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Stick with what you know

After a tumultuous autumn, Russia's Federal Security Service (FSB) seemingly has found a few high notes on which to close the year. After killing perhaps three times as many hostages as terrorists in the theater saga, and following the government’s predictable Kursk-like silence concerning the gas that killed the hostages, and the FSB’s self-congratulatory media tour, director Nikolai Patrushev can raise his vodka glass on New Year’s Eve, toast his recent victories and ignore his inglorious defeats.

Coincidentally, Salman Raduev, the Chechen warlord who seized a hospital in Kizlyar and held hundreds hostages in 1996, died of "internal bleeding" in a Perm prison last week. Raduev's operation and the security service's seizure -- which cost the lives of nearly 80 persons before being resolved -- resembled the 1995 Budennovsk hostage crisis (in which Shamil Basaev's group seized another hospital, an act that ended in tragedy with more than 100 civilians dying when Russian troops stormed the hospital). (ASSOCIATED PRESS, 16 Dec 02, and AGENCIE-FRANCE PRESSE, 25 Oct 02; via ISI Emerging Markets Database)

Raduev was the first prominent Chechen warlord to be prosecuted by Russian authorities and his operation was the second in a developing pattern of large-scale hostage seizures, for which the security services have yet to develop adequate tactics, techniques and procedures.

In the ever-expanding Russian crackdown on Western "spies," Patrushev noted recently that 30 members of the Peace Corps would not receive visa extensions,
because many were allegedly gathering information on Russian officials as well as on the sociopolitical and economic situation in numerous Russian regions. (MOSCOW TIMES, 16 Dec 02; via ISI Emerging Markets Database) Since when has such material been classified? Among the high crimes of which the so-called "operatives" purportedly were guilty: collecting information regarding the course of elections. Of course such a task could be simplified by following the golden rule of Putin-era politics - if an important post is due to be filled by election, look to see if is supported by the FSB. Governorships, for instance, appear to be a critical part of the FSB outplacement service.

In a string of genuine successes, the FSB's focus on growing Islamic fundamentalism and influence in southern Russia appears to have yielded some results this year. The closing of "Pan-Islamic" companies such as Serhat and Eflyak, the detention of the militant Islamist Abdullah Abdel Hamid Abdel Basit Mahmud and recent arrests by Russia of Hizb-ut-Tahrir members seem to indicate that all is not wrong in the FSB.

**Russian Federation: Foreign Relations**

By Ansel Stein

**The carrot and the stick**

Over the course of the last six months, Iraq has secured Moscow's diplomatic support by offering a $40 billion "program for economic cooperation." (THE NIS OBSERVED, 21 Sep 02) Russian support - obtained with oil contracts, economic incentives and Moscow's own goal of hampering American power in the region -- has centered primarily around protecting Iraq's interests in discussions at the United Nations Security Council (UNSC). Apparently, however, Moscow has not taken as firm a stance as Baghdad would have liked: After lengthy wrangling, Russia voted for UNSC Resolution 1441. As a result of the diplomatic process that produced 1441, Iraq is now more aware than ever that it could have acquired
the same level of "protection" from at least two other permanent members of the Security Council-China and France-in exchange for similar economic concessions.

On 11 December, Iraq's oil ministry announced that it had terminated the contract with LUKoil to develop the West Qurna oil field, one of the biggest fields being offered to foreign oil companies (7.3 billion barrels of recoverable reserves). Iraq charged that LUKoil had failed to fulfill its obligations under the agreement, which was signed in 1997, and "since the Contract was signed with the sole purpose of developing and producing from the West Qurna field to augment the oil production capacity of Iraq, the non-performance by LUKoil had in effect resulted in substantial harm to the economic interests of the country." (Energy Intelligence Group, Inc., NEFTE COMPASS, 11 Dec 02; via Lexis-Nexis)

LUKoil responded that its inability to develop the fields resulted from the ongoing UN sanctions regime. In fact, Russian companies do not face this problem alone. Companies from several other countries -- France, Italy and China, among them -- hold contracts that are not operational because of the sanctions, which were in place before the agreements were reached. (THE TIMES (London), 12 Dec 02; via Lexis-Nexis)

Iraq raised the issue with LUKoil several times in the recent past and the threat to terminate the contract has been in the air for at least the last two years. The final straw for Baghdad seems to have been Alekperov's statement that LUKoil had received assurances -- presumably from Russian President Vladimir Putin -- that the company's position in Iraq wouldn't be jeopardized if Saddam Hussein were ousted. (IBID.)

Exacerbating that diplomatic gaffe were LUKoil's behind-the-scenes negotiations with US Secretary of Energy Spencer Abraham on oil activities in a post-Saddam Iraq. These talks are said to have taken place during the US-Russia energy
summit in Houston at the beginning of October. (IBID.) Russia’s numerous meetings in recent months with Iraqi opposition groups also could not have been helpful. Most recently, the Russian ambassador to Iran met with Ayatollah Mohamad Baqir Al Hakim, leader of the Supreme Council for the Islamic Revolution in Iraq. (THE NIS OBSERVED, 4 Dec 02) Moscow now appears to be betting more on the Iranian than the Iraqi horse - a choice which is not necessarily less problematic for Washington.

LUKoil is expected to bring the case to international arbitration in its bid to rescue the only serious business agreement signed by Russia in Iraq so far. West Qurna was to have been developed by a consortium led by LUKoil that included Russia's state-owned Zarubezhneft and Mashinoimport, which have long been present in the Iraqi market and are involved in purchasing Iraqi crude oil under the UN oil-for-food program. Zarubezhneft also is due to take part in contracts resulting from the cooperation agreement.

As for Moscow's reaction, there have been some calls for changing the nature of the Russo-Iraqi relationship. Valery Draganov, chairman of the Duma's Economic Policy Committee, called Iraq an "unstable partner" on 14 December. "In addition to the economic aspect, we should ask ourselves the question whether we can continue sitting on two chairs," Draganov said, according to Interfax. "We are backing the U.S.-led anti-terrorist operation and simultaneously giving hope to a regime, cooperation with which offers no economic prospects and poses a threat of betrayal." (ASSOCIATED PRESS WORLDSTREAM, 14 Dec 02; via Lexis-Nexis) Whether this call will be heeded by the Kremlin remains an open question.

Russian Federation: Domestic Issues and Legislative Branch
By Kate Martin
Center does not favor attempts at independence

Speaking to the presidium of the state council that is charged with examining and improving the division of responsibilities between the federal center and the regions, President Putin said opaquely that a "renewed legal basis is required for reinforcing independence and increasing responsibility, both of regional and of local authorities." (ITAR-TASS, 1431 GMT, 21 Nov 02; FBIS-SOV-2002-1121, via World News Connection) Some regional leaders appear to be taking the notion of "independence" quite seriously, ignoring earlier indications that the administration's notion of reform more closely resembles reinforcement of the "power vertical," that is, federal control over the regions.

