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Yastrzhembsky set to lead team again

On 19 March, President Vladimir Putin decreed the appointment of Sergei Yastrzhembsky, his current spokesman on Chechnya, to the position of top presidential spokesman. (AGENCE FRANCE PRESSE, 0840 PST, 19 Mar 01; via C-apf@clari.net) During Yel'tsin's second term as president, Yastrzhembsky held a similar post, but was removed from the Kremlin team in the wake of the 1998 devaluation of the ruble and search for a new government head. Yastrzhembsky backed the wrong horse at that time, supporting Moscow Mayor Yuri Luzhkov over Yevgeni Primakov. Yastrzhembsky's return to the Kremlin under Putin was initially seen as evidence of Putin's disdain for the former prime minister, Primakov. It is unclear, however, given the changing political climate, whether Yastrzhembsky's appointment signals any clear presidential preference for one set of advisers over another. While the Yel'tsin era was replete with personnel allied to teams surrounding the erratic head of state, Putin's regime has been marked by a stronger emphasis on loyalty and, preferably, a security service background.

Yastrzhembsky's new Kremlin job does mirror one important element of the Yel'tsin years: the duplication and overlap in spheres of authority and job descriptions. If Yastrzhembsky is the new presidential press secretary, where does that leave Aleksei Gromov's press department or the information departments inspired by Gleb Pavlovsky or the media ministry for that matter? Yastrzhembsky's appointment could make redundant entire directorates of the presidential administration. Or perhaps everything old really is new again, as the Yel'tsin-era Family member and current chief of staff, Aleksandr Voloshin, recalls
a familiar, reliable accomplice to Kremlin service. (KOMMERSANT, 16 Mar 01; Agency WPS, via lexis-nexis)

**Putin demonstrates PR moves**
Proving that even an old KGB hand can learn new public relations tricks, President Putin dramatically altered his response to a national crisis by choosing to cut short his vacation and return to Moscow to monitor the situation. Clearly stung by media coverage of the Kursk submarine tragedy last year, Putin handled the hostage taking aboard a Moscow-bound jet by establishing a special committee to follow developments while he rushed back from a Siberian skiing trip. (AGENCE FRANCE PRESSE, 0500 PST, 16 Mar 01; via CAFP@clari.net)

Interestingly, the emergency committee established by Putin was not slated to be headed up by Emergencies Minister Sergei Shoigu, but rather by a deputy director from the Federal Security Services, Vladimir Pronichev.

**The Ballad of Borodin**
Pavel Borodin, the former Kremlin property manager who is currently being detained in the United States while he awaits a hearing on a Swiss request for his extradition, has had a rough couple of weeks. Despite President Putin's assertions of immunity on behalf of his former boss, Borodin may have to fight his way through the American and Swiss legal systems as prosecutors attempt to make corruption charges stick in the multimillion-dollar Mabetex Trading case. In recent developments, Borodin has yet to prevail. On 9 March, Borodin's request for bail was denied, and four days later he was taken to a New York area hospital with chest pains. On 16 March, he appeared before yet another judge for a bail hearing, but the judge adjourned the hearing without a finding. (AGENCE FRANCE PRESSE, 1330 PST, 16 Mar 01; via CAFP@clari.net)

The secretary of the Russian Security Council, Sergei Ivanov, who was in Washington for meetings with the new president's security team, raised the issue of Borodin's arrest with the National Security Advisor, Condoleezza Rice, but
stopped well short of demanding Borodin's release. Ivanov claimed that the Putin administration was "somewhat concerned" about Borodin's situation, but wanted to avoid turning it into a "political issue." (RUSSIAN PUBLIC TELEVISION, 0900 GMT, 15 Mar 01; BBC Summary of World Broadcasts, via lexis-nexis)

With such lukewarm official support from his government, it is likely that Borodin will spend another few gloomy weeks in New York until his April extradition hearing, at the expense of the taxpayers of the United States.

GOVERNMENT

No-confidence vote shakes both branches

The Communist Party (KPRF) Duma faction initiated a vote of no confidence in the government last week, which may have repercussions for both the parliament and the Cabinet. The leadership of the KPRF, which some hint may have been led darkly astray by the ubiquitous Gleb Pavlovsky, failed to capitalize on the discontent with Prime Minister Mikhail Kasyanov's government and instead reinforced the general public's perception of the lower house as "just an empty talking shop." (THE RUSSIA JOURNAL, 20 Mar 01; via RussiaToday.com)

The ever-ready conspiracy theorists advise that Pavlovsky, who is known to be closely tied to the Putin administration, may have hinted to KPRF head Gennady Zyuganov that the Kremlin was dissatisfied with the work of Kasyanov and his cabinet. As soon as Zyuganov acted on this tip, however, Pavlovsky undercut him by accusing the communists of using demagoguery to blackmail the president. (Pavlovsky's comments are listed on his website, www.strana.ru, as quoted in ITOGI, 13 Mar 01; Agency WPS, via lexis-nexis.)

While the government survived this vote, many of the Duma parties made it clear that real improvements would have to be realized by next Fall or a more unified parliament might muster the required majority. Criticism of the government was not by any means restricted solely to the communists. Both the Union of Right
Forces and YABLOKO were critical of the overly "centralized" nature of the Kasyanov reforms. The communists, in addition to policy demands, were incensed by the government's failure to send any Cabinet member or high-ranking representative to address the Duma deputies' concerns.

It is clear that the no-confidence vote was meant as a warning to the prime minister and his supporters in the government. The only question is whether the warning was coming only from the Duma.

