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Russian Federation: Executive Branch

By Susan Cavan

Putin's victory

While the Central Electoral Commission (CEC) has yet to release the final figures, it is generally accepted that Vladimir Putin has won Russia's presidency in the first round of voting, with nearly 53% of the vote. While some analysts have raised questions of voting fraud (see, for example, Pavel Felgenhauer on the results from Chechnya and Ingushetia in THE MOSCOW TIMES, 30 Mar 00), the sense of inevitability that has surrounded Putin's presidential quest since Yel'tsin's resignation has served to mute the criticism.

Putin, who, with the possible exception of his jet fighter flight into Chechnya, waged a remarkably low-key campaign, was similarly modest in his post-election comments. He urged people not to expect "miracles" from his presidency and, with a nod to the Communist voters, he promised to consult with the Duma on important issues. (AGENCE FRANCE PRESSE, 27 Mar 00; via lexis-nexis) He further suggested that members of different parties could join his new government, as long as they shared his views. He later clarified these remarks and distanced himself from the idea of forming a coalition government.

A month's wait

Putin's inauguration, which constitutionally must be held within 30 days of the CEC's publication of the final election results, is set for early May, at which time Putin plans to unveil his new government and administration. With the election finally secured, speculation over Putin's next moves is running rampant through the media. Putin himself has highlighted economic policy, urging the speedy
completion of his policy team's draft economic program and pinpointing tax reform and collection as central issues.

While the composition of the government will not change until after the inauguration, Putin held a "cabinet session" with a few select ministers and advisers on 30 March. Included in the meeting were First Deputy Prime Minister Mikhail Kasyanov, Deputy Finance Minister Alexei Kudrin, Government Apparat Chief Dmitri Kozak, and State Property Committee Deputy Minister German Gref. While the full government held its regular meeting the same day, the above group is now considered the new cabinet. (KOMMERSANT DAILY, 31 Mar 00; Russian Press Digest, via lexis-nexis)

Putin has also selected a working group to "co-ordinate the law-making activities of the Administration and the Government." (SEGODNYA, 31 Mar 00; Russian Press Digest, via lexis-nexis) This group includes Kremlin Chief of Staff Aleksandr Voloshin, as well as Kasyanov, Kudrin and Gref. The results of their work may prove quite revealing of the nature of Putin's presidency. Their work is twofold: They are both to sort out relations among the three branches of government and to delineate tasks between the Kremlin and the government. Given the current composition of the Duma, it is likely that this team's specific goal will be to set up consultative and coordinative lines of communication in order to eliminate needless conflicts.

Cleaning up the overlap and dualities between the Kremlin and government apparats may be the more daunting task. After years of working with an only sporadically engaged president, the Kremlin has, at times, become bloated due to attempts to control directly as many aspects of policy as possible. At other times, stronger hands in the government have asserted authority without Kremlin consultation. Putin's declared desire to create a "strong state" suggests that he will move to strengthen Kremlin oversight of government functions. If he chooses to take a page from Chubais' playbook, that would indicate streamlining the
Kremlin apparat with preference in staffing to loyalists and trusted friends. The same would be necessary in the government apparatus. Putin will enjoy an advantage in this which Chubais, in 1996, could not employ, in that Putin selects the prime minister. He will need to choose someone who will not interfere when Putin staffs the government's apparat with his own men. With tight control of the administrative end of both the Kremlin and government work, Putin is more likely to be able to prevent the issuance of "sweetheart deal" decrees to oligarchs and perhaps curb some of the rampant corruption. If that is really his plan.

On favorites
While it is clear through some of his choices thus far that Putin has named a few close advisers already, it is yet unclear how close they will be to him next month. In the case of German Gref, for example, he appears to have become part of Putin's inner circle. As head of the Strategic Research Center, he claims to be composing a program for Russia's long-term development for the president. He has certainly become very high-profile lately. There are, however, other policy groups formulating programs for the president, and there is no guarantee that Putin will follow anyone's proposal. Gref himself has said of his work at the center, "we have a patron (Putin) and we are just trying to figure out what this patron wants." (THE MOSCOW TIMES, 2 Mar 00; via lexis-nexis)

Gref also seems to leave a less than stellar impression on observers. After attending a conference presentation given by Gref, Pavel Felgenhauer described his remarks as "irrationally unspecific." (Of course, there are times the same could be said of the new president.) Boris Berezovsky, when prompted by an interviewer to comment on Gref, described him as a "weak person," who "doesn't understand basic issues." (THE MOSCOW TIMES, 25 Mar 00; via lexis-nexis)

Berezovsky's interview managed to muddy the waters on presidential favorites by, among other things, suggesting that Putin's remarks about fighting the oligarchs were just a typical politician choosing the right words "for the voters."
While on the one hand dismissing the separation of the oligarchs from power as something that "will never happen," Berezovsky did hint darkly that Vladimir Gusinsky's Media-MOST group may be headed for trouble. MOST group's media holdings include part of NTV, which has been operating comparatively freer from state control than Russia's other outlets (and that's faint praise). It has also been supportive of Moscow Mayor Luzhkov and Former Prime Minister Primakov, a stance Berezovsky clearly deemed foolish. Not that MOST would cease to exist after the election, "but there will be some redistribution of property, they have debts, some big ones..." (Ellipses in original.) (MOSCOW TIMES, 25 Mar 00; via lexis-nexis)

SECURITY SERVICES
Is Yavlinsky covered?
Both the Federal Security Services and the Ministry for Internal Affairs claimed oversight of electoral coverage in order to crack down on dirty campaign tricks. In the days leading up to the election, ORT TV ran reports claiming Yavlinsky's campaign was funded by foreign money, that some of his supporters (specifically Gusinsky) were Israeli citizens, and ran a seemingly staged press conference of a gay rights group declaring its support for Yavlinsky. Shame on Berezovsky's ORT for running the reports and shame on any citizens who may have been swayed by them. Do these tactics, or any of the other media attacks on Yavlinsky, rise to the level of dirty tricks? Is the FSB or the MVD investigating?

Russian Federation: Foreign Relations
By Chandler Rosenberger and Sarah Miller

Welcome to the club
Why should the Russians take democracy seriously when no Western leader does? In their rush to congratulate Vladimir Putin on winning the Russian elections, presidents and prime ministers decided not to wait for an assessment
of the polls' fairness, despite the narrowness of the margin and credible warnings of voter fraud. (INTERFAX, 1317 GMT, 24 Mar 00; FBIS-SOV-2000-0324, via World News Connection) Apparently all believed, for example, that Putin's large majority in Chechnya reflected the true sentiments of the population he had bombed. Luckily their consciences were untroubled by international observers, who once again cheerfully attested to the Russians' ability to open polling stations and count slips of paper. Yes, the OSCE admitted, there had been some bias in major media outlets before the poll, but it had not affected the outcome. (INTERFAX, 1115 GMT, 27 Mar 00; FBIS-SOV-2000-0327, via World News Connection) Not even by three percent -- the margin of Putin's majority?

American officials greeted Putin's victory with a familiar "wait-and-see" tone, implying either that seven months of brutality in Chechnya was not much to see, or that it was not the kind of thing that concerned them. European leaders added their dear hope that the man who launched the Chechen war would somehow be the best person to end it, but had apparently used up their annual allotment of outrage just after the Austrian vote. "Where," asked one French commentator, "is the Europe that mobilized against Milosevic and Haider in the name of human rights? Can it, should it continue to cajole and finance a Russia that turns its back on it more each day?" (LE MONDE, 19 Mar 00; FBIS-WEU-2000-0321, via World News Connection)

**Consolidating society: strength through peace**

On 24 March, shortly before his election, Putin led his cabinet to sign off on a new foreign policy doctrine that seemed to be the work of a man for whom one might well overlook some electoral niceties. The new foreign policy would be marked by its "realism," Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov said. "Our policy is based on succession, predictability and mutually beneficial pragmatism. Russia will remain an important stabilizing factor of international relations." (ITAR-TASS, 28 Mar 00; via lexis-nexis)
The few details that emerged hinted at a document formed in the image of Putin's life experience. Discipline matters: Foreign policy will be led by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, with less freelancing from the military and trade delegations. Economics matter: Russian foreign policy will promote Russia's economic interests vigorously against barriers such as Western anti-dumping laws and restrictions such as political demands attached to Western loans.