Establishing a level of autonomy, however, is no easy task. Despite the support of Bashkir President Murtaza Rakhimov, deputies in Bashkortostan's assembly voted unanimously against changing the system of regional government from the presidential to the parliamentary type. (ITAR-TASS, 1217 GMT, 3 Dec 02; FBIS-SOV-2002-1203, via World News Connection) An earlier draft of a new constitution had eliminated the post of president (with presidential powers being shared by the government and the legislature) and had raised the status of the speaker of parliament. (RFE/RL NEWSLINE, 18 Oct 02)

The notion of parliamentary republics had garnered support outside Bashkortostan as well. "There should only be one president in the country -- the president of the Russian Federation," Mukhu Aliev, chairman of Daghestan's parliament, said. Head of parliament should be the highest post in the national republics, he added. (RFE/RL NEWSLINE, 11 Oct 02)

Not everyone agreed. Ramazan Abdulatipov, a member of the Federation Council, applauded the results of the Bashkortostan vote while warning against similar endeavors. "[A]ttempts to introduce a parliamentary model for forming the organs of power in some places contradict the constitutionally determined
common principles governing their formation and activity. This introduces elements of incompatibility, of certain kinds of contradiction into the functioning of the organs of power at the center and at the local level, and hence leads to destructiveness and instability," he said. (ROSSIIYSKAYA GAZETA, 4 Dec 02; FBIS-SOV-2002-1204, via World News Connection) Abdulatipov stressed that he did not understand the motivation prompting Rakhimov and "certain circles in Udmurtia" to try and change the present system.

Udmurtia isn't limiting its anti-federal behavior to political change, either. Despite a six-year-old decision by Moscow to build a disposal site for 916 defunct solid-fuel rocket engines, the leader of Udmurtia's government, Yuri Pitkevich, recently signed a decree nullifying all previous statutes concerning construction at that location. The move reportedly was sparked by environmental concerns about the disposal process, which includes burning the engines and then cleaning up the residue. An article in the government newspaper Rossiyskaya gazeta minced no words in analyzing this situation: Casting aside arguments for clean air, it called Pitkevich's actions "a flagrant act of regional sabotage against decisions made by the central government," and warned that the federal government had no current "legal grounds to make regional leaders toe the line," at least until the US withdraws funding. Then, it pointed out, the disposal would go on, without the technology US money could have brought. (ROSSIIYSKAYA GAZETA, 6 Dec 02; FBIS-SOV-2002-1206, via World News Connection)

Pitkevich's move does risk the loss of US funding for the destruction of weapons arsenals and makes questionable Russia's adherence to international agreements. Interestingly, Udmurtia had not been the government's first choice for the disposal site. Originally, the plan was to use an existing facility in Perm Oblast', but Moscow had to seek an alternative when the head of that oblast's administration refused to allow it. Consideration of a similar site in Kemerovo Oblast' also has encountered opposition from environmentalists.
Another item of contention between the center and the national republics is as basic as the alphabet: Latin or Cyrillic. Both sides are trying to position their arguments within the context of saving a national culture, either existent or emergent. In a letter to President Putin, Talgat Tadzhuddin, Russia's supreme mufti, expressed his negative opinion of attempts to introduce the Latin alphabet for Tatarstan's national language. "Changing the basics of a language in one of Russia's subjects would bring about irreversible damage to all of Tatar ethnic culture and to the community of Russian peoples and would lead to distrust towards and alienation from them," he said. The mufti is not alone. Representatives of the Tatar diaspora in Bashkortostan also wrote of their concerns: "Changing our written language would lead to the isolation of the whole Tartar people, including those residing in Tatarstan itself, from Russian culture and its priceless heritage." (ITAR-TASS, 0830 GMT, 9 Dec 02; FBIS-SOV-2002-1209, via World News Connection)

The change was supported by Russia's Duma, which decided to make use of the Cyrillic alphabet mandatory in an amendment to the Law on the Languages of the Peoples of the Russian Federation. (INTERFAX, 0852 GMT, 15 Nov 02; FBIS-SOV-2002-1115, via World News Connection) The World Tatar Congress has urged Putin not to sign the amended law. "The approval of the amendment by the parliament infringes on the people's inviolable rights. Making a state decision on the language of an ethnic group without taking its opinion into account is an unprecedented occurrence," the appeal to Putin said. (INTERFAX, 1830 GMT, 2 Dec 02; FBIS-SOV-2002-1202, via World News Connection) Tatar President Mintimer Shaimiev declared the Duma's move to be unconstitutional, and asserted that such a law would not be enforced in Tatarstan. (RFE/RL NEWSLINE, 19 Nov 02)
Tatarstan is not the only republic looking to use the Latin alphabet, however. Ethnic communities in the northern republic of Karelia also protested the Duma's decision. Such a move, according to a letter made public by the Karelian government, "will fully ruin the emerging Karelian and Vepps languages that are close to the Finnish language." (ITAR-TASS, 0039 GMT, 11 Dec 02; FBIS-SOV-2002-1211, via World News Connection)

Russian Federation: Armed Forces

By Steve Kwast and Dan Rozelle

Russian forces race to Kyrgyzstan to maintain balance of power

Moscow finally is fighting back against what it perceives to be an insidious increase in America's presence and influence in the Central Asian region. On 2 December, two Su-25 Frog-Foot ground attack aircraft and two Il-76 Candid transport aircraft arrived at the military airport in Kant, 20 kilometers from Bishkek. Over the next few weeks, five Su-27, five Su-25 fighter aircraft, two AN-26 Curl transport aircraft, five L-39 trainers, two Mi-8 Hip multi-mission helicopters and two Il-76 aircraft will join the initial arrivals. Over 700 Russian servicemen and civilians from Tajikistan also will be transferred to Kant to man this hardware. (INTERFAX, 1219 GMT, 2 Dec 02; via Lexis-Nexis)

The Russian military attaché in Kyrgyzstan, Major General Vladimir Varfalameev, told news agencies that this move is meant to provide air cover for the ground units which have been set up at Kant already, and that the units comprise Russian, Kazakh, Kyrgyz and Tajik battalions. He went on to say that this increased presence is part of a continuing effort to bolster Central Asia's collective rapid-deployment forces for the Collective Security Treaty's Central Asian sector (CSTO). (ITAR-TASS, 0947 GMT, 2 Dec 02; via Lexis-Nexis)
But the timing and method of this move indicate a different objective. President
Vladimir Putin may be more interested in sending a none-too-subtle message to
the region than to bolster CSTO. This Russian activity comes on the heels of
Tajikistan President Emomali Rakhmonov's announcement that he would visit the
United States in December to discuss an increased American military presence
adjacent to current Russian units based in Dushanbe. (NEZAVISIMAYA
GAZETA, 26 Nov 02; WPS Defense and Security, via ISI Emerging Markets
Database) Of additional concern to Putin are the squadrons of planes and
soldiers from NATO which have been stationed at the Manas airfield in
Kyrgyzstan for over a year. That may be a further reason why he announced the
move of military force into the region and why he arrived in Kyrgyzstan on 5
December to visit the troops and see the situation first-hand. (KOMMERSANT, 2
Dec 02; WPS Defense and Security, via ISI Emerging Markets Database)
However, moving a 700-soldier unit from Tajikistan to Kyrgyzstan, an
insignificantly small distance, does nothing to increase military capability in the
area. It equates to little more than a shell game to make it appear that a
significant military presence is being established. (NEZAVISIMOYE VOENNOYE
OBOZRENIE, 9 Dec 02; WPS Defense and Security, via ISI Emerging Markets
Database)