Russian Federation: Domestic Issues and Legislative Branch
By Luba Schwartzman

SECURITY SERVICES
'The explanations of the military look logical and open'
Such is the claim of Russia's Human Rights Ombudsman for Chechnya, Vladimir Kalamanov. He has visited a few sites in the Vedeno District in Chechnya, including the village of Zdorovoye, near which a mass grave with 48 bodies has been discovered, and the Khatuni settlement, where a filtration camp has been described on the grounds of the 45th airborne regiment. Novaya gazeta journalist Anna Politkovskaya has reported on the latter, after having been arrested herself by Russian troops. She gave an account of intricate torture, brutish cruelty and boundless horror, verbal abuse, beatings, electric shocks, hunger, cold, cigarette burns, pulled nails, and 18-foot-deep holes in which Chechens were held.
(NOVAYA GAZETA, 26 Feb 01; via www.novayagazeta.ru) Kalamanov and Chechen Prosecutor Vsevolod Chernov seem to be doing all they can to muddle the issue by claiming that the account contains contradictions and inaccuracies, and making promises that further information will come forth. (INTERFAX, 0946 GMT, 25 Feb 01; FBIS-SOV-2001-0225, via World News Connection)
The prosecutor general's office reported that 56 criminal cases of crimes against civilians, 18 of them murder cases, have been opened in Chechnya, but only 12 cases have been sent to military courts. (INTERFAX, 1140 GMT, 27 Feb 01; FBIS-SOV-2001-0227, via World News Connection)

The most controversial of these is the case against Col. Yuri Budanov, accused of the abduction, rape, and murder of Elza Kungaeva, an 18-year-old Chechen girl, in March of 2000. (See The NIS Observed, 7 Mar 01.) The scales of justice are tipped already by the fact that the charges against Budanov omit rape -- considered a more weighty crime than murder in Chechnya. Moreover, further doubt is cast upon the conduct of the case against Budanov by the presence of Governor Shamanov (not known for humanitarian values) in full regalia at the first day of the trial, held in the Rostov District Military court, the excuse of "combat fatigue" used by the defense, and statements such as State Duma Deputy Speaker Vladimir Zhirinovsky's "no-one wanted to kill anyone [these tragedies] do happen during wars quite often." (HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH; via www.hrw.org, and RIA, 1325 GMT, 7 Mar 01; FBIS-SOV-2001-0307, via World News Connection) The trial was postponed, after Budanov "suffered a heart attack," until 20 March; the results should be highly telling.

Security around President Putin, and the campaign against Chechen fighters, are bound to be intensified in response to the recent hijacking of the Vnukovo Airlines TU-154 aircraft that departed from Turkey on 15 March with 166 passengers and a crew of 12. The hijackers -- Supyan Arsaev and his two sons, Iriskhan Arsaev and Denis Magomerdzaev -- rerouted the plane to Saudi Arabia, and demanded an end to the war in Chechnya. When they stopped to refuel in Medina in order to continue on to Afghanistan, the Chechens, armed only with knives, were apprehended by Saudi authorities. The father was shot to death. A 27-year-old flight attendant, Yulia Fomina, and one of the passengers died during the raid. There are no extradition treaties between Russia and Saudi Arabia, but
talks are currently underway regarding the fate of the hijackers. (INTERFAX, 1841 GMT, 15 Mar 01; FBIS-SOV-2001-0315, via World News Connection, and REUTERS, 17 Mar 01; via Johnson's Russia List)

Sex, drugs and rock 'n roll... but for now drugs
In Voronezh, US citizen and post-graduate Fulbright student John Edward Tobbin, who was detained on 1 February, has been facing escalating accusations. Charged originally with possession of 2.5 grams of marijuana, he is now accused under Articles 228 Part b Clause "b" (repeated illegal purchase or storage of drugs with the intent to sell and selling of drugs in large quantities) and Article 223 Part 1 (organization and maintenance of a drug den for consumption). Rumors have been spread also of further charges of spying and non-cooperation. (INTERFAX, 1114 GMT, 8 Mar 01; FBIS-SOV-2001-0308, via World News Connection) There has been much talk of increased drug use and drug-related crimes in Russia, and it would be very convenient for the authorities to push the line of the drug problem as an American-inflicted vice.

FEDERAL ASSEMBLY
To vote or not to vote...
A no-confidence vote has taken in the Lower House of the Russian Federation Federal Assembly on 14 March. The rules of the game are as follows: If a no-confidence vote is passed (by 226 votes of the 450-member Duma), the president can either dismiss the government, or just take note of the vote. If another no-confidence vote is passed within three months, however, the president must either dismiss the government or dissolve the State Duma and schedule new elections. Thus, as deputies considered their options, they had to weigh the pros and cons of re-elections.

The motion for the vote was initiated and advocated by the Communist Party of the Russian Federation (KPRF) -- 86 deputies, not counting Duma Speaker Gennady Seleznev -- which blamed the government for famines, blackouts and
other mismanagements. The Agro-Industrial group (41 deputies) followed its KPRF ally.

A dissolution of the State Duma would probably hurt the Communist Party the most. But the party was counting on remaining in a minority, and wanted to indulge its supporters by expressing opposition to, and distancing itself from, the government. Then matters became somewhat complicated. The pro-Kremlin Unity party called KPRF’s bluff and suggested that it might support the no-confidence vote. Unity’s 84 deputies alone easily could have swung the vote, but then, of course, other parties started jumping on the bandwagon, and stating that they too would support the no-confidence vote... as long as Unity did. The Unity party then backed off, denied statements attributed to it, and promised that a final decision would come on Tuesday, 13 March -- the day before the vote. In the end only 127 deputies (80 Communists, 39 Agro-Industrialists, 5 Russian Regions group members, and one YABLOKO member) voted for the motion, 76 voted against it, 5 abstained and the rest (including every Unity member, every Liberal Democratic Party member and most Fatherland-All Russia, Russian Regions Group and Peoples Deputy Group deputies) did not register votes.

(ROSSISKAYA GAZETA, 6 Mar 01; FBIS-SOV-2001-0306, and INTERFAX, 1425 GMT, 5 Mar 01; FBIS-SOV-2001-0305, via World News Connection)

The outcome had lots of winners: The communists got to fly their colors without being subjected to a new election, Unity was able to demonstrate its power, the government got to stay as is (and furthermore -- it was made clear that another attempt at a no-confidence would be pointless) and those alarmed at the prospect of the hassle of re-elections were relieved.

**Russian Federation: Media**

By Maria Metcalf
A glimmer of hope on the horizon?

Following the battle between Gazprom-Media and Media-MOST over the control of NTV is like watching two cars speeding in opposite directions on an autobahn. Each driver is yelling out the window at the other when they pass, pretending that they are talking when in fact there is no mutual interaction and neither is capable of understanding a word that the other is saying. The chances that they will find a meeting place between them or that they will have an honest dialogue pointing in the same direction are very slim. Indeed, the government clearly does not intend that any dialogue occurs at all.