(ROSSIYSKAYA GAZETA, 16 Mar 00; FBIS-SOV-2000-0316, via World News Connection)

Most importantly -- Russia matters. The doctrine appears finally to put to rest the common notion that Putin has two contradictory natures, the democrat of the St. Petersburg reforms and the tough nationalist of loyal KGB service. Putin seems to want Russia's embassies, intelligence agencies, defense attaches -- even its cultural ministries -- to help consolidate domestic life around re-invigorating the country so that it can stand taller in the world.

To introduce the rigors of competition to the market at home, Putin the Saint Petersburg reformer will promote Russia's integration in the international economy. To gain new prosperity and strength for Russia, Putin the former spy and apparatchik will put every state agency to work. Speaking with reporters after the 24 March meeting, Security Council Secretary Sergei Ivanov said that the "views and interests" of the Russian power departments, including the Foreign Intelligence Service, "found reflection" in the new doctrine. Participants at the meeting, he said, believed the doctrine "must take into account not only the national security interests but also Russia's national interests, including in the economic field." (ITAR-TASS, 24 Mar 00; via lexis-nexis)

Call it "velvet mobilization." Putin appears to be putting Russia on a war footing without threatening any war. Such a Russia, however, will confound the determinists who imagine that economic "reform" leads straight to good behavior abroad. Even before the new self-strengthening campaign was underway, Putin
promised that "Russia will be more attentively, judiciously and insistently standing up for the interests of its citizens -- both those who reside in Russia and those who have opted to settle down in the CIS countries, the Baltic States or the distant abroad." (BALTIC NEWS SERVICE, 24 Mar 00; via lexis-nexis) Putin's vision may be "realistic" and peaceful for now, but the Russian state he imagines is a powerful force for defending the interests of an ethnic nation scattered far afield and supposedly downtrodden -- not, history suggests, a recipe for perpetual peace.

**Speaking with one voice**

The complexities of Kosovo show why Russia feels the need to consolidate its international affairs back under the foreign ministry's control. Several elements of Russian political life, such as the Duma's committee on foreign affairs and the international department of the military -- lean to extreme support for Yugoslavia and deep paranoia about NATO's intentions. In greeting the first anniversary of NATO's campaign in Kosovo, the foreign ministry showed a far more subtle touch -- one more likely to promote Russia's standing as the Kosovo operation collapses.

Perhaps in recognition of his abilities, Ivanov appears to have been given complete authority over all relations dealing with Kosovo -- even military relations with NATO. Ivanov chaired a committee preparing the resumption of the Russia-NATO Permanent Joint Council (ITAR-TASS, 1209 GMT, 17 Mar 00; FBIS-SOV-2000-0317, via World News Connection) on March 17, and seems to be in complete control of all decisions governing Russian involvement with the alliance's peacekeeping forces. Russia, Ivanov has said, will be closely involved in deterring a new outbreak of violence between the Yugoslav military and the NATO alliance, and would not, despite rumors, withdraw its 3,600 troops from KFOR. Ivanov refused, however, to commit Russian police forces to UN patrols.
More in sorrow than in anger, Ivanov has used the obvious failures of the Kosovo mission to diminish the West's authority, regardless of its military prowess, in handling matters of ethnic conflict. Kosovo has proven the perfect foil to Western complaints about Chechnya. This may explain why, despite a constant drumbeat of criticism from international organizations such as the UNHCR and the European Union, Russia has been spared the wrath of elected officials, such as Britain's Tony Blair and America's Bill Clinton, who are publicly identified with the Kosovo operation.

But watching quietly as the West fails in Kosovo also promotes Russia's long-term goals. For a Russia newly committed to the fate of its compatriots aboard, Kosovo is providing a cautionary tale of the sorrows of intervention in another country's interethnic affairs. It is a tale Ivanov is more than pleased to tell.

'New realism' in Russian foreign policy, but no real policy change
The Russian Security Council may have approved the draft of a new foreign policy doctrine on 24 March, but there is little to suggest that major foreign policy change is in the works. According to Russian Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov, the "newness to Russia's foreign political concept is, primarily, its realism." (ITAR-TASS, 28 Mar 00; via lexis-nexis) Despite Ivanov's vague terms, apparently there is at least one area that might receive greater emphasis in the new doctrine: promotion of Russian economic interests abroad. In fact, Ivanov himself hinted that the foreign ministry in particular should play a larger role in promoting Russia's economic interests. (RFE/RL NEWSLINE, 27 Mar 00)

Russia's foreign policy vagueness has prompted some uneasiness in Asian countries, which have been carefully observing Russia's foreign policy direction under President-elect Vladimir Putin. Despite reassurances by top Russian officials, Japanese newspapers elicited a chorus of requests for the Russian president to clarify his foreign policy. (AGENCE FRANCE PRESSE, 27 Mar 00; via lexis-nexis) For Japan, which has been trying to arrange another Russo-
Japanese summit since Yel'tsin canceled last Fall's meeting, a change in Russia's foreign policy on certain key issues like the peace treaty could be of domestic political advantage. Thus far, however, Putin appears only willing to rely on Japan for economic advice and assistance. The economic realm is the one area in which Putin has kept up relations with Japan since his appointment, sending various Russian economic officials to Tokyo. So far, this seems to have worked; concurrent with last week's visit by Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Mikhail Kasyanov and Emissary to the G-7 Alexander Livshits, the Japanese government released another $100 million tranche of its $1.6 billion loan. As long as much-coveted economic cooperation is not hindered, Putin will continue to show no interest in changing Russia's stance on the issues that the Japanese would really like to see resolved, such as the Kurile Islands. Indeed, according to Deputy Foreign Minister Grigory Karasin, although Russia is conducting ongoing negotiations on the peace treaty issue, "Moscow won't relinquish its principle of territorial integrity in drafting [it]." (INTERFAX, 1036 GMT, 23 Mar 00; FBIS-EAS-2000-0323, via World News Connection) Hence, Russia will take all it can get without giving up its strategic interests in the region.

Beyond Japan, with which relations have been strained for some time, Russia even has issued reassurances to China, with which it has been vigorously increasing political and economic ties. However, this time Defense Minister Sergeev did the reassuring, telling his Chinese counterpart Chi Haotian that there would be no major changes in Moscow's relations with China. (AGENCE FRANCE PRESSE, 30 Mar 00; via RussiaToday.com) For China, the possibility of a Russian rapprochement with the West that would eclipse the growing Russo-Chinese "strategic cooperative partnership" is the main concern. But, Russia's new emphasis on expanding economic interests suggests that even if Putin builds a more cordial relationship with the West, China will still be an important avenue for economic expansion.
Russian Federation: Media
By Jonathan Solomon

A tale of two oligarchs: the one with power (for now)...
In Russian politics, two weeks is an eternity. Prior to the presidential election, Putin stated that one of his first initiatives in office would be to start limiting the political influence of the oligarchs. The press ministry’s 29 February announcement that the broadcast license of Boris Berezovsky's ORT network would not be renewed and would be put up for tender in May seemed ominous. So did an implied reference to Berezovsky by Rossiyskaya gazeta in a 2 March article on "black" propaganda as practiced in both the election and the Russian corporate world. (See THE NIS OBSERVED, 21 Mar 00)

But Berezovsky did not seem the least perturbed by this posturing. On 25 March, editors from Vedomosti, the Russian-language sister paper of the Moscow Times, printed an exclusive interview with the oligarch. When he was asked if he believed that Putin would try to force him and the other oligarchs from power, Berezovsky answered that Putin was being "very pragmatic, just like a regular politician." He went on to intimate that, although Putin had said that the oligarchs' influence should be reduced, the whole claim was merely "campaign promises." "This is normal, it's absolutely right," noted Berezovsky. "Only, it will never happen. But his words are right. For the voters." (MOSCOW TIMES, 25 Mar 00; via www.themoscowtimes.com)

Berezovsky seems convinced that Putin's threat against the oligarchs is all bluster. Why? There are a few possibilities. One is that, just prior to the election, it became clear that Putin would not win as clear a mandate from the people of Russia as he might have hoped. The fact that he only won a little more than 52% of the vote, as well as the strong showing by Gennady Zyuganov, demonstrates that he has not yet consolidated power, and that he lacks the political strength to excise the "cancerous" oligarchs.
Another is that Putin may have no intention of fully attacking the oligarchs, or at least not all of them. Putin's claim to fame is the popular Chechen adventure, but as that conflict descends into guerrilla warfare and Russian casualties rise, to stay in power he may need the backing of Berezovsky and the other "first-tier" oligarchs. In this situation, Putin would be allowed to make it appear that he was fighting the oligarchs little by little. He would probably take small actions, such as placing ORT's license up for tender, for his own public relations image. But, he might not mobilize directly against them. No doubt, one of Berezovsky's many holdings could buy back the ORT license, and he would thus take no damage. It would be a symbolic, yet fake, war on the oligarchs.