This "hollow" gesture by Putin might be explained by a recent Russian survey.
The results, published by the Russian Academy of Sciences' Institute for
Comprehensive Social Research (ICSR), indicate that Russians dislike any US
military presence in former Soviet territory and approve overwhelmingly Putin's
use of Russian troops to counter such a presence. On the other hand, the study
found that most Russians believe Putin's greatest achievement of the past two
years was "unfreezing" Russia's relations with the West. (IZVESTIA, 8 Oct 02;
via The Current Digest of the Post-Soviet Press) These results could explain
why, while Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov recently indicated that Russia no longer
views one country as its principal antagonist, at the same time Putin shuffles
troops around Central Asia to make it appear that Moscow is countering the US
In the final analysis, the Russian military is in such poor shape, and stretched so thin because of Chechnya, that no new military force could be generated to increase the Collective Security Treaty Organization's ranks in Kyrgyzstan. The most that Moscow could do was to shuffle military forces within the region. This constituted an unimpressive effort to boost Putin’s popularity and to send a message to the Central Asian states that they remain within Russia's orbit, even as Moscow’s influence continues to deteriorate along with its economic and military might.

**Putin's visit to China and India strengthens military ties**

President Vladimir Putin's recent visit to East Asia and Central Asia had a clear goal: To increase military sales to everyone who will buy. As an example, during his time in India he endorsed more than 350 draft contracts for military support. According to Andrei Nikolaev, head of the Russian State Duma Defense Committee, Russia will "deliver new military hardware and weapons to India and modernize the existing types of weapons, launch production of T-70 and T-90 tanks and Su-30MKI aircraft, and develop joint production of advanced types of hardware and arms." (ITAR-TASS, 3 Dec 02; via Lexis-Nexis)

Additionally, these 350 contracts include production of Amur-1650 submarines, radio electronic countermeasures systems for Su-30MKI aircraft, Smerch multiple launchers, airborne early warning systems for the A-50 aircraft and the modernization of the heavy aircraft carrier Admiral Gorshkov for the Indian Navy. (ITAR-TASS, 1917 GMT, 2 Dec 02; via Lexis-Nexis) Of most concern to India's neighbors is Russia's renewed offer to provide an integrated air and missile defense system that President Putin offered in New Delhi. The long-range S-300V surface-to-air missile system, along with the shorter-range "Tor-M1" and "Buk-M1" systems, will be integrated into the Indian "Trishul" system and would
cover the entire Indian territory. (THE ECONOMIC TIMES, 1 Dec 02; via Lexis-Nexis) According to Rosoboronexport, the contracts signed with India total about $12.5 billion, no small amount of money for a Russian military and economy in desperate need of cash. (INTERFAX, 1331 GMT, 28 Nov 02; FBIS-SOV-2002-1128, via World News Connection)

The same dynamic was evident in China. China added the S-300F surface-to-air missile system to its inventory along with several naval acquisitions. According to Konstantin Makienko, deputy director of the Russian Center for Analysis of Strategies and Technologies, China has arrived at a qualitatively new stage in development of its navy. "The Chinese navy is making active steps to access the medium ocean zone," he said. This capability would allow operation outside the first chain of islands (e.g., Japan, Taiwan and western Borneo). (ITAR-TASS, 0950 GMT, 25 Nov 02; FBIS-SOV-2002-1125, via World News Connection)

Military sales to China and India keep the two giants on equal military ground. When asked about the arms race he is fueling, President Putin said, "We are confident about the positive development of Russian-Indian, Russian-Chinese and Chinese-Indian relations We look favorably on the possibility of India joining the Shanghai Cooperative Organization (SCO). We have come to the conclusion that now we could address other problems through that organization." The SCO originally included four former Soviet republics and China to resolve border disputes but has expanded its role to include "fighting terrorism." (PRIME-TASS, 2 Dec 02; WPS Defense and Security, via ISI Emerging Markets Database)

Despite President Putin's claim that no arms race can take place among friends, China and India still have a long way to go before they look upon one another without suspicion. In the meantime, Moscow obtains what it wants from both countries: money to help revitalize a failing economy and reform a struggling military.
Ukraine update

In the last edition of The NIS Observed, (4 Dec 02) the downing of a Russian passenger jet by Ukrainian air defense troops in October 2001 was mentioned in relation to an upcoming joint Russian-Ukrainian exercise. The aircraft, a Russian Tu-154, crashed into the Black Sea, killing all 66 passengers and 12 crewmembers. (INTERFAX-UKRAINE, 1156 GMT, 3 Dec 02; via Lexis-Nexis) It now appears that an attempt may be made to raise the airliner, which lies nearly 2,000 meters deep on the bottom of the Black Sea. Remnants of the plane are necessary to "prove the guilt of officials who violated the rules during the exercise," according to the Ukrainian deputy prosecutor-general in charge of military prosecution, Oleksander Atamanyuk. At present no officials of the Ukrainian defense ministry have been charged, though it is widely accepted that an S-200 air defense missile fired by Ukraine air defense troops brought down the aircraft. (ITAR-TASS, 3 Dec 02; via Lexis-Nexis)

Russian prosecutors have provided assistance in the matter; however, the evidence they submitted did not include any pieces of the aircraft or missile. By raising the debris of the aircraft along with any remains of the passengers, investigators will have "the entire chain of evidence and be able to state that the jetliner had been destroyed by a missile, and prove the guilt of the military," said Atamanyuk. (NEZAVISIMAYA GAZETA, 9 Dec 02; What the Papers Say, via ISI Defense and Security Database)

Russian defense ministry leadership rumors

The apparent bureaucratic power struggle between Defense Minister Sergei Ivanov and Chief of the General Staff Anatoly Kvashnin has prompted considerable open discussion in military circles. The latest rumor, according to one recent article, is that one of the two men will leave the defense ministry in the near future. The military believes that Kvashnin has the best chance to remain and perhaps even ascend to the position of defense minister. Kvashnin's supporters point to his recent atypical participation in the high-profile political
meetings of the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council and Russia-NATO Council. He also has made himself much more accessible to journalists of late and is in line for promotion to marshal of the Russian Federation. Other sources cited in the article say that Kvashnin is permitted to phone President Putin personally without first informing the defense minister and at times even receives calls from him. Now that the return of the red star to the military's combat banners has been approved, the military believes that there should be little or no embarrassment to returning a military officer to the position of defense minister. (VREMYA NOVOSTEI, 2 Dec 02; What the Papers Say, via ISI Defense and Security Database) On the other hand, the relations between Putin and Defense Minister Sergei Ivanov are widely believed to be based on personal friendship developed during their FBS career.

Another Russian general also may be receiving a new assignment, though certainly not the kind that leads to higher rank or a more prestigious position. Colonel General Gennadi Troshev, currently commander of the North Caucasus Military District, is rumored to be in line for a transfer to head the Siberian Military District. Until this surprising news, Troshev appeared to have bright military and political prospects. He had fought in both Chechen campaigns and had been responsible for some of the more successful operations. Troshev now occupies one of the most important positions in the military, the position held by Kvashnin in 1997. Most recently Troshev has been mentioned as a potential candidate for governor of the wealthy Rostov region or president of Chechnya. However, indications are that Troshev may be facing the same career danger that has befallen prior commanders of the Chechen campaigns, who have been relegated to positions of obscurity. Another factor mentioned is Troshev's self-serving book about his time in Chechnya titled "My War: The Chechnya diary of a general in the trenches." While it may have led to a rise in his political status, the book also has earned the resentment of many top military officers. (NEZAVISIMAYA GAZETA, 10 Dec 02; What the Papers Say, via ISI Defense and Security
Should Troshev try to fight the reassignment, he would be well advised to avoid rides in helicopters and steer clear of long car trips.