On 12 March, an official from the Audit Chamber, Mikhail Beskhmelnitsyn, made a surprising statement "recommending the gas giant Gazprom ... give up its bid to take over NTV." (gazeta.ru, 13 Mar 01) A recent audit of Gazprom revealed not only inefficient financial management but numerous violations in financial and economic activities. Beskhmelnitsyn condemned Gazprom's attempts to gain control of NTV. "The Audit Chamber considers Gazprom's investment in mass media, first and foremost in NTV, inexpedient.... The Chamber has recommended Gazprom to withdraw funds invested in NTV as non-purpose oriented and to earmark them for measures aimed at increasing gas production," he said. (gazeta.ru, 13 Mar 01) This statement marks a difference of opinion in the Kremlin regarding Gazprom's involvement in the NTV takeover attempts. It seems to demonstrate that state agencies have independent opinions, and that not all state-run organizations are forced to coordinate their efforts in the Kremlin. This is good news in NTV's struggle to remain independent. One wonders, however, if Beskhmelnitsyn or the Audit Chamber's chief, Sergey Stepashin, will keep their jobs for much longer. No one else in Moscow has commented on the Audit Chamber's report.

On the other hand, Moscow courts have ruled that Media-MOST cannot have its 19 percent vote in NTV's next shareholder's meeting. This decision effectively makes Gazprom's 46 percent a controlling stake by default. Also, Gazprom has
decided to scrap a Media-MOST newspaper and change the content of one of its magazines. In an agreement that left Gusinsky with only 49-percent shares of Sem Dnei, Media-MOST’s publishing house, Gazprom already has gained dominance. Sem Dnei publishes the Segodnya newspaper and Itogi magazine, both of which frequently criticize the Kremlin. According to Sem Dnei president Dmitry Biryukov, Gazprom-Media has decide to shut down Segodnya and change Itogi's editorial policy. Gazprom-Media board member Anatoly Blinov said that the decision to discard Segodnya was based on the fact that it is an unprofitable publication. (MOSCOW TIMES, 13 Mar 01) However, most Russian political daily newspapers are subsidized and operate at a loss.

**The Russian government's campaign in the West**

On 7 March, Gazprom-Media Director General Alfred Kokh took his campaign for the control of Media-MOST to Washington where he met with the US president's National Security Council. Kokh spoke with the National Security Council's director for Russia, Marc Picolo, the deputy special advisor of the US president and secretary of state on Russia, John Bayerly, and the National Security Council director for European and Eurasian affairs, Daniel Fried. During these discussions, Kokh tried to convince the National Security Council that Gazprom-Media’s pursuit of control of NTV was strictly business-related and was neither politically motivated nor an attempt to smother Russian freedom of speech. But the NSC had some tough questions for Kokh regarding the inconsistency of Gazprom debt collection, specifically why it seemed not to be particularly concerned about Itera’s half-billion-dollar debt, while persisting vigorously in its collection of the Media-MOST debt.

Despite repeated claims by Alfred Kokh that Gazprom-Media fully endorses the Turner-Soros consortium's proposals, still no deal has been struck between Gazprom and the consortium regarding the Western investment of $300 million in Media-MOST to help save NTV’s independence. Why is Kokh trying so hard to convince the US of Gazprom's purely business intentions if he is really ready to
accept a deal with the Western investors? Doesn't it seem like a wasted expenditure of effort on his part? If Gazprom supports the consortium's business proposal, and if the quest for collection of Media-MOST's debt is not a political one, why hasn't Kokh accepted the offer?

Meanwhile, Russian press minister Mikhail Lesin announced that his ministry is planning to launch a public relations campaign to help influence positively the way Russia is viewed abroad. Lesin seems to be attempting to counter the bad publicity that the press ministry has been getting for pressuring the independent media in Russia. Lesin asserts that there is more freedom of speech in Russia than in the United States, because the American media belong to roughly 50 corporations, whereas in Russia, media belong to about 1,000 different companies. Additionally, Lesin boasts that he was "not afraid of the word 'propaganda.'" (Jamestown Foundation FORTNIGHT IN REVIEW, 2 Mar 01) The fact that Lesin referred to his advertising campaign in the US as "propaganda" is especially interesting, because it is a retread of the Soviet Union with its "agitprop" department of the CPSU Central Committee. Since Goebbels, "propaganda" has implied duplicity and distortion.

A Strana.ru article on 3 March explained that Vladimir Putin devotes much time each day to analyzing the news reports from all national Russian TV channels, which are recorded for him uncut. The article is meant to show that the president is attentive of the press. It is difficult to believe that the president of a country which is so replete with social and economic problems finds the time to "analyze" personally the daily news from each national channel. Why is he so attentive? If the battle for a controlling stake in NTV isn't based on politics, if it isn't a struggle for power (in this case over television media), then why does Kokh need to meet with members of the NSC to convince the US of this? If the Russian press ministry isn't being given a fair shake by the foreign media for pressuring independent Russian media, then how will launching a costly campaign of
duplicity and distortion make the Russian press ministry look any better? Perhaps "He doth protest too much."

Russian Federation: Foreign Relations
By Sarah Miller

**Russian foreign affairs: pragmatic, but where's the policy?**

Russian President Vladimir Putin's frenetic diplomatic schedule is raising eyebrows across the globe as he cultivates ties with "rogue" states and acts as his country's most prestigious arms peddler. However, these dealings are more associated with filling Russia's immediate needs than with implementation of a fully fledged Russian foreign policy. Other than his January speech to the Russian foreign ministry, in which he called for using diplomatic means to improve the economy, Putin has done little to clarify Russian interests or policy. As a result, in the time since he took office, Putin has focused on trying to bolster Russia's waning prestige and improve the failing Russian economy without any overarching policy to guide his actions.