The most likely possibility is a synthesis of the other two. Putin is a man who seems to consider himself loyal to only a handful of persons. The recently deceased former mayor of St. Petersburg, Anatoly Sobchak, was one of them. Sobchak had been one of Putin's professors at Leningrad State University, and later brought Putin into politics when, as chairman of the city council, he hired the former KGB officer as an aide. Sobchak lost his 1996 re-election attempt amidst a series of corruption investigations, but shortly after Putin became prime minister in 1999, all charges against his mentor were dropped. (MOSCOW TIMES, 21 Feb 00; via www.themoscowtimes.com) By his own admission, Berezovsky lacks that kind of personal relationship with Putin.

Putin's intelligence background also suggests that he knows a thing or two about covert warfare, political or otherwise. Comments made by Berezovsky in the interview as to how Putin made a name for himself in early 1999 in the Yeltsin administration suggest these skills. "At that time there was a real conflict between him and Primakov, who had convinced Yeltsin to fire Putin from his FSB post. Back then, the presidential administration simply saw him as someone who wouldn't go anywhere, but would just hold on tight to his own position," stated Berezovsky. (MOSCOW TIMES, 25 Mar 00; via www.themoscowtimes.com)
Needless to say, Putin was never fired, but Primakov lost his job only months later. What is remarkable is how long the two apparently have been feuding, and the extremely rapid rise of Putin contrasted with the equally rapid fall of Primakov.

What seems likely, then, is that Putin will make every effort to consolidate power while stringing along the oligarchs. He will make them think that he needs them, and will take the "token actions" against them that they expect. He will be patient. But the moment that he sees an opening and feels that he has the power, Berezovsky and those like him will be put under a crippling attack. "Some particularly well-known oligarchs will have to be dealt with in a special way," said unnamed Kremlin sources to Interfax on 28 March. (INTERFAX, 1535 GMT, 28 Mar 00; FBIS-SOV-2000-0328, via World News Connection) Is that a former FSB director's "special way"? Sounds intriguing.

Putin seems to know how to play the "sleeping dog" well, if Berezovsky's comments are any indication. How long we will have to wait to see if this is true is another story entirely, but the political seasons in Moscow change a lot more often than the weather.

...And the one on the verge of losing it

What is certain is that Putin will be able to claim that he excised one oligarch in the near future. Vladimir Gusinsky's Media-MOST empire is under assault from virtually all directions. In his interview, Berezovsky grimly predicted that after Putin is elected, "MOST will be around. But there will be some redistribution of its property, they have debts, some big ones..." (MOSCOW TIMES, 25 Mar 00; via www.themoscowtimes.com)

NTV is MOST's flagship holding. MOST has also invested in Novaya gazeta in the past, and MOST Bank handles Obshchaya gazeta's accounts. (RFE/RL: RUSSIAN MEDIA EMPIRES V REPORT; via
These three outlets have been among the most critical in recent times of the Putin administration and the Chechen war. On top of that, Novaya gazeta has been investigating, among other things, the Ryazan "terrorist bomb drill," Putin's possible ties to corruption, and the sources of Yeltsin's 1996 and Putin's 2000 campaign funds.

Little wonder then that the FSB allegedly tried to coerce an NTV personality to act as a mole within the network. Or that Novaya gazeta's internal computer server was hacked on 15 March and two issues' layouts were destroyed. (See THE NIS OBSERVED, 21 Mar 00) In addition to the computer hack, according to Novaya gazeta's deputy editor Yuri Shchekochikhin, the paper's offices had been burglarized and a computer with the list of advertisers had been stolen the previous week. He claimed that, since then, a number of advertisers had voided their contracts with the paper. This was in addition to the four tax audits conducted on the paper in the last two years alone. (FINANCIAL TIMES, World News-Europe, 17 Mar 00; via lexis-nexis)

NTV has had rough times this year in its own right. The natural gas monopoly Gazprom had owned roughly 30% of NTV's stock since 1996, and in late 1999 announced that it was attempting to buy up another 13% or so of NTV's shares. Yet, until recently, the giant remained quiet with regards to its views on NTV's editorial policies. On 15 February, however, Gazprom chairman Rem Vyakhirev stung NTV with a sharp rebuke for its coverage of Chechnya. "As the head of Gazprom and as a citizen," he said, "I do not consider the position of NTV leadership on the Chechnya problem entirely correct." He went on to suggest that highlighting "negative aspects" of the government's war against the "bandits" was "simply inappropriate." These "negative aspects" include reports on federal troop and civilian casualties, as well as the refugee crisis. They gave Gazprom pause to review its media investments within the framework of the company's interests, "which obviously cannot contradict the interests of the state," said Vyakhirev. (MOSCOW TIMES, 15 Feb 00; via www.themoscowtimes.com)
The pressure this implicitly placed on NTV to "get with the Kremlin's program or else" should not be underestimated. Consider how last Fall, as NTV gave air to opponents of the Unity bloc in the Duma elections, the state-run Vneshekonombank called in the $42.2 million NTV owed. Then, on 17 February of this year, the Supreme Arbitration Court decided to uphold the antimonopoly ministry's intention to force NTV to pay dues retroactively for the use of state broadcasting assets. Yel'tsin had decreed in 1998 that the network was vital to democracy in Russia, and thus it should have the same broadcast facility-use discounts as state-run ORT and RTR. But in the spring of 1999, the ministry charged that NTV had been paying those rates since 1996 in violation of "fair competition laws." With the court decision, NTV could be forced to pay millions in back dues, and at any time Putin can revoke the Yel'tsin decree, which currently saves NTV $13 million annually. (MOSCOW TIMES, 19 Feb 00; via www.moscowtimes.ru) Gusinsky could not afford to keep NTV running much longer should Gazprom threaten to sell off its shares, the retroactive debt be called in, and the special decree be revoked.

Recently, ORT opened up a full barrage against NTV and Gusinsky just before the presidential election to boot. Gusinsky and NTV backed YABLOKO candidate Grigory Yavlinsky in the campaign. So, in addition to its "relentlessly positive" coverage of Putin, on the evening of 23 March ORT painted Yavlinsky as "the candidate of gays and foreigners," while it played upon lingering anti-Semitic attitudes in society by calling "NTV as a channel dangerous in that it was run by a Jew, Gusinsky." (MOSCOW TIMES, 30 Mar 00; www.themoscowtimes.ru) Its reports suggested that Gusinsky was directly bankrolling Yavlinsky, as were other prominent Russian and Israeli Jewish businessmen. Shots of Gusinsky at a banquet with Hasidic Jews were shown. (INTERNATIONAL HERALD TRIBUNE, 25 Mar 00; via lexis-nexis)
It is clear that Gusinsky and MOST are in the Kremlin's crosshairs, and they know it. Rather than openly contesting these turns of events, NTV's general director and co-owner, Yevgeny Kiselev, cited Putin's backing of free speech on the Itogi news program on 12 February, and begged him to treat state and private networks equally. (MOSCOW TIMES, 19 Feb 00; via www.moscowtimes.ru) Putin has the upper hand with regards to Gusinsky and MOST, and NTV continues to broadcast at the president-elect's pleasure. It is unlikely that MOST will change its coverage to pacify the Kremlin. So, when Putin has had enough, the other shoe will drop and that will be it for Gusinsky. His holdings will be divided up, but he will likely be allowed to leave the country should he so desire. It is only a matter of time.

