; FBIS-SOV-2000-0119, via World News Connection) Not long after, a delegation of Spanish military experts arrived to inspect the arsenals in Dniestr only to be refused access by Smirnov's authorities. (BASAPRES, 1900 GMT, 27 Jan 00; FBIS-SOV-2000-0127, via World News Connection) Shockingly, there was no attempt by Russia to mediate the inspection stalemate.

The head of the OSCE mission in Chisinau, William Hill, then "warned" Russia about missing the agreed-upon deadline and said he "hoped" all agreements would be fulfilled. (ITAR-TASS, 1424 GMT, 17 Jan 00; FBIS-SOV-2000-0117, via World News Connection) Although Russia did not respond to this comment, it did reiterate its readiness to accept US money to remove the troops. On 4 February, a US delegation led by State Department envoy Craig Downkerley arrived in Chisinau to "put pressure on the Moldovan Dniestr Republic," and to discuss the United States' monetary contribution toward the withdrawal of Russian troops. "We informed the guests how the Conventional Forces in Europe (CFE) Treaty is being implemented," Lieutenant-General Valery Yevnevich, the commander of
Russian troops in the region, said. "We told them about expenses necessary to take Russian arms out of the region in accordance with OSCE decisions." (BASAPRES, 1900 GMT, 5 Feb 00; FBIS-SOV-2000-0205, via World News Connection) On 1 February the delegation had met with other OSCE and Russian military representatives to discuss the Dniestr issue. "The military experts got down to specific issues on the basis of information prepared by the Russian Defense Ministry," the Russian foreign ministry told ITAR-TASS. (ITAR-TASS, 2048 GMT, 3 Feb 00; FBIS-SOV-2000-0203, via World News Connection) Ministry representatives undoubtedly did not readily discuss the fact that no weapons have been removed from the Transdniestr region since the days before the OSCE summit. But, they must have explained the situation satisfactorily. Neither the OSCE nor the US delegates had one negative word to say about the situation after the meeting. And the same media outlets that wrote eloquently about the agreement to remove Russian troops have expressed nary a peep about Russian backstepping. So, everything must be right on track -- just as Russia intended.

Newly Independent States: Caucasus
By Miriam Lanskoy

ARMENIA
Is Yerevan ready for new talks?
In the last several weeks the US and Russia have launched separate efforts to reinvigorate the negotiations over Nagorno-Karabakh which stalled in the wake of the 27 October assassinations of leading Armenian politicians. Special adviser to the US secretary of state on newly independent states, Stephen Sestanovich, and the US cochairman of the OSCE Minsk Group, Carey Cavanaugh, traveled to the region in late January to introduce proposals for new meetings in the OSCE Minsk group framework. (SNARK, 1235 GMT, 22 Jan 00; FBIS-SOV-2000-0124, via World News Connection) However, it was Vladimir Putin who
brought Aliev and Kocharian together on the sidelines of the CIS summit on 25 January for the first time since the assassinations. After the meeting, Putin told journalists that Russia was ready to serve as a guarantor of a settlement. (INTERFAX, 27 Jan 00; via lexis-nexis)

In marked contrast to last year when the US promoted the bilateral dialogue, Russia has emerged as the new broker of the presidential talks. These talks and the meeting of the four Caucasian states, held for the first time at the January CIS summit and due to be held again at the April summit, threaten to eclipse the international initiatives, the new Stability Pact project and the existing OSCE Minsk Group. A second meeting of the two presidents was held on the sidelines of the Davos economic summit on 30 January. That session produced only vague promises to hold more talks and prompted Azerbaijani Foreign Minister Vilayat Guliev to comment that Armenia still seems unprepared to continue the negotiations, "this meeting showed once again that Armenia has not got over the shock caused by the events of 27th October." (TREND NEWS AGENCY, 1609 GMT, 3 Feb 00; via lexis-nexis)