**Russian Duma approves military budget**

In its third reading the Russian Duma has approved the national budget for 2003. A fourth and final reading remains; however, this is largely considered to be a formality. Included in the budget are 345 billion rubles (approximately US $10.8 billion) for the military. In a recently published interview, Colonel General Yuri Rodionov, a former defense minister and now a member of the Duma defense committee, stated that the amount for the military had grown by 62 billion rubles over last year's budget. However, according to Rodionov, when adjusted for inflation, it is only a 0.15% increase from the 2002 budget. Of the 345 billion rubles budgeted, he said, 326 billion are allocated for construction and maintenance, 13 billion will go to the defense ministry's nuclear energy program and 4 billion will be spent on mobilization and reserve training. Rodionov criticized the budget for not providing enough money to continue the present rate of dismantling nuclear submarines and for not factoring in expected increases in transportation and energy costs. According to Rodionov, removal of spent fuel will drop from 18 submarines per year to only 6 and spending on modernization will have to be sacrificed to compensate for a 5 billion ruble shortfall for transportation and fuel expenditures. (NEZAVISIMOYE VOENNOYE OBOZRENIE, 6 Dec 02; What the Papers Say, via ISI Defense and Security Database)

Of significant concern to other members of the Russian Duma is the lack of funding directed to the well-being of service members. While small increases are stipulated for salaries and allowances, other items of compensation were nowhere near the amounts necessary. Money assigned to cover the costs of food is sufficient to supply the equivalent of only 67% of all service members. Instead, members will receive compensation of 20 rubles per day (less than US $1). Money allocated to pay for housing, medical care and relocation of service
members is half of that required. The budget also states that members will be supplied only with field uniforms.

Other budget shortages also continue to plague the Russian military. Lack of flight time for pilots and sailing time for Navy ships will erode not only individual service member’s capabilities but also overall satisfaction with the military. And, in perhaps the biggest defense ministry initiative, the failure to provide adequate salaries has put the transition to a contract military in serious doubt. When viewed together, these shortfalls make it obvious that without significant reductions in force size, Russia's military budget will be unable to supply the materials and compensation necessary to sustain a viable fighting force. (WPS OBSERVER, 4 Oct 02; What the Papers Say, via ISI Defense and Security Database)

Newly Independent States: Western Region

By Nadezda Kinsky and Scott Fleeher

BELARUS

Leaving the back door open

The United States joined the travel ban issued by 14 European Union countries to eight top Belarus officials (including President Alyaksandr Lukashenka) on 26 November, citing a shared concern over Belarus' treatment of its citizens: "The United States imposes this extraordinary measure in view of the continuing erosion of human rights and democratic principles in Belarus." (WWW.USIS.MINSK.BY)

The travel ban also had been explicitly linked to the October closure of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) Mission in Minsk. (Portugal, which holds the current OSCE presidency, had not joined the ban in view of its hosting the recent 55-nation OSCE talks.) On 2 December, Dutch EU
delegate Jan Marinus Wiersma stated that if an agreement was reached about an OSCE presence in Belarus, the EU would be able to lift the travel ban.

Lukashenka welcomed discussion of the issue: "We are ready to personally invite to our country all those -- even if there are 100 of them -- [empowered] for talks on the mandate of an OSCE mission, on the forms and terms of its presence."

(RFE/RL NEWSLINE, 5 Dec 02) This honor was not extended on that same day, however, to two experts -- one Romanian, one Czech -- who had planned to take part in a conference in Minsk on democratic election standards. Their failure to receive a visa most probably was in response to the Czech refusal to issue a visa to President Lukashenka to attend the Prague NATO summit in November.

Lukashenka uttered his statement during what was, for him, a highly surprising visit on 3-4 December with three US Congressmen. The stop in Minsk, initiated by an invitation from President Lukashenka to the Congressmen who were on their way to Moscow, appears at this time like an unfortunate break in the US resolve towards the current Belarus regime. Still, this meeting may have contributed to Lukashenka's swift response allowing OSCE participants back into the country. Not surprisingly, the regime also used the visit for propagandistic purposes, with a press release asserting that the Congressmen had called the highly controversial 2001 presidential election in Belarus fair and democratic and had emphasized their readiness to establish contact with the Belarus legislature. The Belarus opposition, which also met with the Congressmen, was appalled at this "cheap propaganda." A member of the US delegation, Rep. Curt Weldon, expressed surprise at the government's move: "I am appalled that anyone would take such blatant action and put out such outrageous lies. The delegation went to Minsk in good faith and what they have seen is the lowest form of politics."

(WWW.USIS.MINSK.BY)

Against the background of Putin's invitations to Lukashenka and intensified talks on the development of a union between Russia and Belarus, as well as the
growing economic power Russia holds over struggling Belarus (particularly evident at the moment in the gas sector), Lukashenka looks increasingly dependent on the Russian president. It may be useful, therefore, for the representatives of the EU and US not to slam shut Belarus’ door to the West. The best vehicle for continued dialogue appears to be the efforts at reopening OSCE relations.

Talks between Belarus and OSCE have begun tentatively at the level of the Belarus ambassador to Austria Viktor Haysyonak, who is also the permanent representative to the OSCE, and representatives of the OSCE Permanent Council and Secretariat. The Belarus authorities have expressed their hope that the talks might yield results by the end of the year. (ITAR-TASS, 12 Dec 02; via Lexis-Nexis) Officials on both sides denied rumors that discussions had not even begun yet, but warned that the issues at hand will take more than a few days to be resolved. In the meantime, Norway also has issued an identical travel ban.

UKRAINE

Some new, old faces
President Leonid Kuchma has spent his time since the parliamentary election turning around the results and consolidating his position with surprising ease. As it stands now, the pro-presidential majority in the Rada has 233 deputies, increased again after some recent defections from the Our Ukraine faction. With his new prime minister, Kuchma is balancing the power of the clans and has set himself up for what would seem to be a safe two-year run to a comfortable retirement.