The Chechens get TV!
And lastly, on a lighter note, Putin's spokesman on Chechnya, Sergei Yastrzhembsky, was proud to announce on 22 March that persons in the region's mountainous areas can now receive RTR, thanks to a new transmitter in Gudermes. (ITAR-TASS, 1706 GMT, 22 Mar 00; FBIS-SOV-2000-0322, via World News Connection) Don't you wonder how lucky they must feel?

Russian Federation: Domestic Issues and Legislative Branch
By Michael Thurman

JUDICIARY
Putin discusses independence of the country's courts
In a meeting with Vyacheslav Lebedev, chairman of the Supreme Court of the Federation, Putin said that the court system should be financed exclusively from federal sources. He voiced concern that the independence of the nation's courts could possibly be compromised if judges, clerks and administrative staff had to
Putin is correct in his concern over the independence of the Russian court system, but the problem lies closer to home. The threat to judicial independence comes from the executive branch's routine flouting of court rulings, manipulation of judicial appointments, and other machinations which leave the legitimacy of the whole constitutional arrangement open to question. Of course judges need to be paid, but so do soldiers, teachers, and other public servants. The re-centralization of authority and control is no panacea, even in the face of perceived chaos and the expansion of regional power. Putin forgets why the regions were forced almost overnight to pick up the tab for the federal employees stationed on their respective territories -- Moscow ceased to do so. A better approach to ensuring judicial independence is vigorous enforcement of the country's laws, something the federal prosecutor's office has been prevented from doing since the day it launched an investigation into possible kickback arrangements between the Yel'tsin "Family" and a Swiss construction firm a year ago. Until the law is respected, it does not matter much who writes the checks for the judges' salaries.

REGIONS
Vladivostok Duma by-election invalidated
Vladivostok electoral politics is probably the most rough-and-tumble in the federation today. It was not until December 1999 that the city finally passed a charter thereby bringing it into accordance with every other city in the country. But the struggle continues. The regional election commission has recently invalidated the apparent electoral victory of former Vladivostok Mayor Viktor Cherepkov, who received a plurality of the vote with 27 percent. The reason for the commission's decision is its claim that the Primory district court had ruled two days before the 26 March elections that the registration of another candidate, Orysyta Bondarenko, had been improperly revoked. This, so argued the
commission, invalidated the electoral results and Cherepkov's victory. The relevant documents have been submitted to the Central Election Commission in Moscow for a final decision; whatever the outcome, no doubt there will be an appeal. (ITAR-TASS, 0635 GMT, 30 Mar 00; FBIS-SOV-2000-0330, via World News Connection)

**Putin speaks to Union of Russian Cities**
At the 21 March meeting in Novosibirsk, Putin spoke to the Union of Russian Cities of the need to coordinate the actions of municipal authorities to benefit the entire population. He also spoke disapprovingly of the municipal authorities' tendency to ignore or pass local laws contrary to federal law. Most tellingly, however, was Putin's oblique reference to the often strained relations between the regions' governors and mayors. Putin seemed to suggest a federal/municipal alliance to limit the power of the governors. (ROSSIYSKAYA GAZETA, 21 Mar 00; FBIS-SOV-2000-0324, via World News Connection)

This speech was given only a week before the presidential elections, so it is hard to know how much of the speech was about policy and how much about election season promises. The answer will come in the actions of the new Putin administration.

**Russian Federation: Armed Forces**

**Russian information warfare, Soviet style**
Russian President-elect Vladimir Putin called for an increased emphasis on information science in the military-industrial sector on 21 March at an all-Russia conference of defense and agrarian workers. Putin stated Russia has been lagging behind other countries in this field since the Cold War, and that lagging behind in the information field might result in backwardness in "everything else."
Putin's concerns are justified since the information age will have a profound impact in economics, politics, society, and particularly military affairs.

Russia's latest national security concept, published 14 January, lists Russian information resources as a national interest. Specifics include the development of modern telecommunications, protection of the state's information resources from unsanctioned access, and the problems of Russia's weakened potential in this field and dependence upon foreign technology, which undermine Russia's ability to defend itself. In addition to worries about NATO expansion, the document notes, Russia is also very concerned about the desire of a number of countries to dominate the global information sphere and expel Russia from the external and internal information market. (NEZAVISIMOYE VOENNOYE OBOZRENIYE, 14 Jan 00; via Johnson's Russia List) Russia's draft military doctrine also addresses information warfare, listing it as an external and internal threat to the government, economy, and military. The document even acknowledges that information warfare will constitute a basic general feature of modern war. Specific Russian applications of information warfare are "information preparation (information blockade, expansion, aggression) and the confusion of public opinion of certain states and of the world community as a whole." (KRASNAYA ZVEZDA, 9 Oct 99; via lexis-nexis)

Military analysts at the US Foreign Military Studies Office have researched Russian views on information-based warfare extensively. For Russia, information warfare is conducted in peacetime and wartime. This is a significant departure from the US view which currently confines information warfare to periods of crisis or conflict. One reason for this departure is the fact that the Russian state, economy, and society are in transition resulting from institutional and philosophical instability; therefore, Russian citizens are vulnerable to unscrupulous promises of economic and social prosperity. Traditional Russian military thinking has also developed differently from the West due to geographical
considerations, varied military threats, and an emphasis placed on the study of military affairs as a science. In wartime, information warfare refers to the attainment of superiority in the use of information protection and suppression systems, to include command and control, electronic warfare, and reconnaissance. (CALL PUBLICATION No. 98-21; Foreign Military Studies Office)

The Soviet Union was very adept at peacetime information warfare, specifically the practice of information manipulation and perception management. This practice rose in prominence during the war in Chechnya, where Russia imposed strict news media controls on their "anti-terrorist operation." (NIS OBSERVED, 29 Feb and 21 Mar 00) Journalists arriving in the Northern Caucasus had to seek accreditation from the press center of the armed forces, technically an illegal requirement since neither a state of war nor emergency had been declared. The military was given the right to brand journalists as either "desirable" or "undesirable," depending on if their work supported the government's official position. Government-controlled television and radio stations graphically highlighted alleged Chechen atrocities, repeated the military's understated casualty rates, and squashed efforts by independent news media to provide objective coverage. The refugees' plight and destruction of "liberated" Grozny due to Russia's scorched earth tactics were relegated to the back pages. (PERSPECTIVE, March-April 2000) As a result, Russian public support for the war remained solid. Military personnel fighting the Chechens believed they were patriots, and any Russian who protested the operation was considered a traitor. Although Russia waged a successful information operations campaign on the homefront, information warfare on the battlefield was less successful.

Russia's backwardness in intelligence gathering and dissemination contributed to the Russian army's inability to counter the Chechen's hit-and-run tactics. Early in the war, Col. Gen. Vladimir Yakovlev, who has responsibility for Russia's satellites, boasted the satellite fleet was operating in the interest of the federal
troops. Independent analysts disputed this claim, stating the troops could not make use of the one optical intelligence satellite which was believed to fly over Chechnya once per day. Although the data were useful in identifying Chechen vehicles, the data was out of date when it arrived in the troops hands. Federal troops did not have the capability to download satellite data instantly, therefore, the mobile Chechen targets had plenty of time to move to a new location. The military only used the data to destroy fixed targets such as bridges and buildings, alienating the local population which Russian forces were sent to "liberate." (DEFENSE NEWS, 13 Dec 99) In this aspect of information warfare -- the ability to move data rapidly from sensor to shooter within an agile enemy's decision cycle -- the Russian military was deficient.

Despite their present deficiencies in the information sphere, Russian thinkers and strategists have devoted considerable energy to information warfare, and it is apparent they clearly understand its utility in conflict. The problem is, can Russia's generals reorganize their armed forces to take full advantage of the information age and counter future adversaries employing guerrilla tactics? Despite two bloody battles for Grozny, Russian generals are still wed to a clumsy command structure leading large troop and armored formations into battle. These battles include massive air and artillery bombardments using battle plans approved by superiors well in advance. This doctrine prevents the Russian army from seizing the initiative and more efficiently attacking the Chechens at their weakest moments. A smaller, better trained, more professional army is required to counter guerrilla warfare. (PERSPECTIVE, March-April 00) Russian generals still dream of major conflicts between nation-states (such as World War II and Desert Storm) which are becoming less common. In the near future, Russia's more probable scenarios will involve stopping ethnic conflict in border regions where adversaries are likely to employ guerrilla tactics.