Although the meetings may have resumed, the radical demands and tense political environment in Yerevan will probably prohibit any progress along that route. Last week the very influential union of Nagorno-Karabakh war veterans, Yerkrapah, announced it would oppose any settlement "that entails the return to Azerbaijani jurisdiction of occupied Azerbaijani territories bordering on the unrecognized Nagorno-Karabakh republic." (RFE/RL NEWSLINE, 8 Feb 00) This suggests that the Yerkrapah leadership claims not only the Nagorno-Karabakh area but also the indisputably Azerbaijani districts that border it -- Azerbaijani areas which Armenian forces have been occupying since the cease-fire of 1994. Moreover the group insists on having a veto over any settlement plan and a national referendum on the issue. Prime Minister Aram Sarkisian agreed that no peace deal can be adopted without Yerkrapah's approval, while deputy parliamentary speaker Tigran Torosian suggested that any plan must be put to
public debate. It seems that Yerevan's most powerful political factions have gotten behind a position on the occupied territories which is guaranteed to breed resentment in Baku.

Since the assassinations, the military wing --Yerkrapah and its political representation, the Republican Party, which is part of the ruling coalition Miasnutiun -- has emerged as the major political force in opposition to the president. Immediately after the assassinations, the military had presented the president with suggestions for his new cabinet. That demand was not met but a military prosecutor was charged with carrying out the investigation to placate some of the criticism from that quarter. In December, a Yerkrapah congress called for the president's resignation. That call was echoed in January by Vazgen Manukian, the leader of the National Democratic Union and a contender in the 1996 and 1998 presidential elections. The idea of early presidential elections met with approval from several other opposition figures who had opposed such calls in December. (IWPR'S CAUCASUS REPORTING SERVICE, 28 Jan 00)

Although so far Kocharian has managed to remain in his post, some very astute analysts believe that new elections are only being postponed until the Miasnutiun parliamentary coalition can find a suitable candidate. (RFE/RL CAUCASUS REPORT, 28 Jan 00)

In the meantime, the military prosecutor arrested six more persons in January, bringing the total to 20, based ostensibly on the testimony of the assassins in his custody. (NOYAN TAPAN, 1324 GMT, 10 Jan 00; FBIS-SOV-2000-0111, via World News Connection) Among the suspects are several associates of the president, including a presidential aide, Aleksan Arutyunyan. The arrests of influential members of the president's circle fuel the popular speculation that Kocharian and his entourage were behind the assassinations. At the same time, Prosecutor Gagik Dzhangirian told reporters the terrorist act may have represented the first phase of an attempted coup. (NOYAN TAPAN, 0600 GMT, 13 Jan 00; FBIS-SOV-2000-0113, via World News Connection) This seems like a
very odd scenario. Why would Kocharian sponsor a coup against himself? He lost political clout in domestic politics as a direct result of these events and his diplomatic initiative on Nagorno-Karabakh was scuttled. Unless some new evidence is revealed, this version seems unpersuasive -- the ostensible culprit lacks a motive. Others, like Vafa Guluzade, the former national security advisor to Aliev, advance a different view and suggest that Russian interests were behind the assassination. (See Vafa Guluzade "Russia, Turkey and Caucasian Stability," at http://www.cacianalyst.org/Forum%20sums.htm) This version seems more logical: The military and its Russian sponsors used the terrorist act to cower the president, just when the negotiations over Nagorno-Karabakh were beginning to bear fruit, and press for their own militant stand on Nagorno-Karabakh.