**Anti-Americanism: a symptom of Russia's fading prestige and economy**

Judging by the Putin administration's rhetoric and actions over the past few weeks, it might seem that simple anti-Americanism is driving Russia's foreign policy. However, a recent softening of rhetoric suggests that the Russian leadership may be changing tactics. Russian threats to take "asymmetrical action" in the face of US plans to implement a National Missile Defense (NMD) have been issued with decreasing frequency. In another twist, despite Russia's uncompromising insistence that US NMD plans would destabilize the international system, recently Moscow seems to be de-emphasizing Washington's significance in Russian foreign policy. After his meeting in DC with US National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice and US Secretary of State Colin Powell, Russian Security Council Chairman Sergei Ivanov announced that
Russia's relations with Washington were not a "key priority." (REUTERS, 13 Mar 01; via lexis-nexis) Statements like these, when coupled with Colonel-General Leonid Ivashov's announcement that Russia would not abandon the ABM Treaty immediately even if Washington were to violate the agreement, suggest that Moscow is changing its tune in order to protect its pocketbook and ego. This is especially true now that the Bush Administration seems set on implementing some form of NMD. Actual implementation of the system would force Russia to make good on its vague threats, incurring costs that the country cannot afford.

**Weapons for dollars, agreements for prestige**

Russia's increasing emphasis on building ties to "rogue" states fills its dual needs of wealth and prestige. Putin's recent meeting in Moscow with Iranian President Mohammud Khatami garnered international coverage as well as potentially lucrative arms deals, including tanks, fighter components, and even the possibility of an S-300 air-defense system for Iran. (INTERFAX, 1444 GMT, 14 Mar 01; FBIS-SOV-2001-0314, via World News Connection) The US has urged Russia not to provide Tehran with advanced conventional weapons or sensitive military technology, but Putin announced on 12 March that he plans to sell arms to Iran as well as complete construction of the Bushehr nuclear power plant. (REUTERS, 13 Mar 01; via lexis-nexis) These developments will undoubtedly place further strain on US-Russian relations, however, economic gains clearly supersede Russia's diplomatic concerns.

Likewise, Putin's trip to Seoul focused on prestige and economics. Russia has long seen the North-South Korean dialogue as a natural conduit by which to increase its prestige. As a result, Moscow has circumvented US and Chinese attempts to exclude it from "four-way peninsular talks" with a unilateral effort of its own. Russia already can lay claim to brokering a deal for a north-south railroad that will be connected to the Trans-Siberian Railway and will provide economic benefits in the region for Russia. (MAEIL KYONGJE, 1158 GMT, 27 Feb 01; FBIS-EAS-2001-0227, via World News Connection)
However, Moscow’s efforts to improve political and economic relations on the peninsula have not been translated into outright political rewards for Russia on the international scale. In the days following Putin’s visit, the ROK all but publicly rescinded the section of its joint statement with Russia, in which it had adopted Moscow’s anti-NMD rhetoric. In the statement, the presidents agreed that the "ABM Treaty is the foundation of strategic security and should be preserved and strengthened," but North Korean President Kim Tae-chung has since called the wording of the joint statement "a diplomatic blunder." (TONG-A ILBO, 9 Mar 01; FBIS-SOV-2001-0309, via World News Connection) Thus, while Moscow has made gains in specific areas of cooperation with the Koreas such as weapons and energy, Russian actions do not indicate any apparent overarching interests that might form the basis for a long-term policy.

A similar pattern is apparent in Russian relations with Vietnam, where most of the emphasis rests on economic and strategic benefits. In September, Russia forgave $9 billion of Vietnam's Soviet debt, paving the way for the strategic partnership treaty signed in Hanoi during Putin's visit on 1 March. (INTERNATIONAL HERALD TRIBUNE, 3 Mar 01; via lexis-nexis) The new partnership could provide a substantive economic return for Russia, since Vietnam still relies on Russian weaponry. Furthermore, Russia has agreed to participate in construction of an oil refinery and a hydroelectric power plant in Vietnam that will provide a further opportunity to reap economic gains from the partnership. (ITAR-TASS, 1956 GMT, 28 Feb 01; via lexis-nexis) While the financial side of the partnership is looking up, its strategic portion remains uncertain. At issue is the future of Russia's enviable naval base at Cam Ranh Bay... and therefore its force projection capability in Southeast Asia. Moscow has yet to translate its improving relations with Vietnam into a policy that will protect Russian strategic and economic interests.

**Salesman or statesman?**
Putin's diplomacy is shaping up to be more of a salesman's strategy than a coherent foreign policy. In addition to the relationships above, Putin has cultivated ties to India, China, Cuba, Nigeria and elsewhere, pledging weapons in exchange for the promise of prestige and economic gain. However much these numerous relationships may solve immediate problems of cash flow and self-esteem, they will not make a statesman out of Putin, or guide Russia out of the slump in which it now flounders.

**Russian Federation: Armed Forces**

*By Richard Miller*

**The Russian Air Force -- questionable plans for a questionable future**

The Russian Air Force and Sukhoi aircraft industries recently demonstrated upgrade packages and modernization plans for the SU-27 and SU-30 aircraft. While large numbers of these aircraft remain in inventory, currently significantly fewer remain operationally ready. These upgrades may be made available, and are attractive for foreign military sales; however, their utility for Russia is in greater doubt. Pursuing these upgrades may be "placing the cart before the horse" in determining Russia's true defense needs. This is particularly relevant while the force still faces significant funding shortfalls, dangerously low levels of tactical pilot training, and, most importantly, no honest assessment of a greater strategic vision or threat assessment for the Russian Federation.

In June 1998, Jane's Information Group Sentinel Security Assessment listed the Air Force fixed-wing inventory at over 17,000 aircraft with an additional 2,000 training aircraft. It estimated also that fewer than 6,000 of these aircraft are "in service." Published by Aviation Week, the Aviation and Aerospace Almanac for 2000 lists an active inventory of still over 4,000 aircraft. Shortly after the fall of the Soviet Union, Russian Air Force pilots were receiving less than 40 flight hours per year for training. Today, many of their fighter pilots receive only 10 hours per
year due to fuel shortages and lack of funds. By contrast, even at their lowest level of training, NATO pilots average more in a single month than the annual Russian amount. The Jane's assessment also highlighted the "significant problems [in] training command and technical staff. As new generation aircraft and weapons are introduced, there are serious concerns as to how far ground crews will be able to maintain them." (JANE'S SENTINEL SECURITY ASSESSMENT, Jun 98)

Given continued funding shortfalls, minimal pilot training, and difficulty retaining trained personnel able to maintain increasingly complex combat aircraft, the viability of planned upgrade and modernization plans as a means of enhancing the effectiveness and competency of the force is questionable.