The onset of the information age marginalizes the utility of large conscript armies and formations of tanks, aircraft, and ships. Capabilities of individual platforms
are becoming less relevant. It is increasingly more important to "network" military platforms together and increase the forces' combat power, enabling them to strike an adversary quickly at his weakest point versus battling toe to toe. In the near future, Russia may watch the West's trial and error with first generation information age technology. Forced by necessity, a gradual change in culture and organization of the Russian military may enable Moscow to seize other advantages of information warfare in the future.

Sergeev is retained ... at least for the time being

Despite much speculation over the "almost certain" replacement of Defense Minister Marshal Igor D. Sergeev, President-elect Vladimir Putin has once again shown his elusive personality and announced his intention to keep Sergeev in his current position. Following on the heels of the presidential election, Putin announced on 28 March that he was extending Sergeev's term as defense minister for another year. (INTERFAX, 1201 GMT, 28 Mar 00; FBIS-SOV-2000-0328, via World News Connection) This latest term is Sergeev's third as defense minister. He was appointed in 1997 and served two previous one-year terms under former President Boris Yel'tsin. Sergeev will be 62 on 20 April.

The Sergeev announcement was Putin's first major personnel declaration following presidential elections, and came as something of a surprise. Many in and outside Russia believed that Putin would move quickly to replace Sergeev. The two most likely candidates for the defense minister position had been the present chairman of the Duma's defense committee, General Andrei Nikolaev, and the current chief of the General Staff, General Anatoly Kvashnin. (THE NIS OBSERVED, 15 Feb 00) Sergeev has been seen as a passive defense chief at a time when the need for aggressive leadership is clear both in terms of much-needed military reform and the present war in Chechnya.

Issues of military reform and the success of Russian forces in Chechnya are high-profile issues for Putin. Much of his success to date has been tied to the
"success" of military operations in Chechnya and his open courting of the armed forces. This courting in turn hinges heavily on his ability to move forward on long-standing cries for extensive Russian military reforms. For these reasons, Putin's justification for keeping Sergeev on the payroll is not clear. It became even murkier with the 28 March announcement by Putin's press secretary, Aleksei Gromov, that Putin actually made his decision "some time ago" to extend Sergeev's term as defense minister. (INTERFAIX, 1201 GMT, 28 Mar 00; FBIS-SOV-2000-0328, via World News Connection) -- apparently while rumors of Sergeev's replacement were at their height.

So why did Putin keep Sergeev on? One guess is that Putin's decision is a calculated move to give the Russian public the impression that he is satisfied with the present operations in Chechnya, that everything is going according to plan. (THE NEW YORK TIMES, 29 Mar 00) This may persuade the general public. Putin's announcement also rewards Marshal Sergeev for his solid support and maintains the defense status quo, throwing water on any potential power plays and instability within the defense ministry based on anticipated leadership changes. Keeping the armed forces pacified is critical to Putin as he places more of his focus on resurrecting the Russian economy and other domestic issues.

If this is, in fact, Putin's game plan, then he is playing a very volatile game that could very easily blow up in his face. It is clear from media coverage that the war in Chechnya is bogged down. There is no clear ending to the conflict, no "glorious Russian victory" any time in the near future. There are only back-and-forth reports of Russian advances, followed by reports of Russian withdrawals and setbacks. Add to these items growing Russian casualties and the overall impact eventually will be to crack what has been overwhelming Russian public support for Putin, especially in the absence of any positive actions on the economic front.
Very few analysts believe Sergeev will serve his full term. More likely, Putin's retention of Sergeev is a prevarication: pacifying the public and the military while putting difficult and costly reform issues on the back burner. This, coupled with regular pronouncements of support for the military and hints at change, will keep the military on the hook. It also holds Sergeev in place as a possible scapegoat for future failures regarding military reform and Chechnya while Putin, playing to the larger public audience, tackles more pressing plans for the economy and other domestic issues.

In the meantime ... the military votes

Not surprisingly, the military voted heavily in the recent presidential elections. Ninety-seven percent of Russia's 1.2 million troops went to the ballot boxes, or in the case of Chechnya, the ballot box went to them.

- 83% of servicemen in Kamchatka voted
- 78% of servicemen in Sakhalin voted
- 84% of servicemen in the Kuriles voted
- 91% of servicemen in the Pacific Fleet voted
- 98% of servicemen in Chechnya voted

According to Major General Nikolai Burbyga, director of the defense ministry's education department, voting was overwhelming for Vladimir Putin... no real surprise.

- 81% of servicemen deployed to Chechnya voted for Putin
- 80% of servicemen outside of Russia voted for Putin
-- 87.3% of peacekeepers assigned to Bosnia and Herzegovina voted for Putin
-- 86% of sailors assigned to the Black Sea Fleet in Sevastopol voted for Putin

The remaining small percentage of military votes was divided between other presidential candidates: Vladimir Zhirinovsky, Grigory Yavlinsky, and Gennady Zyuganov.
In Chechnya, polling stations and mobile ballot boxes were established at sites of deployed military units. According to Lt Gen Vladimir Kozhemyakin, "The ballot boxes (were) brought directly to areas of military missions, such as block posts, guard units, and other places where military personnel cannot go to polling stations. Further, in cases where ballot boxes could not be transported by air, then they were delivered by ground transport vehicles accompanied by a military convoy. (ITAR-TASS, 0857 GMT, 24 Mar 00; FBIS-SOV-2000-0324, via World News Connection). And if anyone should worry that that this aggressive program to get out the military vote could have been tainted, armed forces representative Kozhemyakin assured all that there were no violations in the organization of the polls and absolute compliance with voting laws and regulations.

Newly Independent States: CIS

By Sarah Miller

Russia, streamlined GUUAM maintain security differences

At the mid-March meeting of eight CIS defense ministers in Moscow, Russia showed that it is not going to abandon its designs to dominate "counter-terrorism" plans for the CIS. In an apparent attempt to clear up some of the questions that last month's CIS heads of state meeting raised about FSB units possibly being stationed on CIS soil, the Russian government sent its FSB director, Nikolai Patrushev, to join the defense ministers. Although Patrushev clarified the mission of the Antiterrorism Center, which will "gather and analyze information on international terrorism," he made no reference to the Antiterrorism Program that might include participation by FSB special units. Instead, the FSB director only
stressed that the center will not have "strong-arm functions." (ITAR-TASS, 1058 GMT, 16 Mar 00; FBIS-SOV-2000-0316, via World News Connection)

Over the past year, Russia has continually used "antiterrorism" rhetoric to reassert its dominance in the CIS, especially among those nations that it considers its closer partners. In a recent interview, Russian Security Council Head Sergei Ivanov specifically singled out Belarus, Armenia, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Kazakhstan as Russia's CIS "allies" when he noted that "the CIS is no longer a unified field." (ROSSIYSKAYA GAZETA, 16 Mar 00; FBIS-SOV-2000-0316, via World News Connection) Interestingly, Ivanov left out Uzbekistan, which is officially a GUUAM member but has participated in various joint defense exercises with Russia since last year. Only two weeks later, Uzbekistan decided to pull its battalion out of the Southern Peace Shield-2000 exercises in Tajikistan, opting to conduct its portion of the exercise inside Uzbekistan. (ITAR-TASS, 0656 GMT, 29 Mar 00; via lexis-nexis) However, it doesn't appear that Uzbekistan will be joining three of its fellow GUUAM members in forming a Georgia-Azerbaijan-Ukraine peacekeeping unit, either. Although the unit is still in the planning stages, the "GAU" presidents plan to have their peacekeepers receive authorization from the UN or OSCE and remain apart from the Russian-dominated CIS peacekeeping forces. (Jamestown Foundation MONITOR, 20 Mar 00) In this streamlined forum, GAU has maintained its opposition to the so-called "Russia-6" or Collective Security Treaty members, despite the optimistic words GAU officials had for Putin's leadership at the January heads of state summit in Moscow. For now, the CIS remains split on issues of CIS security, as Russia seeks dominance among its "allies" and GAU desperately looks westward.

Newly Independent States: Western Region
By Tammy Lynch
UKRAINE

Constitution? What constitution?
The Ukrainian Constitutional Court has apparently decided that it will now be known as the "We'll just fudge it a little and maybe nobody will notice because we really don't want to make the tough choices" court.