The manner in which the investigation into the parliamentary slaying has been carried out is perhaps even more troubling than the attacks on the president. Obshchaya gazeta reported that masked men burst into a parliament session to drag off a presidential aide. The paper compared the proceedings to the great purge of 1937. The parallel is an apt one. The investigation proceeds in total secrecy; the military holds suspects for months and makes arrests based entirely on their testimony. One newspaper editor was arrested because his name was mentioned by a suspect. He was released when it was proven that he was out of the country on 27 October. As it turns out, the evidence against him consisted of the claim that he had commissioned an article from one of the assassins. (OBSHCAYA GAZETA, 13 Jan 00; FBIS-SOV-2000-0114, via World News Connection)

The military prosecutor added another creepy undertone when he hinted at a possible link between the assassinations and the Vano Siradegian trial. (NOYAN TAPAN, 0600 GMT, 13 Jan 00; FBIS-SOV-2000-0113, via World News Connection) IWPR referred to those proceedings against the former MVD minister and 11 other defendants as a "show trial." (IWPR CAUCASUS REPORTING SERVICE, 4 Feb 00 ) It might be possible to imagine some strange
scenario by which this case, which dates back five years, has some bearing on the October 1999 events, but such concoctions bear an even stronger resemblance to 1937, when prosecutors uncovered vast conspiracies to terrify the population and annihilate the opposition.

Newly Independent States: Central Asia

By Monika Shepherd

KYRGYZSTAN

Upcoming Kyrgyz elections unlikely to be free and fair

Perhaps inspired by Uzbek President Karimov's practices, the Kyrgyz government has barred a number of opposition parties from participating in the parliamentary elections, due to be held on 20 February. Opposition party members have also complained of harassment by local officials, who refuse to register certain candidates or prevent party members from holding meetings. (KABAR NEWS AGENCY, 1334 GMT, 10 Feb 00; BBC Monitoring Central Asia Unit, via lexis-nexis) The Central Election Commission claims that a number of parties have provided inaccurate information about their candidates' incomes, which makes them ineligible to run for office. (KABAR NEWS AGENCY, 1124 GMT, 26 Jan 00; BBC Monitoring Central Asia Unit, via lexis-nexis) Furthermore, criminal proceedings have begun against three prominent opposition figures, Ar-Namys (Dignity) Party chairman Feliks Kulov, parliament deputy Ishenbai Kadyrbekov (one of the founders of the Social-Democratic Party), and chairman of the (Poor and Unprotected) People's Party, Daniyar Usenov. Usenov is the only one who has been arrested thus far, even though the charges against him seem to be the least serious: failure to obey a court summons for a case which was brought against him in 1996 and has since been closed. (RFE/RL NEWSLINE, 21 Jan 00)
The Kyrgyz government's actions are quite consistent with the methods employed by both the Uzbek and Kazakh regimes during their recent elections, in order to prevent the opposition from challenging the status quo. The Uzbek election authorities' actions were the most extreme, denying any role whatsoever to the opposition, whereas Kazakh authorities simply weeded out the most popular and well-known opposition parties, but allowed the weaker, less-threatening factions to participate.

Thus far, Kyrgyz authorities seem to prefer the Kazakh election model; as of 7 February, nine parties had been permitted to register their candidates for parliament and at least four parties had been denied a place on the ballot, including Ar-Namys and (Poor and Unprotected) People's Party, two of the most popular parties. Oddly enough, however, the two largest opposition parties, the Communist parties, are being allowed to participate in the elections, although their candidates may only run in single-member districts. (RFE/RL NEWSLINE, 11 Jan 00) Perhaps what President Akaev fears most is not a challenge from the left, whose sympathizers are most likely to be found among the older generations, but a challenge from those candidates who base their appeal on nationalist platforms. Feliks Kulov, chairman of Ar-Namys, has singled out Kyrgyzstan's Russian minority for support, promising to work to reinstate Russian as one of Kyrgyzstan's official languages, as well as to provide maximum representation not only for Russians, but for all of the country's ethnic minorities. (RFE/RL NEWSLINE, 6 Jan 00) During a period when inter-ethnic tensions are rising in Kyrgyzstan, any opposition candidate's ability to appeal to a wide range of groups undoubtedly poses a significant threat to those who currently hold power. Kulov's willingness to form blocs with other opposition parties could have guaranteed the opposition a significant share of parliament seats. Apparently this was not a prospect that President Akaev's government was willing to tolerate.