The strategic bomber force recently has seen more activity with arctic training flights and participation in a major exercise in February. The February exercise, in conjunction with test launches of land- and sea-based nuclear capable missiles, included all three types of bombers -- the TU-160 (NATO Designation: BLACKJACK), TU-22 (NATO Designation: BACKFIRE), and the TU-95MS (NATO Designation: BEAR). Tactical fighter and attack aircraft regiments as a whole are worse off with fewer resources available for training. A small group of pilots is developing proficiency through operations in Chechnya but they are limited in number. This type of operation also does little to develop or improve the force as a whole. The recent announcements concerning modernization plans are focused on tactical fighter and attack aircraft.

**Upgrade and modernization**

Recent aircraft demonstrations, test flights, and modernization plans have included the following:

SU-27 (NATO Designation: FLANKER): Principally an air-to-air combat plane, upgrade plans include enhancements of the previously secondary role of ground
attack. Already considered one of the best fighter-interceptor aircraft in the world, the improvements to its avionics suite include a new computer, global positioning system, and multifunction cockpit displays. Also planned is improved fire control radar with a ground-mapping mode capable of acquiring large surface targets from 400km and small-sized surface targets to a range of 120km. Additional improvements include reducing radar cross-section through the use of radar-absorbing paint and screened engine nozzles, and installing an in-flight-refueling probe to increase range. The first upgraded SU-27UBM, a two-seat combat-capable trainer, was accepted from the Irkutsk Aviation Production Association (IAPO) on 6 March. (JANE'S DEFENCE WEEKLY, 12 Mar 01) These improvements will further realize its multi-role function as both a fighter and attack aircraft capable of employing precision guided munitions.

SU-30: Russia's first SU-30KN prototype, accepted in 1999, recently completed successful trials at the Akhtubinsk test center. Six to eight more SU-30Ks will also complete upgrades to the improved SU-30KN configuration before year-end. The improved SU-30KN will also be able to serve as an airborne reconnaissance/strike command post capable of relaying targeting information to additional strike aircraft. The upgraded SU-30KN and SU-27 UBM are expected to complete testing by August.

Also mentioned for upgrades and modernization were:

Fixed-wing fighter-attack aircraft:
SU-24 (NATO Designation: FENCER)
SU-25 (NATO Designation: FROGFOOT)
MiG-29 (NATO Designation: FULCRUM)
Specific details for these aircraft were not available.

Air-refueling/tanker aircraft:
Convert IL-76MD (NATO Designation: CANDID) transports into tankers.
Helicopters
MI-24VK-1 (NATO Designation: HIND) attack helicopter
MI-8MTKO (NATO Designation: HIP) transport helicopter
Both are being upgraded for night operations and several already in that configuration have been employed successfully during night operations in Chechnya.

The recent announcements by Moscow indicated that the Russian Air Force would receive up to 100 modernized planes within the next two years. Beyond 2002, Russia would like to increase the modernization program to 70-80 planes per year. However, if these plans are fully implemented, they probably will consume most of the entire Air Force budget for the next five years unless significant funding increases are allocated. General Anatoly Kornukov, Russian Air Force chief of staff, indicated that the modernization programs goals were extending service life of the aircraft involved, improving their existing combat capabilities, and developing new multi-mission capabilities. Upgrade work will be performed at some 15 different defense enterprises, including Komsomolsk-on-Amur and IAPO production plants. The actual number to be done in 2001 remains unclear but various reports point to 8-10 aircraft of each type being completed this year. (ITAR-TASS, 1556 GMT, 6 Mar 01; FBIS-SOV-2001-0306, via World News Connection, and JANE'S DEFENCE WEEKLY, 12 Mar 01)

Military reform plans will cut Air Force personnel by 36,000 in the next several years. However, when coupled with the recent hardware modernization plans and projected budgets, this will still leave the Air Force too large to develop efficiently into a credible and proficient force. Without significantly more resources, further cuts are required to redevelop truly a professional force. It is doubtful that the Ministry of Defense or President Putin will push forward with such an agenda. To do so would be a public demonstration that Russia no longer is a world power but merely a regional one. Putin has shown repeatedly in
statements and actions concerning the military that he views as important, and wants to restore, Russia's preeminence on the world military stage. The recent flurry of foreign initiatives to sell arms may help the flagging Russian aircraft industry in the short term, and thereby indirectly benefit the Russian Air Force. However, a long-range program structured only around foreign military sales and dreams of Russian greatness, rather than legitimate security needs, seems doomed to failure.

Newly Independent States: Western Region
By Tammy Lynch

UKRAINE
Should he stay or should he go?
Earlier this month, in a Financial Times opinion piece, financier George Soros strongly urged Ukrainian President Leonid Kuchma to resign because of the accusation of his "complicity in the murder of Georgy Gongadze." Soros also suggested that the West must turn away from Kuchma if he refuses to resign. "The West must take a clear position," he wrote, "denouncing Mr. Kuchma's behavior and actions. There is no way for the international community to continue to do business with Mr. Kuchma until an impartial investigation has been completed and those responsible are held to account." (FINANCIAL TIMES, 2 Mar 01; via lexis-nexis)

Of course, it is understandable that Mr. Soros would recoil at the idea that the president of any country might (either directly or indirectly) indicate the approval of the murder of a citizen. Certainly, the conduct of Mr. Kuchma and several of his power ministers following the discovery of Georgy Gongadze's body has stretched the bounds of credulity. However, the time when Kuchma could have ended the crisis by resigning has passed. To do so -- as Soros suggests -- at this critical point could plunge the country into a major political power struggle, further
exacerbating the already difficult domestic situation and creating a vacuum in the middle of Europe. Given this scenario, perhaps geopolitics should take precedence over any personal aversion to Kuchma's behavior. At this point, Ukraine must get on with the business of reforms -- including the electoral and constitutional reforms that have been introduced recently to prevent any repetition of such a sinister affair.