On 29 March, the court ruled that Kuchma's proposed All-Ukraine referendum can go forward with two revisions. On 16 April, voters will be asked whether they approve Kuchma's initiatives to (1) eliminate parliamentary immunity, (2) cut the number of parliamentary deputies from 450 to 300, (3) make the unicameral legislature a bicameral model, and (4) allow the president to disband parliament if it fails to form a majority within one month or does not pass a budget within three months of its submission by the executive branch.

The court did rule, however, that two of Kuchma's proposed questions were unconstitutional. It will not allow Kuchma to ask voters whether they have confidence in parliament, and give him the power to disband the body in the event of a no-confidence vote. It will also not allow a question on whether a new constitution should be approved through direct referendum instead of by the parliament.

Even with these questions disallowed, however, the referendum is constitutionally questionable. This fact appears to have been lost on many of Kuchma's critics and most of his supporters, who seem happy just to have had the most troublesome questions rejected. The European Union released a statement that read, in part, "This decision is a positive development, which provides encouraging evidence of the effective functioning of Ukrainian democratic institutions." (REUTERS, 0852 GMT, 4 Apr 00; via America Online) Ukrainian Parliamentary Deputy Serhiy Holovaty, who is also a former justice minister, said, "With this decision the Constitutional Court has practically
defeated the intentions of those who wanted to effect an anti-constitutional coup in Ukraine." (REUTERS, 0902 GMT, 29 Mar 00; via America Online)

"Practically" is the operative word. The Constitution of Ukraine contains some interesting tidbits that seem to have gone unnoticed by many in the country. This burdensome document notes the following:

"The constitutional composition of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine consists of 450 National Deputies of Ukraine who are elected for a four-year term on the basis of universal, equal and direct suffrage, by secret ballot." (Article 76)

"National Deputies of Ukraine are guaranteed parliamentary immunity." (Article 80)

The questions approved by the Constitutional Court, therefore, amount to amending the constitution. So, according to this document, how are amendments supposed to be adopted?

"A draft law on introducing amendments to the Constitution of Ukraine may be submitted to the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine by the President of Ukraine or by no fewer National Deputies of Ukraine than one-third of the constitutional composition of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine." (Article 154)

"A draft law on introducing amendments to the Constitution of Ukraine, ... previously adopted by the majority of the constitutional composition of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, is deemed to be adopted if, at the next regular session of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, no less than two-thirds ... have voted in favor thereof." (Article 155)

There is no mention in "Chapter XIII: Introducing Amendments to the Constitution of Ukraine" of amendment by referendum. And yet, the Constitutional Court, by a
vote of 15 to 3 with one abstention, found these questions constitutional and -- most importantly -- binding. "Government bodies will be obliged to take [those results] into account and adopt the appropriate measures about those questions addressed in the referendum." (RFE/RL NEWSLINE, 31 Mar 00)

Perhaps the politically appointed judges (six by the president, six by the Congress of Judges and six by the parliament) recognized that the power structure of the country has become lopsided in favor of the president, and acted accordingly. Or perhaps these judges, who cannot be reappointed, simply did not want to make the difficult decision to pronounce the entire referendum unconstitutional.

Ukrainian political analyst Mykhailo Pohrebinsky suggests, however, that the court will once again be called upon to examine the situation if the referendum questions are passed. "What is required now is for the Constitutional Court to consider a new case -- what to do if parliament doesn't implement the people's will?" (REUTERS, 3 Apr 00; via America Online) In fact, according to the constitution, that body is in no way required to do so.

For this reason, on 4 April, the Council of Europe's parliamentary assembly (PACE) warned Ukraine that it could be suspended if Kuchma moves forward with his poll before the parliament passes a new law of referenda. Although the PACE suspension would probably be more symbolic than meaningful, as one of the few predominantly Western organizations that have accepted Ukraine, it would be a difficult blow to the country's West-oriented foreign policy. This fact does not seem to concern Kuchma, who vowed to continue with the vote.

In January, when Kuchma first suggested that he would hold a referendum, this writer asked, "Does Kuchma want to be king?" and suggested that the only way these questions would be approved by the Constitutional Court would be if Ukraine planned to "follow Russia's lead and contort the constitution to fit the
whims of the presidential administration." (THE NIS OBSERVED, 17 Jan 00) This week, we discovered that the Constitutional Court has learned well from Russia, as Kuchma began planning his coronation.

**Meanwhile, in the council's parliamentary assembly ...**

The new constitutional tangle with the Council of Europe comes just as Ukraine had finally eliminated a major disagreement with that body by outlawing the death penalty. It also comes as representatives of ethnic Russian organizations in Ukraine are appealing to the council to look into what they call Ukraine's "Russophobia." In a statement to the council's parliamentary assembly, The Ukrainian Slavic Party wrote, "The Ukrainian language policy is based on Russophobia, as is manifested by the fact that the Russian language is almost not taught to junior classes, ... and even in senior classes it is taught in miserly doses." (INTERFAX, 22 Feb 00; via lexis-nexis)

There is undoubtedly a reason that the Slavic Party statement uses vague terms like "almost not taught" and "miserly doses." The exact figures would simply not support the argument. According to government data, 34 percent of primary and secondary students were taught in the Russian language during the 1998-1999 year. Twenty-five percent of preschoolers were taught in Russian, and 34 percent of students in higher education were taught in Russian. While this is down considerably from 1991, when approximately 50 percent of all students were taught in Russian, the figures more adequately represent the current language breakdown of the country. The Russian language school figures, incidentally, remain above 98 percent in Crimea, 87 percent in Luhansk Oblast' and 90 percent in Donetsk Oblast', in spite of the existence of significant numbers of Ukrainian speakers in these areas. (THE UKRAINIAN WEEKLY, 5 Mar 00; via Arel's The Ukraine List #76) That's quite an interesting understanding of the term "miserly."

**BELARUS**
How not to make friends and influence enemies

Following the Freedom March II on 15 March, Belarusian authorities tried valiantly to intimidate protesters into not amassing for the opposition's next scheduled protest on 25 March. President Alyaksandr Lukashenka and the rest of his administration seemed to believe that, by outlawing the protest and threatening opposition members with arrest, they could limit the demonstration's effect internationally. They failed miserably.

Unlike Freedom March I and II, the 25 March commemoration of the 1918 declaration of the Belarus Republic garnered significant Western attention -- thanks to Lukashenka's tactics.

According to Belapan, between 5,000 and 7,000 people attempted to gather at the designated rally point, ignoring the threats from authorities that they would be arrested. Belapan noted, "Yakub Kolas Square ... was cordoned off by rows of helmeted police. The underground railroad exits leading to the square were also blocked. Two police armored personnel carriers could be seen on the square." The report continued, "Police groups waded into crowds with truncheons and grabbed people, pushing them into police vehicles. More than two hundred people were detained, including cameramen and reporters of the Russian television networks RTR, NTV and ORT, as well as Christopher Panico, counselor of the OSCE Advisory and Monitoring Group in Belarus." (BELAPAN, 0230 GMT, 25 Mar 00)

Reaction from outside Belarus was swift in appearing. Vladimir Putin reportedly intervened immediately in order to facilitate the release of at least one dozen Russian reporters. The OSCE responded sharply to the arrest of its representative, who had diplomatic status. And the United States and European Union called the Belarus tactics "brutal." US Department of State Spokesman James Foley said, "The authorities deployed police with dogs, riot troops and armored personnel carriers ... to arrest 300 to 500 Belarusian citizens, reportedly
beating many of them." According to Foley, Polish MP Mariusz Kaminski and 35 journalists from Russia, Belarus and Poland were among those arrested. For the first time, Foley also signaled that the US had given up all hopes of using dialogue to solve the crisis in Belarus. "The Lukashenka regime's suppression of this demonstration makes clear its disinterest in dialogue," he said. (REUTERS, 1950 GMT, 27 Mar 00) This is a significant departure from several previous statements. There are also unconfirmed reports from Charter-97 that the US is considering the introduction of some type of economic sanction.