Newly Independent States: Baltic States
Spies, spies everywhere...
Russia, a country known to be shocked when confronted with evidence of intelligence-gathering activities, has been waging a campaign to warn of such activity by the Baltic states, a campaign that has become all the more pronounced since former spymaster Vladimir Putin was named acting president. The campaign not only has highlighted intelligence work by Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, but also pointed to the "man behind the curtain," so to speak, that is, the West and, in particular, the United States.

Thus, ITAR-TASS correspondents reported that the Baltic states "are assuming a front-line role in gathering intelligence for NATO," and the Central Intelligence Agency "is reportedly coordinating [Latvia's] intelligence efforts." In addition, ITAR-TASS reports, "the work of some of Latvia's special services is being directed by the intelligence services of Scandinavian countries and in particular Sweden." (ITAR-TASS, 1103 GMT, 24 Jan 00; FBIS-SOV-2000-0124, via World News Connection)

A subsequent ITAR-TASS report concluded that more than 450 Estonians have been training in intelligence centers in the West and that "analysis of forms and methods used by the Estonian secret service makes one think that they closely interact with colleagues from Great Britain, Denmark, the United States, Germany and Sweden in intelligence efforts on Russia." (ITAR-TASS, 1923 GMT, 28 Jan 00; FBIS-SOV-2000-0128, via World News Connection) So, not only are there spies in them there Baltic states, but they're not even Baltic spies. They're varmints from the West.

The deputy chief of the Federal Security Services (FSB) Reconnaissance Service in Kaliningrad noted "the resurrection by Lithuanian secret services in the Russian enclave's border regions" had been evident since last year, and that the
Lithuanian and Polish surveillance activities can be linked with the influence of NATO and cross-Atlantic partners. (BALTIC NEWS SERVICE DAILY REPORT, 1100 GMT, 3 Feb 00)

It is unclear what reaction, if any, on the international front the Russian government expected from such reports. One doubts that Estonian Prime Minister Mart Laar's response was anywhere near what was anticipated. Noting the propaganda offensive the Russian media have been waging, Laar gleefully retorted that "I would be much more concerned if the development of such Estonia structures didn't cause headache to anyone. That would be a sign that they are no match for the opposite side." (BALTIC NEWS SERVICE DAILY REPORT, 1100 GMT, 3 Feb 00)

A cynic might attribute the motivation behind Russia's official news agency's repeated representations of the Baltic states as, essentially, three stooges of the West as either an undisguised attempt to feed the country's growing "us versus the West" rhetoric in preparation for the coronation of the now acting president, or to disarm (for domestic audiences) Western calls to stop the bombardment of Chechnya. A cynic might also ask how the Russian government obtained such facts ... if not by spying itself.

Meanwhile, as Russia proclaimed its outrage about spying in the present tense, it was less willing to discuss spying in the past tense. Last month Latvian Prime Minister Andris Skele reiterated his views of the need to publicize names of former KGB employees, sparking renewed parliamentary debate about the ways and means, advantages and disadvantages, of such a move. (BNS, 1319 GMT, 25 Jan 00; FBIS-SOV-2000-0125, via World News Connection) An unscientific poll of parliamentary factions concerning the initiative of Skele's People's Party demonstrated that the idea generates little enthusiasm, primarily because of the incompleteness and unverifiability of the files. (BALTIC NEWS SERVICE DAILY REPORT, 1400 GMT, 27 Jan 00)
Spies and Nazis and Bolsheviks -- oh my

Former KGB agents were not the only blast from the past heard in the Baltic region lately. There has also been a resurgence of hate-mongering, in the form of National Socialist and Bolshevik political parties.