When the "Gongadze tapes" crisis began months ago, Ukraine's political landscape looked much different from today: less polarized, less active and less explosive. In November of 2000, before the release of the tapes purporting to reveal Kuchma sanctioning the murder of Gongadze, Kuchma and Prime Minister Viktor Yushchenko were the undisputed political leaders of the country. There was little diversity among political elites, with no one able to garner nearly the support of the president and prime minister. Kuchma -- by virtue of his popularity, control of the power ministries, collection of kompromat and referenda to increase his power -- had become seemingly invincible. For his part, Yushchenko had worked skillfully with parliament to create a relatively stable and compliant pro-presidential majority, and had begun an assault on the country's oligarchs. Overall, the presidential administration, government and parliament were united, even if Kuchma's personal distaste for Yushchenko was palpable. If Kuchma had resigned in this atmosphere, it is very possible (although clearly not definite) that Yushchenko could have asserted control over the administration, government and country. Probably, he could have influenced the workings of the parliament to ensure that -- at least in the short-to-medium-term -- the country continued on the same path as in the previous year.

But the atmosphere is much different now. The Gongadze scandal has woken the parliament from its slumber, ending (despite lip service to the contrary) the pro-presidential parliamentary majority and creating a relatively united center-right parliamentary opposition. It has almost completely stagnated the work of the president, while increasing the power and prestige of a number of other
politicians. Most important, it has shaken the previously strong parliamentary support for Yushchenko. New coalitions are being formed, and new leaders are emerging. If Kuchma were to resign today in favor of Yushchenko, the new president might be able to assert control over the government and continue his reform program. He could also become simply a lame duck president with no electoral mandate, little more than a target for politicians who have tasted popular support during this scandal.

And what of the new prime minister -- the person with more real power than the president -- if Yushchenko were to become president? In the parliament's current atmosphere many scenarios are possible, and one of many persons could be elevated to become head of government. Not all potential candidates, however, are as reform-minded as Yushchenko. In fact, with the major exception of the Socialist Oleksandr Moroz, the strongest candidates seem to be those representing the parties of the oligarchs.

There is no exact science available to determine what would happen in a power change, but certainly it would create a power vacuum, at least temporarily, and there is no doubt that such a vacuum on Ukraine's territory is not conducive to global tranquility.

Ukraine's closest Western neighbor obviously understands this. Poland's President Aleksander Kwasniewski met with President Kuchma in Poland on 15 March, despite protests from some Polish human rights groups. Poland's Foreign Minister Andrzejj Majkowski told reporters, "Isolation of Kuchma and generally of Ukraine is the worst imaginable thing; those forces who wanted to move Ukraine away from the road to Europe want this." (PAP, 1619 GMT, 13 Mar 01; FBIS-EEU-2001-0313, via World News Connection)

Kwasniewski, however, made it clear that his country did not support Kuchma's treatment of the media or his opposition, and met with a delegation of opposition
leaders the day before his meeting with Kuchma. Kwasniewski adamantly suggested to both sides that they hold "roundtable" talks to settle issues of power sharing, structures of authority and media freedom. Although both Ukrainian sides agreed in principle, each of them still seems too caught up in vitriol to sit down and negotiate. There are positive signs, however, that progress is being made. Just days ago, Kuchma met another of the opposition's demands and is rumored to have fired Interior Minister Yuriy Kravchenko. Kravchenko's replacement will show whether Kuchma's step was a genuine response to opposition concerns or an empty gesture designed to placate his opponents.

While the focus of Soros and others on Kuchma is obviously understandable, it overlooks a quiet but important step recently taken by parliament to stop something like the Gongadze affair from ever happening again, and to deal with the pervasive corruption in the country. Parliament recently began discussing a constitutional reform package that would make it easier to override the president's veto and would also eliminate the president's power to appoint local officials. Those officials have been found to be one of Kuchma's prime weapons against the opposition. The package also attempts to deal with the power of the oligarchs by creating a real, legitimate political party structure and basing parliament's makeup on such parties instead of individual personalities and continuously shifting factions. Of course, nothing has been passed yet, and any reform package can be perverted to favor the strongest in a group. But it shows, nonetheless, that parliament is attempting to learn from this crisis and to create a structure on which to build a genuinely democratic government.

It may seem today that Kuchma retains total control, and, technically, he does. But, his demeanor has created an opposition where there was none before, engaged the parliament in work it avoided earlier, and acted as a catalyst for many organizations finally to begin building the civil society and democratic institutional foundations that should have been created a decade ago. It is a situation that must be supported by the West, whether Kuchma remains or not.
NEWLY INDEPENDENT STATES: CAUCASUS
By Miriam Lanskoy

ARMENIA/AZERBAIJAN
Any rabbits up Powell's sleeves?
Early in April, US Secretary of State Colin Powell will host the next bilateral meeting between Armenian President Robert Kocharian and Azerbaijani President Heyder Aliev in Key West, Florida. The announcement of US re-engagement comes at a critical juncture in Armenian-Azerbaijani relations, since, in recent weeks, statements more bellicose than at any time since the 1994 cease-fire have been made by representatives of nationalist parties in both capitals. Also it comes early in the Bush presidency, when little is known about the administration's policy for Nagorno-Karabakh or the region as a whole. Therefore, this summit could be crucial for preventing another war and for building the credibility of the administration's Caucasus policy.

In Azerbaijan especially, the publication of the OSCE draft proposals on 21 February set off a political storm, with representatives of all the major political and social movements declaring them completely unacceptable and calling for tougher policies. (See The NIS Observed, 28 Feb 01) Many Western and regional analysts interpreted the scandal as Aliev's latest clever maneuver: He "leaked" the unacceptable documents so that he could sign something that would bring few tangible gains but would look good in comparison with the OSCE drafts. When, in the first week of March, French mediation failed to produce any headway, the disappointment with the peace process was compounded. In Armenia, communist and nationalist parties made territorial claims against neighboring states by calling for a "return" of Turkey's Kars-Ardahan area, as well as of Azerbaijan's Nakhichevan region, and autonomous status for Javakh, the Armenian-populated area of Georgia.
The publication of the OSCE drafts prompted a vigorous public debate in Azerbaijan and forced the opposition to articulate alternative policies. Initially, it came up with little except calling for another war, but on 7 March two former officials in the Aliev government, Eldar Namazov and Tofiq Zul'fugarov, published a competing proposal in the daily paper Zerkalo. They pointed out that Azerbaijan obtained important endorsements of its territorial integrity in the UN Security Council, the OSCE and the Council of Europe in the 1994 to 1997 period, when the processes of state-building, economic reform and military development seemed promising. Since 1997, Azerbaijan has faltered in its development; viewed as undemocratic and corrupt, it gains less support in international forums. Overall, the opposition is calling for internal renewal as the best way to win international support. The specific measures it suggests are more interesting: It treats as separate issues the question of the Armenian-occupied districts outside Nagorno-Karabakh and the question of Nagorno-Karabakh's eventual status. The latter can wait. The return of Azeri refugees to the occupied districts cannot. Since the UN Security Council has demanded repeatedly that Armenia cease its occupation of the non-Karabakh districts of Azerbaijan, "humanitarian" use of force by the Azerbaijani military to enable refugees to return to their homes would be legally and morally justified and politically popular. According to Namazov and Zul'fugarov, if Azerbaijan openly declared its intention to conduct such operations, it might find understanding among its allies, and see its negotiating position vis-à-vis Armenia much improved.