Many new faces have appeared in high positions during recent weeks, including Yuriy Kravchenko, who on 6 December found himself unexpectedly the head of the Ukrainian State Tax Administration. One of Kuchma's supporters, he had lost his position as Minister of the Interior in the course of the Gongadze scandal. The new head of the Supreme Court, Vasyl Malyarenko, was elected in November,
shortly after the first of two court cases against President Kuchma were filed in Kyiv. (THE NIS OBSERVED, 30 Oct 02) The judge who had opened and presented the two cases against the president, Yuriy Vasilenko, has declared that he is concerned not only for his own position and safety, but for the safety of his family, suspecting that he is under surveillance. (EKSPRES, 5 Dec 02; BBC Monitoring, via ISI Emerging Markets Database) Oleksandr Lavrynovich, the new justice minister, has stated that Vasilenko's cases discredit the judge's professionalism. He reiterated also that the secretly recorded Melnychenko tapes are not permissible as evidence in any court case. (KIEVSKIY TELEGRAPF, 9 Dec 02; BBC Monitoring, via ISI Emerging Markets Database)

The opposition is now fighting against the dismissal of Volodymyr Stelmakh, governor of the Ukrainian National Bank. Kuchma made his third request for the governor's dismissal on 12 November, after earlier attempts had failed in parliament. Stelmakh signed a resignation letter that same day, though it later emerged that the letter was written under considerable pressure. The opposition is taking a strong stance on this case. Opposition leader Viktor Yushchenko stated on 15 November that Stelmakh "is our last fortress and we shall not retreat." (UNIAN, 15 Dec 02; BBC Monitoring, via ISI Emerging Markets Database)

The opposition has been strongly critical of many recent appointments, pointing particularly to the new cabinet's lack of popular legitimacy. Oleksandr Moroz stated that "What we have witnessed is a new stage of redistributing the country among oligarchic clans. Under the president's guidance, the Kyiv, Donetsk and Dnipropetrovsk clans have struck a compromise. The president and his team are refining the oligarchic model of forming a government." (INTERFAX, 2 Dec 02; FBIS-SOV-2002-1202, via World News Connection)

Viktor Yanukovych and leaders of the pro-presidential majority on 7 December signed a "Political Accord on Cooperation and Joint Responsibility" in exercising
power, (INTERFAX, 7 Dec 02; FBIS-SOV-2002-1207, via World News Connection) which Kuchma praised, pointing to the political consolidation which he said had not been seen previously at the beginning of a new cabinet. He underlined the necessity of unity in action between the cabinet, the parliament and the president, saying that he would no longer be able to correct the "populist mistakes" made by the Supreme Rada and that he placed his trust now in the work of the coalition government and the parliament. (ITAR-TASS, 7 Dec 02; FBIS-SOV-2002-1207, via World News Connection) This new situation does indeed have the appearance of a much-strengthened Kuchma bloc at all levels of the administration.

Undoubtedly, the developments during the last month have made the opposition's work more difficult, as their role in the Rada has been increasingly sidelined. Moreover, considerable pressure is being exerted on all opposition figures, both professionally and personally.

Given such measures, it is not entirely surprising to see some politicians crumble. Yushchenko's Our Ukraine is losing parliamentarians at a worrying rate. On Tuesday, 10 December, reacting to the defection of a group of five parliamentarians, Yushchenko said that members of the Our Ukraine faction have been under higher-than-ever criminal and political pressure. He denounced those who joined the pro-presidential faction as having betrayed the voters of Our Ukraine, and said that he would appeal to the electorate not to forget those names. One of the defectors is Oleksandr Stoyan, head of the Federation of Trade Unions, another important figure for Kuchma. Our Ukraine now has only 103 deputies in parliament.

Yulia Tymoshenko, Oleksandr Moroz and Petro Symonenko are continuing their opposition to President Kuchma. On 4 December, they announced the continuation of the "Rise Up, Ukraine!" campaign, set to enter into a new phase which they titled "Releasing Ukraine from Kuchma." They stated that they would
soon begin touring the regions again, and announced a nationwide strike for 9 March 2003. "We are convinced that an open national protest of this sort against the authorities will provide sufficient reasons for Kuchma to resign and, after all, to stop discrediting the country and the people," they said. (INTERFAX, 4 Dec 02; FBIS-SOV-2002-1204, via World News Connection) After some doubt in the last few weeks whether the Our Ukraine bloc also would be able to come to an agreement with the other three opposition factions, Yushchenko and Tymoshenko issued a call for a united front. (UNIAN, 14 Dec 02; BBC Monitoring, via ISI Emerging Markets Database)

Not only the political world is experiencing pressures from the top. Journalism has not been an easy or particularly safe profession in Ukraine for quite some time, but in recent months, things appear to have become even more difficult. The case of Mikhailo Kolomiets, who disappeared in late October and was discovered hanged in a Belarus forest, remains unsolved and disputed. Ukrainian and European media watchdogs issued an appeal on 13 December, calling on European institutions to protect Ukrainian journalists and to insist on a proper investigation into the Kolomiets case.

MOLDOVA

Reintegration or stagnation?

On the heels of the November 2002 OSCE acknowledgement that Russia would fail to meet the previously established deadline for removal of some 40,000 tons of ammunition and 2,500 soldiers from the disputed Transdniestr region of Moldova, (THE NIS OBSERVED, 4 Dec 02) the Moldovan parliament approved President Vladimir Voronin's request to create a new post of Minister of Reintegration. An amendment to Moldovan law states that "the minister for Moldovan reintegration will promote and coordinate government policy on reintegration," although the legislation (clearly aimed at the breakaway region of Transdniestr and the increasingly separate Gagauz area) does not specifically
mention either region by name. (BASAPRESS, 12 Dec 02; FBIS-SOV-2002-1206, via World News Connection)

Less than a week after the announcement of the new ministerial position, Moldovan Foreign Minister Nikolai Dudeu appeared unable to exude much optimism with regard to putative progress in the resolution of the Transdniestr question. Following a series of OSCE meetings in the Portuguese city of Porto, Dudeu called the talks a failure, and then proceeded to place blame for the lack of progress during the summit squarely on the leadership in Tiraspol. Dudeu went on to add, "Proceeding from this situation, the Moldovan leadership believes that only the adoption of coercive measures (political and economic) can make the Dniestr leaders resume the negotiating process." (ITAR-TASS, 10 Dec 02; FBIS-SOV-2002-1210, via World News Connection)

In contrast to the tone set by Dudeu, President Voronin's press service proceeded to inform the media that he had "positively assessed" the results of the OSCE summit in Porto. Voronin's apparent optimism was somewhat surprising in that, as a result of the summit, the deadline for Russia to remove its ammunition and 2,500-strong "guard force" had been extended to December of 2003. (INFOTAG, 10 Dec 02; FBIS-SOV-2002-1210, via World News Connection) Apart from Voronin's rosy outlook, prospects for Russian compliance with the newly set deadline do not appear promising. During the current installment of the OSCE agreement, Russia has succeeded in moving a mere six trains full of equipment over the entire 12-month period. (INFOTAG, 10 Dec 02; FBIS-SOV-2002-1210, via World News Connection) Adding to the excuses for the lack of progress in the Transdniestr, Russian Defense Minister Sergei Ivanov cited cost (approximately $48 million) as the primary obstacle in removal of the ammunition. Ivanov went on to add, "Protests by the local people and opposition by Dniestr authorities complicate the process." (INFOTAG, 9 Dec 02; FBIS-SOV-2002-1209, via World News Connection)
The full array of Russian pretexts, ranging from cost to opposition by the Transdniestr population, may serve to entertain (or distract) some observers, yet those who seek the truth might be better advised to search elsewhere for salient information. A sampling of somewhat more plausible excuses for the lack of progress in the region might include black market profiteering, or the increasingly evident attempts by Russia to keep a military foothold in the "door to the Balkans," especially with Romania's candidature for NATO membership.