While the KGB files may or may not remain closed, war crimes must be investigated, the Baltic states were told by a US official attending last month's international forum on the Holocaust in Stockholm. "It is very important for the Baltic countries to bring their war criminals to justice," US Deputy Secretary of the Treasury Stuart Eizenstat told journalists. (BALTIC NEWS SERVICE DAILY REPORT, 1400 GMT, 28 Jan 00) And Baltic leaders are listening. With the recent mobility of Konrad Kalejs, an Australian citizen of Latvian origin who is suspected of having committed war crimes as an officer in the Arajs Kommando, international attention has been increasingly focused on Baltic inability to prosecute suspected war criminals.

The Kalejs case has caused Latvia untold amount of grief, and warranted an official statement from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs which simultaneously trumpeted the country's belief in the need for international justice and laid the foundation for an alibi should such justice be unachievable: " Latvia regards crimes against humanity as crimes without a statute of limitations. Latvia is ready to prosecute persons whose guilt in the above-mentioned crimes is proved in accordance with national and international legislation. However, no one in the Republic of Latvia can today be prosecuted on the basis of suspicion and without comprehensive evidence as was often the case during the totalitarian regimes of Nazis and Soviets." (BALTIC NEWS SERVICE DAILY REPORT, 1900 GMT, 7 Jan 00) It will be surprising if a lack of evidence holds back the prosecution of Kalejs, however. The US Department of Justice has made its records accessible, and material is also provided by Australia, Canada and the United Kingdom. In addition, the director of the Jerusalem office of the Simon Wiesenthal Center,
Efraim Zuroff, reported that the center had submitted a list of seven potential witnesses, former members of the Arajs Kommando who were convicted by Soviet authorities and are living in Latvia. (BALTIC NEWS SERVICE DAILY REPORT, 1400 GMT, 3 Feb 00)

Another person charged with war crimes, Vassily Kononov, has been convicted. Kononov, the first person prosecuted for war crimes since the restoration of Latvia's independence, denied any guilt associated with the killing of civilians in the village of Mazie Bati in 1944. According to the charges, 18 Soviet partisans dressed in German army uniforms shot or burned alive all the villagers. Kononov based his plea of innocence on the belief that he had been fighting as a partisan against enemies in special circumstances: "During the war time there [is] wartime law. If you don't shoot the enemy the enemy will shoot you," he said. (BALTIC NEWS SERVICE DAILY REPORT, 1100 GMT, 17 Jan 00) The Riga District Court found Kononov guilty nonetheless, and sentenced him to six years in prison -- one-half the time requested by the prosecutor. (BALTIC NEWS SERVICE DAILY REPORT, 1900 GMT, 21 Jan 00)

Meanwhile, the current activities of two groups have been catching the attention of authorities. A search of apartments of several members belonging to members of the radical National Bolshevik party in Riga has resulted in criminal charges, although at the moment such charges are relatively minor. The group reportedly has ties with the National Bolshevik party in Russia. The case was opened over the assault of the honor and integrity of law enforcement officers, but other charges may be added, according to a spokesman for the Ministry of the Interior. (BALTIC NEWS SERVICE DAILY REPORT, 1400 GMT, 3 Feb 00)

In Lithuania, the head of the unregistered National Socialist Unity Union, Mindaugas Murza, appears to be having more luck getting near the ballot than his party is having, at least for the time being. According to media reports, Murza plans to run for a seat on the city council of Siauliai. According to the head of the
Central Electoral Commission (CEC), there are no obstacles so far for members of the party to participate in the elections through the list of another party. "We cannot decide on Murza's participation in the elections until [we] receive the documents," CEC director Zenonas Vaigauskas said. (BALTIC NEWS SERVICE DAILY REPORT, 1400 GMT, 28 Jan 00) Moreover, while the Lithuanian Ministry of Justice repeatedly has rejected the National Socialist Union's requests to be registered as a political party, the Supreme Administrative Court ruled earlier this month that the ministry must consider the Union's charter and registration application once more. (INTERFAX, 1413 GMT, 5 Feb 00; FBIS-SOV-2000-0205, via World News Connection)