This plan is of particular interest because its authors, Namazov and Zul'fugarov (former presidential advisor for Nagorno-Karabakh and foreign minister, respectively) resigned their posts in the last days of October 1999 in protest against the draft framework agreement accepted by Aliev. That draft agreement (which has never been published) was the result of bilateral negotiations initiated by Madeleine Albright in April 1999. The subsequent series of talks produced a
formula which apparently was acceptable to Armenia and Azerbaijan. It would have been endorsed officially at the Istanbul summit of the OSCE in November 1999, if not for the assassinations in the Armenian parliament, which brought US involvement in the peace process to a virtual standstill for nearly two years. If Colin Powell intends to pull the 1999 draft framework agreement out of the filing cabinet, brush off the dust, and set it before the parties, the Namazov-Zul'fugarov text gives some ideas about the direction in which Powell may wish to update the 1999 texts.

Besides the content of the negotiations, there is the question of US strategy and commitment to the region. The failure of the talks can bring about a crisis; for that matter, so can success. What if the prospect of a peaceful resolution to the conflict topples the Armenian government as it did in 1997? Or inspires assassinations of government leaders, as it seems to have done in 1999? This time the situation could prove even more volatile, since the Azerbaijani government also is very vulnerable. Would the US disengage again? Or is there a backup strategy this time? One certainly hopes that there is.

**CHECHNYA**

**Spy vs. spy**

Since the start of the present war, Russia's military intelligence (Main Directorate for Intelligence, or GRU) has been financing its activities in Chechnya by extorting money from Chechen businessmen. So says an unnamed FSB agent who has recently returned to Moscow from Chechnya. For instance, Oneximbank owed Supian Taramov $200 million, which it was refusing to pay despite a court order. GRU agents persuaded the bank to pay the debt in return for a modest fee of 50%. Mr. Taramov was required also to finance the formation and logistics of a Chechen police force in the Vedeno district. (INDEPENDENT INFORMATION CENTER GLASNOST -- CAUCASUS, 17 Mar 01) This is the latest in a string of repeated public mudslinging between officers from rival agencies, which
suggests that, despite Putin's January order placing the FSB in command in Chechnya, the underlying conflicts remain unresolved.

In a recent interview (OBSHCHAYA GAZETA, 15 Feb 01), Major General Vladimir Dudnik had the following to contribute on this topic:

Q: But all the responsibility ... is now on the FSB!
VD: The entire army laughs into its sleeve at that decision. Where is the head of the FSB, Patrushev? In Moscow. And where is Chechnya? And, he, like any person, has only two hands. In one he holds his pen to write his threatening orders, and with the other he holds his portfolio lest it is "stolen." He does not have artillery, as under Beria and NKVD. Nor tanks, nor aviation.
Q: The military will give them to him.
VD: Never! Remember this, the army will never subordinate itself to the chekists. Even in the Stalinist times there was mutual antipathy between the army and the VChK, NKVD, KGB.
Q: Patrushev can create those units under the FSB!
VD: And then, he will become that third force on which the growing totalitarianism can lean.
Q: So, what can be done?
VD: Let it go, like DeGaulle, who gave Algeria over to Algeria.
Q: But there is still civil war there!
VD: Yes. And why should France care? ...

**Budanov's buddies take revenge on village**

As court proceedings began against Col. Budanov, who is charged with the abduction and murder of an 18-year-old Chechen woman, Elza Kangaeva, her village was subject to bombings and "cleansing." (For more on the Budanov case, see The NIS Observed, 28 Feb 01.) On the night of 28 February-1 March, the village of Tangi-Chu was subjected to artillery and aerial bombardment which destroyed several homes. When the village commandant called the army division
to stop the bombings, his request was refused. Subsequently the village was "cleansed" in the now familiar manner, with residents beaten and detained in a pit. The Glasnost news service comments that, a year ago, when the murder occurred, General Shamanov was in command of Budanov and the army divisions taking reprisals against the residents of Tangi-Chu. Shamanov has exonerated Budanov repeatedly and has flown to Rostov to support him. "Apparently assured of their complete immunity, members of the Russian military continue to commit wrongdoing, as though nothing has happened, even in the village from which victims and witnesses have been summoned to court."

(INFORMATION CENTER GLASNOST-CAUCASUS, 12 Mar 01)

Newly Independent States: Central Asia
By Lt. Col. James DeTemple

Iran wants to expand military cooperation with Tajikistan
On 9 March Iranian Defense Minister Ali Shamkhani and Tajik President Imomali Rakhmanov, accompanied by his defense minister Sherali Khairulloyev, met in Dushanbe to discuss Central Asian security issues and broadening Iran-Tajikistan military cooperation. The expansion of bilateral defense cooperation with Tajikistan indicates Iran's strategic interest in containing the influence of the Taliban. Given its geographic proximity, Iran is keenly interested also in developing military relationships with neighboring countries.