**Ship 'em out we'll make more!**

According to the Moldovan security services, Transdniestr is not just a place to store weapons and ammunition, but also serves as home to a relatively robust weapons manufacturing (exporting?) industry. A Moldovan report filed at the recent OSCE summit charged that the Russian manufacturing giant Pribor (located in the Transdniestr) has produced over 50 missile launchers which can be mounted on ZIL-131 and URAL-365 trucks. Twenty of these systems allegedly are in use by the Transdniestr military forces, with the remainder believed to be in service in Georgia's secessionist statelet of Abkhazia. (BASA-PRESS, 4 Dec 02; via Moldova AZI) Remnants of the Russian defense companies Eletromas, Metalorukav and Kirov are believed to be producing pistols, assault rifles, portable missile launchers and anti-personnel mines that are sold in turn (from the Transdniestr) to other "disputed" regions (secessionists from Georgia). Vyacheslav Sapronov, chief of the so-called Transdniestr Industrial Complex, predictably denounced Moldova's accusations as unfounded, and went on to add that such charges were aimed "not only at Tiraspol, but at Moscow as well." (MOLDOVA AZI, 6 Dec 02)

New ministers, new weapons, and a new deadline for the thus far unimpressive Russian exodus from the Transdniestr -- claims of a quest for reintegration and stabilization may dominate the rhetoric; however, stagnation seems to depict more accurately the situation on the ground. If the status quo is maintained, the Transdniestr capability to produce and distribute weapons may continue to
outperform Russia’s demonstrated lack of willingness to remove its ammunition and soldiers from the region.

Newly Independent States: Caucasus
By Miriam Lanskoy

CHECHNYA
New publications concerning the 1999 explosions
Novaya gazeta recently published two important documents concerning the 1999 explosions in Russian apartment buildings. The emergence of the documents -- a letter from Yusuf Krymshamkhalov and Timur Batchaev, who are suspects in the case, and transcripts of interviews with GRU agent Aleksei Galkin - suggests that the public commission formed last summer to investigate these crimes is making progress, and that Russia’s liberal circles refuse to give up the quest to establish the truth about the bombings. (An archive of articles and documents can be found on the Somnenie (Doubt) web page: www.somnenie.narod.ru/sent.html)

On 9 December, Novaya gazeta published an open letter in which Krymshamkhalov and Batchaev confess to bringing sacks of explosives to the Moscow apartment buildings affected and contend that their superiors and organizers were agents of the FSB. On 6 December Batchaev was killed in a shootout with Georgian policemen; on 7 December Krymshamkhalov was arrested and brought to Lefortovo prison in Moscow. (See Georgia section below.)

The letter is addressed to the public commission which is conducting an independent investigation into the bombings. In it, Krymshamkhalov and Batchaev state
"1. We admit we were accomplices (souchastniki) in the terrorist acts which occurred in Moscow and Volgadonsk in September 1999. We state that we did not know Khattab, Basaev, or any of the Chechen field commanders or political leaders, and in general none of the Chechens had anything to do with the September 1999 terrorist acts. They did not order these acts, finance them, or organize them.

2. We are accomplices to the explosions on the lowest level and have nothing to do with setting the explosions. We transported the bags of explosives. We thought they would be stored and used later against administrative buildings of the military and the security services, not against apartment buildings. We could not have guessed that the explosions would occur in the buildings where the explosives were stored. We did not know in advance when the explosions would occur."

The letter goes on to say that the organizers were a Tatar named Abubakar and Max Lazovsky, the head of a criminal group in Moscow and an FSB agent. The letter was provided by the American historian Yuri Felshtinsky, who apparently had a long correspondence with the two suspects. The two reportedly promised Felshtinsky that they would tell all on videotape if he agreed to pay them $3 million. He refused, saying that purchased information is useless to him. Felshtinsky formed the impression that the two men were being held captive and were controlled tightly by others, probably by Chechen fighters. When Krymshamkhalov and Batchaev found out about the explosions, they escaped to Chechnya and had to rely on Chechen commanders for security, Felshtinsky reasons. It is a strange coincidence that one of the two men was killed and the other was apprehended just as the Novaya gazeta issue containing their statement was going to press.

On 2 December, Novaya gazeta published the full text of an interview with GRU agent Alexei Galkin and a video in which he claimed that the FSB and GRU were responsible for the explosions. Galkin had been taken prisoner in Chechnya as
the second Chechen war was starting and the video was produced while he was in captivity in Grozny in December 1999. (An excerpt of this interview appeared earlier in an article by Helen Womack in THE INDEPENDENT, 6 Jan 00) Galkin survived the ordeal and escaped from his Chechen captors in the winter of 2000. After nearly a year of medical treatment and rehabilitation he retired from the service in the summer of 2002. In November 2002 he granted an interview to Novaya gazeta, which published it together with the transcript of the 1999 video.

On the video he said:
Galkin: I personally was not involved in the explosions in Moscow and Daghestan. But I know who conducted the explosions, who is behind the explosions in Moscow, and who conducted the explosions in Daghestan.
Journalist: Can you say who?
Galkin: The Russian Security Services, the FSB working together with the GRU, are responsible for the explosions in Moscow and Volgadonsk. The explosion in Buinaksk is the work of our group that is now working in Daghestan.
Journalist: are you speaking on your own free will?
Abu Movsaev (his captor): You don't have to answer.
Journalist: How are you being treated here?
Galkin: I am being treated well. As a military prisoner I am given three meals a day, I am not beaten, and I have been given medical treatment.
Journalist: There is a written statement. Do you confirm that you made this statement?
Galkin: This statement was typed from my words. (Holds the paper closer) I wrote this statement by hand and it bears my signature.

In the recent interview with Novaya gazeta, Galkin explained that, in fact, he was held in abominable conditions without food or water and was subject to regular beatings. During interrogations Abu Movsaev, a Chechen commander, would beat him until he gave the right answers. Galkin says that he was threatened into compliance. Two Russian soldiers were beheaded in front of him. Then he was
told that another GRU officer and a Chechen companion who were captured together with Galkin would be beheaded. He also was told that harm would come to his family.

Interestingly, amid a long detailed narrative of his travails, Galkin never actually touches on the subject of the bombings. Galkin never explicitly repudiates the statements he made earlier. He says that they were made under duress, which is also evident from the transcript of the video. In his interview he does not say that the Chechens told him what to say nor does he comment in any way on the bombings themselves.

**Coerced repatriation**

Russian authorities insist that the repatriation of refugees from tent camps in Ingushetia to Chechnya is proceeding in a voluntary manner. In fact, federal authorities are coercing the refugees, albeit without the use of physical force. A detailed report of the Russian Human Rights Center Memorial last updated on 2 December (WWW.MEMO.RU) describes the repatriation process and the conditions in each camp.

In May 2002 the authorities announced the decision to close down all the refugee camps in Ingushetia and repatriate the refugees to Chechnya by the end of September. In the summer all food shipments from the government were stopped, although international donors continued to provide rations. Then two camps in Chechnya close to the Ingush border were dismantled. Then the camps in Ingushetia were told to drop names from their registration rolls. From some camps refugees then started returning to Chechnya. In other camps family members shared rations so that those dropped from the registration rolls would not have to leave. Then gas deliveries were stopped or continued erratically, leaving the inhabitants with no heat. Russian threats, such as being told "today you can drive away, later you will be running," also have been reported. The first
camp, "Iman," was dismantled on 2 December. The other camps were put on notice that they too would be closed before 20 December.