Lukashenka, meanwhile, underwent a major shift in opinion as international reaction began to pour in. On 25 March, while on an official visit to the United Arab Emirates, he wholeheartedly supported the police actions, suggesting that such things are necessary to "maintain law and order." He said, "Any disorders have to be stopped and we will do that." (ITAR-TASS, 2016 GMT, 25 Mar 00; FBIS-SOV-2000-0325, via World News Connection)

Just days later, however, Lukashenka apparently found his humanity, criticizing police for "serious mistakes." He said, "It is as if law enforcement bodies deliberately make serious mistakes in their jobs at exactly the moment when the head of the state has left the country." (REUTERS, 1351 GMT, 31 Mar 00; via America Online) How unfortunate that Lukashenka was not in the country to take care of the situation. And how convenient.

According to Interior Minister Yuri Sivakov, before Lukashenka left Minsk, he told Sivakov to ensure order. "We fulfilled this task," Sivakov said. (REUTERS, 1950 GMT, 27 Mar 00; via America Online) Sivakov is apparently also fulfilling another task -- scapegoat.

Meanwhile, opposition members have vowed to continue their protests. For the first time, thanks to Lukashenka, they will do it with the strong support of the West.
CHECHNYA

Can sanctions reinstate peace talks?

President Putin's response to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) sanctions on Russia shows that he can be persuaded to compromise. Amid all the anti-Western bluster about a new iron curtain and Western support of "terrorism," there was a concession announced the day after the vote: Direct presidential rule will not be imposed on Chechnya. (ITAR-TASS, 7 Apr 00; via lexis-nexis)

On 6 April Russian representatives were still defending the plan to introduce direct rule for several years by reference to Soviet legislation. (AFP, 6 Apr 00; via Johnson's Russia List) Putin had backed this idea very forcefully over the last month, but on the day after the PACE vote he suddenly decided to abandon it. While this decision can in no way satisfy PACE demands for a cease-fire, peace talks, and a war crimes inquiry, it does mean that those goals are attainable -- if member governments find the political will to continue along this course.

In the last days of March, revelations that clandestine negotiations with the Maskhadov government have been ongoing since January were followed by calls for a political solution to the conflict. The PACE vote builds on those developments, bolsters domestic peace advocates and creates greater internal and external pressure for a negotiated settlement.

On 6 April a two-thirds majority of the PACE voted to suspend Russia's voting privileges and called on the ministers of the member states to initiate proceedings to suspend Russia's membership in the Council of Europe unless
Russia immediately makes "substantial, accelerating and demonstrable progress" towards eradicating human rights abuses and calling a cease-fire in Chechnya. The assembly also directed member nations to bring war crimes charges against Russia in the European Court for Human Rights. (REUTERS, 6 Apr 00; via Johnson's Russia List) Council of Europe foreign ministers are scheduled discuss the possibility of suspending Russia from the body on 10 April.

The PACE vote comes amidst mounting pressure to pursue renewed negotiations with the Chechens. On 4 April, the speaker of the Federation Council, Yegor Stroev, called for a policy of negotiations and an end to the Chechen war, saying, "Either we continue to play hide-and-seek with society or we undertake steps to end the war and begin to resolve the problem peacefully." (ITAR-TASS, 4 Apr 00; via lexis-nexis) The US ambassador, James Collins, echoed that call on the following day, saying that the war must end in a political solution. (INTERFAX, 5 Apr 00; via Johnson's Russia List)

According to recent revelations, peace talks have been underway for months even as presidential spokesman Sergei Yastrzhembsky continued to set unrealistic conditions for the start of such talks, including the elimination of Chechen armed forces and the surrender of Chechen field commanders. But even Yastrzhembsky has commented that perhaps Maskhadov, who has been charged with leading an insurrection, can be given amnesty. (ITAR-TASS, 30 Mar 00; via lexis-nexis)

According to Ingushetia's President Ruslan Aushev and North Ossetian President Alexander Dzasokhov, the two have been serving as intermediaries since January. Informal groups, including North Caucasian leaders and federal government representatives, have been meeting to discuss possible avenues for negotiations. A written proposal was passed through intermediaries to the
Chechen authorities in early March, but no response has been forthcoming. 
(NEZAVISIMAYA GAZETA, 31 Mar 00)

According to Aushev, the proposals were "quite logical and reasonable .. (and) could have provided a basis for negotiations. (...) Maskhadov and his cabinet members should accept these proposals. They had better forget any ambitions, now that the fate of the whole people is at stake." (VESTI, 29 Mar 00; via lexis-nexis)

It's possible these proposals were scuttled by Putin's intention to institute direct rule over Chechnya, first broached at roughly the same time as Aushev transferred the proposals to Maskhadov. Aushev has commented that the institution of direct presidential rule would be unconstitutional and counterproductive. He pointed out that the federal government already has a high-ranking official serving as representative in Chechnya, Deputy Prime Minister Nikolai Koshman. In practical terms, a change in the formalities of federal governance over Chechnya would have no bearing on the course of the war, characterized recently by mounting guerrilla raids against Russian positions. (INTERFAX, 30 Mar 00; via lexis-nexis) In an earlier interview he explained that the federal government has resisted proposals of instituting direct presidential rule over the Prigorodnyi krai district, (a conflict zone between the Ossets and the Ingush) precisely on the grounds that this measure lacks constitutional basis. (INTERFAX, 16 Mar 00; via lexis-nexis)

The sum of Aushev's statements represents a fairly coherent program: Peace negotiations must be held between Maskhadov's and Putin's representatives, the Chechen side must respond to the last set of proposals, and the final status of Chechnya should be determined by popular referendum. (VREMYA MN, 3 Mar 00; via lexis-nexis)
The details of the proposals forwarded to the Chechens have not been revealed. However, the lack of response and Aushev's recommendation to "forget any ambitions" suggest that the terms were probably fairly harsh.

The international community would do well to build on the PACE vote by reminding Russia of its obligations under previous agreements that remain woefully unfulfilled, but should constitute the foundation for any future negotiations.

1) According to the peace treaty of 12 May 1997, Russian and Chechnya agreed "to stop the centuries old confrontation" and "build further relations in accordance with generally recognized principles and norms of international law" and "cooperate on the basis of certain specific agreements." (The Treaty of Peace and the Principles of Relations between the Russian Federation and the Chechen Republic Ichkeria, OFFICIAL KREMLIN INTERNATIONAL NEWS BROADCAST, 13 May 97; via lexis-nexis)

2) The Khasavyurt treaty specifies that "The agreement on the fundamentals of relations between Russian Federation and the Chechen Republic being determined in accordance with generally recognized norms of international law shall be reached prior to December 31, 2001." (IZVESTIA, 3 Sep 97; via ISCIIP database)

3) At the November 1999 OSCE summit in Istanbul (and many times since), Russia agreed to provide access to Chechnya to humanitarian workers and inspectors, that the mandate of the OSCE mediation mission for Chechnya remains in force, and that its participation would benefit the political regulation of the conflict.
KYRGYZSTAN
Authoritarianism, political repression real winners in Kyrgyz elections?
Kyrgyzstan, once widely considered to be the most democratic Central Asian state, particularly by Western analysts, appears to be catching up quickly with the most authoritarian and politically repressive Central Asian state, Uzbekistan.