Shamkhani pointed out "Iran had good capabilities to equip the Tajik national army well," based on earlier agreements for military cooperation, including technical assistance and military equipment. (IRNA, 1842 GMT, 8 Mar 01; FBIS-NES-2001-0308, via World News Connection) Iran and Tajikistan initiated military cooperation in 1998 with a memorandum in Tehran. Shamkhani added that the two countries should cooperate in the fight against international terrorism and drug trafficking, which they viewed as serious threats to Central Asia (IRNA,
expressed the "hope that the two countries can make joint efforts to fight against regional insecurity and infiltration of transregional forces." (IRNA, 1140 GMT, 9 Mar 01; FBIS-NES-2001-0309, via World News Connection)

According to Khairulloyev, the two countries could not ignore the potential spillover of the Afghan civil war into Central Asia. Iran and Tajikistan support the Northern Alliance, which opposes the ruling Taliban in Afghanistan, and is expected to launch another spring offensive.

Some spillover already has occurred. In March, Russian border troops deployed in southern Tajikistan reported fierce fighting, allegedly including shelling of Tajik territory, between Northern Alliance and Taliban forces on the Tajik-Afghan border. (ITAR-TASS, 1140 GMT, 10 Mar 01; FBIS-SOV-2001-0215, via World News Connection) Indeed, recent joint Tajik-Russian military exercises supposedly were responding to the renewed fighting in Afghanistan.

Tajikistan's porous borders and vulnerability to the Taliban remain causes for concern in Central Asia. While containing the Taliban within Afghanistan constitutes a strong incentive for outside involvement in Dushanbe, clearly it is not the only motive. Expanded military cooperation with Tajikistan would provide Iran with a conduit for supplying military assistance and logistics support to the Northern Alliance as well as increase its military influence in the region.

Newly Independent States: Baltic States
By Kate Martin

Preening for inclusion
While Baltic statesmen point with glee at recent indications of US support for their inclusion in an expanded NATO, strengthened resolve in Washington very
well may be spurred on by Russian statements that are having the opposite effect on Washington's allies in Europe. Unless minds are changed in Europe, the international community could see a showdown along an interesting axis, with America's former Cold War friends siding with their onetime foe against a US-supported plan. Still, a lot could happen in the next year or so, and one shouldn't place bets on how the alliances will form.

In Washington for a conference of the joint Baltic-American committee, Estonian Defense Minister Juri Luik reported that the installation of the Bush administration had brought about renewed consideration of the alliance's expansion. The previous administration's willingness to accede to Russian wishes apparently had made officials in the Baltic states increasingly unsure of US support. "The Republicans' coming to power... has within a few months launched the discussion about the new round of expansion of NATO with a new impetus in the United States," Luik said. While in DC, the minister met with Lisa Bronson, the director of the Department of Defense NATO policy department, who praised Estonian's NATO Membership Action Plan as a good means of enhancing the country's defense capacity and cooperation capability. (BALTIC NEWS SERVICE, 9 Mar 01; via lexis-nexis)

Cooperation continues to be the key word for Baltic hopes. David Weisman, the US military representative to NATO, met with Latvian officials in February and had kind words about cooperative projects between the Baltic states, which he views as a unit. He made it clear, a subsequent statement announced, that "[f]rom the military viewpoint, it would be preferable to admit Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania to the alliance all at the same time." Moreover, Weisman confirmed that admission of the Baltic states would be on the agenda of the NATO 2002 summit. (BNS, 1646 GMT, 27 Feb 01; FBIS-SOV-2001-0227, via World News Connection)
The Baltic states actively are working toward increased cooperation capabilities, including training of officers and troops in NATO-sponsored exercises. A meeting of Latvian representatives and the NATO political-military committee resulted in expectations that, in April, the alliance will approve a progress report about Latvia's movement toward alliance membership. However, much remains to be done, the committee explained, including strengthening the combat capability of the National Armed Forces, as well as staff management and training system, implementing a planned increase in the defense budget and raising the level of investment in army development and armaments purchase. (BNS, 0731 GMT, 13 Mar 01; FBIS-SOV-2001-0313, via World News Connection)

Still, Lithuanian Defense Minister Linas Linkevicius reported, NATO countries have approved the idea of data exchanges between the Baltic countries' regional airspace control center and the alliance's integrated air defense system. (BNS, 1759 GMT, 23 Feb 01; FBIS-SOV-2001-0224, via World News Connection) While, obviously, the information from NATO to the Baltics would be limited -- since Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania are not members -- such exchanges would allow for kinks to be worked out in communications. Also helping to increase communications capabilities with NATO countries are the Baltico 2001 war games, involving Lithuanian and Italian troops, which are scheduled to continue until 31 March. Similar exercises were held in 2000 and 1999. (BNS, 0902 GMT, 10 Mar 01; FBIS-SOV-2001-0310, via World News Connection) Moreover, the Baltic states' marine warship squadron, Baltron, is holding exercises aimed at improving joint maneuvering capacity in line with NATO standards so that Baltron ships can participate in more international training and operations. (BALTIC NEWS SERVICE, 13 Mar 01; via lexis-nexis)

Meanwhile, Moscow's continued belligerence toward Baltic inclusion in NATO (see, for example, The NIS Observed, 28 Feb 01), found a somewhat surprising supporter -- Mikhail S. Gorbachev. The former president of the USSR said that a plan concerning NATO enlargement "without Russia's participation" obviously
would be "directed against Russia," which, he said, "is sure to retaliate." (ITAR-TASS, 1248 GMT, 28 Feb 01; FBIS-SOV-2001-0228, via World News Connection) While Gorbachev's influence within Russia is negligible, he retains some cachet in the West for overseeing the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Thus, his reservations could feed into the increasingly apparent lack of consensus among NATO members on the issue. Indeed, the newly elected chairman of NATO's Parliamentary Assembly, Spain's Rafael Estrella, demonstrated how comfortable he found fence sitting in an interview with the newspaper Rossiyskaya gazeta. Estrella took pains to assure Russia that the alliance is not targeting Russia, but instead views enlargement as a means of "expanding the area of security and stability." And then he straddled the fence with some verbal gymnastics: "I believe it is wrong that Russia should have a veto on the matter of NATO expansion. I believe it would be wiser to focus attention in the Russia-NATO dialogue on the quest for a formula that suits Russia and makes for agreement on the interpretation of certain countries' membership. This would give Russia much more influence on decision-making in the bloc." (ROSSIYSKAYA GAZETA, 13 Mar 01; FBIS-SOV-2001-0313, via World News Connection) So, we won't call it a veto...

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