Security concerns are the main reason why refugees refuse to return to Chechnya. In principle, shelter, water and heat can be provided in Chechnya, although no suitable accommodations have been built so far. The main obstacle to repatriation is that Chechnya remains very dangerous for Chechen civilians who are regularly rounded up in haphazard "cleansing" operations and are subject to torture, "disappearances" and extra-judicial executions. The Memorial report cites a pro-Russian Chechen administration official, Rudnik Dudaev, who says that 100 persons disappeared in November.

The eviction process has been accompanied by a radical reduction in the official count of refugees. Whereas the figure of 145,000 Chechen refugees in Ingushetia was the benchmark for many months, suddenly the official estimate was reduced to 60,000. In the materials Memorial has gathered, each camp administration was told to report a lower number of refugees, thereby denying registration to hundreds of persons.

The reliable numbers are as follows. Roughly 362,000 persons lost their homes in Chechnya as a result of the present war. Approximately 197,000 remained in Chechnya. Of them, 12,000 are living in camps, whereas the remainder are living with friends and family. Roughly 145,000 are in Ingushetia - 30,000 in tent camps, 32,000 in rented spaces and the remainder with friends and family. According to the migration service, about 20,000 Chechen refugees migrated to other parts of Russia. Only 12,500 former residents of Chechnya have been registered as "forced migrants," which entitles them to compensation and social services; of this number, the majority are not Chechens but members of other nationalities who lived in Chechnya before the war.

GEORGIA
Where was Yusup Krymshamkhalov arrested?

Russian media report that Yusup Krymshamkhalov - who (as mentioned earlier) was wanted in connection with the bombings of apartment buildings in Moscow and Volgadonsk in September 1999 - was apprehended in Georgia's Pankisi Gorge and extradited to Russia on 7 December. However, Georgia's justice and security ministries deny that Krymshamkhalov, an ethnic Karachai, ever had been to Georgia. (WWW.CIVIL.GE, 9 Dec 02, and PRIME NEWS, 8 Dec 02; BBC Monitoring, via ISI Emerging Markets Database) On 11 December, Georgia's Foreign Minister Irakli Menagharishvili said that Krymshamkhalov was arrested in Stavropol and Georgia's role was limited to providing information leading to his arrest. (PRIME NEWS, 11 Dec 02; BBC Monitoring, via ISI Emerging Markets Database)

According to the Georgian press, there was an incident involving Karachai gunmen who are known to be Krymshamkhalov's associates. Four members of a five-person gang were killed during a shootout with police on 6 December. The fifth died later in a hospital. Three gang members - Tagir Bedzhiev, Timur Batchaev and Rashid Khudiev - were ethnic Karachai, residents of Karachai-Cherkessia. The two other gang members were identified only as local guides. (GEORGIAN TELEVISION, 7 Dec 02; BBC Monitoring, via ISI Emerging Markets Database) Batchaev was wanted by Russia's law enforcement agencies as a suspect in the 1999 bombings of apartment buildings in Russian cities. However, Krymshamkhalov was not mentioned in the Georgian press and may have been apprehended in a different operation. According to the initial reports, the group set out from the Lagodekhi district and was driving a Mercedes towards the Azerbaijani border. All five members of the gang died as a result of the confrontation with police.

How to please Putin

Russian President Vladimir Putin and Defense Minister Sergei Ivanov recently applauded Georgia for the "cleansing" operations it had conducted against
Chechens in Georgia. In previous months Sergei Ivanov had been among the most vocal advocates of Russia launching operations against Georgia, but now he sounds pleased. "I cannot but praise the actions of the security services of Georgia, which arrested recently one of the organizers of the 1999 acts of terrorism in Moscow and Volgodonsk," Ivanov said. (ITAR-TASS, 9 Dec 02; BBC Monitoring, via ISI Emerging Markets Database) Putin lauded the Georgians for "destroying the most odious terrorists." (RIA, 9 Dec 02; BBC Monitoring, via ISI Emerging Markets Database) Apparently, the Georgian leadership has given in to Russian pressure and has started to round up and register ethnic Chechens.

At dawn on 7 December, ethnic Chechens were detained in their homes and entire families were taken into police custody. "The point is that not only Chechen refugees are being arrested but also Chechens who are Georgian citizens," a Georgian television network reported. (RUSTAVI-2, 7 Dec 02; BBC Monitoring, via ISI Emerging Markets Database) The Georgian police working jointly with the Russian FSB neither presented arrest warrants nor allowed lawyers representing some of the Chechens into the police stations. (WWW.CIVIL.GE, 9 Dec 02) These operations were conducted not only in Tbilisi but in several other towns, including Kutaisi, Tsqaltubo, Samtredia and other parts of western Georgia (Imereti). (GEORGIAN RADIO, 9 Dec 02; BBC Monitoring, via ISI Emerging Markets Database) All the arrested persons, including children, were fingerprinted and photographed. Reportedly dozens were arrested in Tbilisi alone, but there is no exact count and it is not clear how many remain in detention. In his comments to the press President Eduard Shevardnadze took pains to emphasize the sweeps were "not directed against the Chechens." Rather the purpose of the sweeps was to identify illegal immigrants who may "inflame the situation," or carry out "large-scale acts of terrorism in Tbilisi" or perhaps "stage an act of terrorism against the head of state." (GEORGIAN RADIO, 9 Dec 02; BBC Monitoring, via ISI Emerging Markets Database)
Newly Independent States: Central Asia

By David Montgomery

Reestablishing Russian hegemony?
The "campaign against terrorism" takes a myriad of forms and is nebulous enough to allow creative interpretation as to what it constitutes. Much of the recent political positioning in Central Asia (or globally, for that matter) can be justified as part of the "campaign against terrorism," regardless of its relevance to such a campaign. Wherever power and hegemony are at stake, rationales that palliate the populace are most attractive, even if logic suggests less benevolent reasons for the actions of a particular country.

During his recent visit to Kyrgyzstan, Russian President Vladimir Putin noted the high priority that his administration places on Russian-Kyrgyz relations, reaffirming political support for Kyrgyz President Askar Akaev and a desire to continue close relations in the social, economic and military sectors. Putin commended the Kyrgyz policy of supporting Russian as a second official language and pledged his support for educational policies aimed at furthering a shared linguistic tradition. (ITAR-TASS, 1928 GMT, 5 Dec 02; FBIS-SOV-2002-1205, via World News Connection) Akaev, for his part, revealed his desire for Kyrgyzstan to be the "main strategic partner" for Russian interests in Central Asia. (RFE/RL NEWSLINE, 6 Dec 02)

Over the past few years, the Kyrgyz government had requested the establishment of Russia military installations in Kyrgyzstan, (TIMES OF CENTRAL ASIA, 12 Dec 02; via www.times.kg) but it was only recently that Moscow acquiesced. One explanation for the decision is that reestablishing a hegemonic presence in Central Asia is in Russia's political interests, since it provides leverage in negotiations concerning the region and serves to limit the influence of the US military presence. Domestic issues within Kyrgyzstan clearly motivate Bishkek.
The Akaev government has been threatened by opposition protests. These protests have become so troublesome to the administration that it has proposed a one- to two-year moratorium on unsanctioned demonstrations and gatherings. (RFE/RL NEWSLINE, 4 Dec 02) The Russian presence may give Akaev's administration the support it needs to help keep the political opposition at bay. This, of course, has not quieted the protests; opposition leader Topchubek Turgunaliev has referred to Akaev's support for the Russian deployment as "a betrayal of [the] state's interests." Continuing to express his views on Akaev's control of power and the willingness to embrace Russia, Turgunaliev added that "Akaev can try to find a way out, but enough people have lost faith in him that he won't be able to survive long in Kyrgyzstan." (EURASIANET, 11 Dec 02; via www.eurasianet.org)