The 12 March runoff elections for 68 parliamentary seats were even more heavily criticized by the OSCE and the Kyrgyz opposition (RFE/RL NEWSLINE, 23 Mar 00) than the first round of parliamentary elections had been. Mark Stevens, the chairman of the OSCE observer mission, told journalists that the Kyrgyz elections had failed to meet his organization's standards. Local election officials' interference in the polling process, as well as the fact that the Central Election Commission (CEC) permitted several candidates to stand for election in the first round but then barred them from participating in the second round, drew sharp criticism from OSCE observers. (KABAR NEWS AGENCY, 1700 GMT, 13 Mar 00; BBC Monitoring Central Asia Unit, via lexis-nexis)

Feliks Kulov, chairman of the Ar-Namys (Honor or Dignity) Party and one of the few prominent opposition candidates who was not kept off the ballot in the second round of elections, reported that in his voting district (Talas Oblast' in northwestern Kyrgyzstan) a number of votes were collected before the polls were officially open, blank ballots were sold, and his party's election observers were denied access to the voting stations. He also charged election officials with bribing and even threatening voters in order to persuade them to cast their ballots for the government-backed candidate, Alymbai Sultanov. (Sultanov won by approximately 16%.) (INTERFAX NEWS AGENCY, 14 Mar 00; via lexis-nexis, and RFE/RL NEWSLINE, 15 Mar 00)

By 15 March thousands of dissatisfied voters were protesting outside government buildings in Bishkek, Kara Bura (in Talas Oblast'), and Balykchy (in Issyk-Kul Oblast') as well as in Osh and Jalalabad Oblast's. The protesters
accused the government of falsifying the voting outcomes in all of these regions and called for new elections to be held. (KYRGYZ TELEVISION FIRST CHANNEL, 1530 GMT, 15 Mar 00; BBC Monitoring Central Asia Unit, via lexis-nexis, and RFE/RL NEWSLINE, 15 Mar 00) A bloc of five opposition parties (including Ar-Namys, the Democratic Movement of Kyrgyzstan, and Daniyar Usenov's El Bei Bechara Party) released an official statement and list of demands to the Kyrgyz government on 20 March. They called on President Akaev's administration to annul the results of the elections in Talas Oblast', on the grounds that they were falsified; to punish all those officials responsible for perpetrating the election fraud; to review the courts' decisions to uphold the ban on numerous opposition candidates' participation in the elections; to release a number of opposition activists promptly from detention; and to stop harassing independent media agencies. (INTERFAX RUSSIAN NEWS, 20 Mar 00; via lexis-nexis)

On 22 March, perhaps in an attempt to dampen the protesters' enthusiasm, law enforcement officials arrested Feliks Kulov in the Bishkek clinic where he was receiving treatment for high blood pressure and chest pains and charged him with the misappropriation of funds and the abuse of power during his short stint as national security minister in 1997-1998. (INTERFAX RUSSIAN NEWS, 22 Mar 00; via lexis-nexis) Although the earlier arrests of Mr. Kulov's campaign manager and other well-known members of Ar-Namys had done little to intimidate the demonstrators, government officials may have reasoned that the detention of Mr. Kulov himself would bring the protests to an end. However, the opposition leader's supporters responded to his detention by continuing their protests both in Bishkek and in Kara Bura and by issuing a second list of demands to the Kyrgyz government, calling for Mr. Kulov's immediate release from prison and urging all of the country's political parties and organizations to join together in resisting the government's heavy-handed actions. (INTERFAX RUSSIAN NEWS, 31 Mar 00; via lexis-nexis) Mr. Kulov himself has gone on hunger strike in order
to protest his arrest and detention. (INTERFAX RUSSIAN NEWS, 31 Mar 00; via lexis-nexis)

Kyrgyz authorities did succeed in ending the opposition demonstrations in Kara-Bura, but only after police chased the protesters out of the town's main square using truncheons. 120 of the demonstrators were taken into custody and bused to the local internal affairs ministry headquarters. Following the demonstration’s forcible dispersal by the police, internal affairs ministry troops were stationed in the town, presumably in order to prevent any further opposition gatherings. (VECHERNIY BISHKEK, 23 Mar 00; BBC Monitoring Central Asia Unit, via lexis-nexis)

While the arrest of Mr. Kulov and numerous other opposition figures has not prompted his supporters to abandon their cause, what it has achieved is to make the Ar-Namys Party's chairman ineligible to run in Kyrgyzstan's next presidential elections. Under present Kyrgyz election law, anyone who has been charged with a crime is not permitted to run in presidential or parliamentary elections. As a result, President Akaev is not likely to face any serious opposition in his bid for reelection next December. Unless the Kyrgyz opposition is able to win the vociferous support of both international organizations and Western governments, President Akaev's administration will have little incentive to change the country's currently highly irregular election laws or to pursue any further political reforms. In fact, the Kyrgyz government seems to be well on its way to duplicating the type of harsh repression practiced by neighboring Uzbekistan.

TAJIKISTAN

Tajik opposition grudgingly accepts flawed elections

Despite numerous complaints of election fraud from nearly all of the opposition parties during Tajikistan's recent parliamentary elections, both regional and national party leaders have proclaimed their acceptance of the voting results, in order to preserve the peace process.
Leading members of the Communist Party of Tajikistan, the Democratic Party of Tajikistan (DPT), the Islamic Renaissance Party of Tajikistan (IRPT), and the Socialist Party reported numerous incidents of interference by local election officials in the polling process, as well as irregular voting procedures. On the eve of runoff elections in 12 voting districts, the Central Election and Registration Commission (CERC) suddenly invalidated a popular Communist candidate’s registration, barring him from participating in the second round of voting. In two other districts where Communist candidates seemed likely to win in runoff elections, the CERC simply annulled the results of the first voting round, citing widespread election violations. (VOICE OF THE ISLAMIC REPUBLIC OF IRAN, 0330 GMT, 12 Mar 00; BBC Monitoring Central Asia Unit, via lexis-nexis) DPT and IRPT officials complained that their candidates often faced an undue number of campaign and registration restrictions and that their election observers were frequently not given access to the polling stations. (VOICE OF THE ISLAMIC REPUBLIC OF IRAN, 0100 GMT, 10 Mar 00 and 1600 GMT, 27 Feb 00; BBC Monitoring Central Asia Unit, via lexis-nexis) However, spokesmen for both of these opposition parties publicly declared their recognition of the election’s validity and their acceptance of its results.

The chairmen of the Leninobod branch of the DPT released a statement following the first round of parliamentary elections in which the party expressed its point of view quite bluntly: "We officially recognize the holding of elections to the Assembly of Representatives and local councils for the sake of the unity of society, of cooperation in the cause of ensuring political stability and the consolidation of democratic achievements." Although the party chairmen acknowledged that there had been irregularities in the election process, they went on to say that establishing a lasting peace in Tajikistan was of greater importance than the election outcome and their own party's interests. (VOICE OF THE ISLAMIC REPUBLIC OF IRAN, 0100 GMT, 10 Mar 00; BBC Monitoring Central Asia Unit, via lexis-nexis)
Although the Leninobod DPT chairmen's words are eloquent and their sentiments admirable, one must question how realistic their views of Tajikistan's situation are. In a country which for decades has been wracked by profound social and political cleavages, it was particularly important that these elections provide a more or less level playing field for the various regional factions to win representation in the national government, a goal which they have craved since before the civil war. Indeed, it was their lack of representation in republic-level politics which led to the outbreak of war in 1992. Unfortunately, Tajikistan's recent parliamentary elections did not provide the opportunities that they were originally slated to, a fact which nearly everyone seems to recognize. How much hope can we then realistically hold that the same dissatisfaction with the status quo which resulted in five years of civil war will not eventually bring about a similar chain of violence?

TURKMENISTAN

President proves that playing nicely with others brings few rewards

Although neither the Turkmen nor the Azerbaijani media were willing to publish many details, on 9 March President Niyazov's press service revealed that the two countries' governments had come to an agreement on how to divide the Trans-Caspian pipeline's capacity, once its construction has been completed. Instead of the two sides sharing the pipeline equally (Azerbaijan's original goal), it seems that Baku has accepted the Turkmen president's terms and agreed to a 5 billion cubic meter quota. This leaves Turkmenistan with more than 75% of the pipeline's capacity. (TURAN, 1655 GMT, 10 Mar 00; FBIS-SOV-2000-0311, via World News Connection) This could be considered a substantial triumph for the Turkmen president's "get-tough" policy, if the pipeline were actually close to being completed. However, just two weeks after having achieved this victory, President Niyazov himself acknowledged that there is little hope that the pipeline's construction will even begin in the near future. According to the present timetable, work is to start in early 2001 and conclude two years later, but the
Turkmen leader told Shell representatives that unless the project receives more international support, it will not be carried out at all. (INTERFAX, 1426 GMT, 22 Mar 00; FBIS-SOV-2000-0322, via World News Connection)

President Niyazov's obstinacy and blunt words compelled the Azerbaijani government to meet his terms, despite pressure from the US and Turkey for him to soften his stance. Will he be able to achieve similar results with the international oil tycoons? Prior to his success in the pipeline quota deal with Azerbaijan, one might have said no, but perhaps President Niyazov's negotiation methods (or lack thereof) are exactly what is necessary in this situation.

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