At the same time that Russia is increasing its presence in Kyrgyzstan and Akaev is facing numerous challenges from opposition parties, the United States has indicated its plans to expand cooperation with Kyrgyzstan. US aid to the region is expected to double in 2003 and military operations at the Ganci air base (Manas airport, 10 km north of Bishkek and approximately 30 km west of the Kant airbase) also are expected to increase. (EURASIANET, 5 Dec 02; via www.eurasianet.org) Akaev has given tacit support for the US presence and has pledged that the US bases may remain in Kyrgyzstan for the length of the UN mandate. (ITAR-TASS, 1544 GMT, 5 Dec 02; FBIS-SOV-2002-1205, via World News Connection)

While the Akaev government supports both the US and Russian presence, a recent poll conducted by the Information Support Fund in Bishkek found that, though 45 percent of those polled were neutral regarding the US presence, only 18 percent supported the US base whereas 34 percent opposed it. (EURASIANET, 5 Dec 02; via www.eurasianet.org) The local population's general disappointment with the US military presence is tied largely to unrealized
expectations; most expected to benefit economically from the US presence. And while that presence has yielded economic benefits to the country, these benefits have been isolated to very few individuals.

US troops have been conscious of this and have made efforts to assist communities near the base by donating clothing, repairing schools and improving the local water systems. (EURASIANET, 5 Dec 02; via www.eurasianet.org)

Though there is a history of tensions between the Russians and Kyrgyz, locals have lower expectations of the Russian forces and it is likely that their presence at the Kant air base will be less obtrusive to the people around Bishkek. With a large population of Russians and a history as one of the agricultural and industrial centers of Kyrgyzstan during Soviet times, Kant is considered a Russian village. Soviet troops used the air base for training, giving Russian troops familiarity with the region and renewing the village's familiarity with a Russian military presence. Furthermore, Russians can more easily blend into the community, both culturally and linguistically.

**Fighting terrorism: Tajikistan and Uzbekistan**

Some of the Russian troops deployed in Kant came from Tajikistan, where the Russian military has maintained an active presence since the dissolution of the Soviet Union. When Tajik President Emomali Rakhmonov met with US President George W. Bush and other high-ranking government officials on a recent state visit, he expressed his concern about the delay of international financial assistance to Afghanistan, suggesting that it could delay normalization and stability. (ITAR-TASS, 0725 GMT, 10 Dec 02; FBIS-SOV-2002-1210, via World News Connection) Rakhmonov added that, though Tajikistan was willing "to cooperate with any country, Russia has been and will always be its strategic partner." (ITAR-TASS, 1419 GMT, 10 Dec 02; FBIS-SOV-2002-1210, via World News Connection) And while Rakhmonov was in Washington, Russian businessmen and representatives from the Business Council of the Eurasian
Economic Community were meeting in Dushanbe to discuss ways to further Russian-Tajik economic relations. (ITAR-TASS, 1952 GMT, 9 Dec 02; FBIS-SOV-2002-1209, via World News Connection) Clearly Russia remains intent on expanding its sphere of influence in Central Asia.

Perhaps the most telling aspect of Russia's role in the region and the interpretation of the recent troop deployment to Kyrgyzstan came out of Uzbekistan. While Uzbekistan has long sought to be the region's hegemonist, Uzbek President Islam Karimov was quoted as saying that a "military rivalry between the great powers in an overheated region is counterproductive."
Although Karimov further noted Russia's importance to the region, (RFE/RL NEWSLINE, 13 Dec 02) there is no doubt that Russia's presence in Kyrgyzstan reaffirms Russia's role in Central Asia and complicates the "campaign against terrorism" at a time when attempts to negotiate the delimitation of the Uzbek-Kyrgyz border recently failed (yet again) (INTERFAX, 1035 GMT, 10 Dec 02; FBIS-SOV-2002-1210, via World News Connection) and the Akaev government is particularly threatened by opposition leaders.

Newly Independent States: Baltic States
By Michael Varuolo

ESTONIA
Seeking historical justice
Since the Soviet annexation in the 1940s, Estonia has been attempting to free itself from Russian hegemony. Following the reestablishment of independence in 1991, Estonia has sought compensation for damage done by the Soviet occupation. Recently, Estonia accelerated this process by bringing its complaints to court.
Russia, as the successor state to the Soviet Union, adamantly opposes any judicial proceeding against Soviet crimes that could result in imprisonment of individuals, or monetary restitution from Russia. According to a Russian foreign ministry spokesman, restitution for those who suffered under the Soviet regime should be confined to "the rehabilitation of victims." These judicial proceedings, he continued, were simply "attempts by some Estonian politicians to find a wider resonance in the so-called occupation context and to exacerbate it artificially in their domestic policy interests." (BALTIC NEWS SERVICE, 11 Dec 02; via Lexis-Nexis) Estonia denies this allegation, insisting that the trials are not about revenge but rather about correcting historical accounts. (THE DAILY TELEGRAPH (London), 26 Nov 02; via Lexis-Nexis)

Charges against eight former Soviet security officials have highlighted the differences between the two governments and reignited a dispute between Estonia and the Russian Federation. (ASSOCIATED PRESS, 19 Nov 02; via Lexis-Nexis) The former Soviet officials are charged with participating in the deportations of over 400 Estonians, including women and children from the island of Saaraemaa to Siberia. The Estonian state has spent over three years investigating this case. The preparation focuses upon secret KGB documents that were found in a Tallinn cellar after the KGB hastily retreated from Estonia. (ASSOCIATED PRESS, 19 Nov 02; via Lexis-Nexis) Russia has condemned the Estonian judicial proceedings, calling them a plot to extract revenge from old men, and has provided financial assistance to offset the costs of defense counsel. The trial is scheduled to begin in January. (BALTIC NEWS SERVICE, 29 Nov 02; via Lexis-Nexis)

In a related case, Vladimir Penart is facing charges of genocide for his role in the arrest and persecution of several "Forest Brothers" (who resisted Soviet occupation). (ITAR-TASS, 1101 GMT, 3 Dec 02; FBIS-SOV-2002-1203, via World News Connection) Russia maintains that Estonia is a) pursuing Penart because of his position as district chief of police and b) manipulating the
definition of genocide so that the Forest Brothers can be considered part of the "peaceful population." (ITAR-TASS, 1101 GMT, 3 Dec 02; FBIS-SOV-2002-1203, via World News Connection) Estonia has yet to comment or set a date for the Penart trial but continues to stand by its judicial system, which since 1991 has convicted five former Soviet agents for crimes against humanity. However, of the five previous convictions, only one has served a jail sentence - dying in prison after completing his first year of an eight-year sentence. (ASSOCIATED PRESS, 19 Nov 02; via Lexis-Nexis)