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Russian Federation: Executive Branch

By Michael Comstock and Scott Dullea

**Bureaucratic/administrative reorganization ahead**

In addition to the recent changes that have expanded FSB power to near-Soviet levels (see Security Services section for details), many expect further decrees affecting economic conglomerates. (THE ST. PETERSBURG TIMES, 18 Mar 03; via ISI Emerging Markets Database) Other reforms are anticipated in the administration.

By reducing overlapping agencies, Putin may not be attempting merely to make the notoriously inefficient Russian government less wasteful, but to advance the careers of individuals he favors, and to sideline opponents. His recent appointment of Valentina Matvienko to the post of plenipotentiary representative in the Northwest Federal District (NFD) may be a case in point. (ITAR-TASS, 11 Mar 03; via ISI Emerging Markets Database) The NFD is an important region, containing the city of St. Petersburg. While the posting opened up following administrative reform, it can provide a useful launchpad should she make a run for the governorship.

According to the chairman of the Council of Ministers, Mikhail Kasyanov, several agencies are expected to undergo changes in the coming months, including the ministries of communications, railways, press transport/industry, and science/technology. Kasyanov, not a member of Putin's exclusive St. Petersburg group but powerful nonetheless, no doubt will be looking for ways to increase his own influence by means of administrative changes.
Kasyanov’s role in the process can be explained in one of two ways: either Putin and Kasyanov have come to an agreement on which spheres they will dominate (Putin controlling the "power" ministries, while Kasyanov handles the domestic economy), or Kasyanov is making a play for increased bureaucratic power. The fact that Matvienko was one of Kasyanov’s deputies may be significant. It is more likely that Putin and Kasyanov are squabbling over pieces of the pie than carefully dividing it up.

There has been speculation that Putin may not exercise as much control as he would like. Some newspapers assert that Putin’s "power" allies are pressing for concessions at the expense of the oligarchs. (WPS, 12 Mar 03; via ISI Emerging Markets Database)

**Putin’s appointees: What are friends for?**

An old Russian proverb says "one's own earring to one's dear friend." Indeed Vladimir Putin has given away many "earrings" during his term in office. In fact, the president has surrounded himself with many dear friends, and these appointees comprise an important element of the Putin cult. This month Putin continued to bolster that cult through a reamalgamation of security service agencies and reshuffling of their leaders, continuing the practice of gaining control through dependable friends that he began immediately upon taking office.

When he served as acting president, 40 percent of Putin’s highest officeholders were former KGB/FSB officers, 10 out of his 24 appointees having a secret police background. (RUSSIA REFORM MONITOR, 7 Feb 00) While this seemed logical to some, considering the president’s own background and the priority his administration placed on dealing with Russian organized crime, some began to fear the return of the KGB and authoritarian rule. (PERSPECTIVE, Mar-Apr 00)

Such fears were not assuaged by the president’s subsequent actions. Asserting the Kremlin’s influence over the vast Russian countryside, in the spring of 2000,
Putin appointed seven so-called "superbosses" (officially, plenipotentiary representatives of the Russian president) to oversee the new federal superdistricts, specifically the work of all the federal agencies in their respective regions. Of the original seven "superboss" appointees, two were army commanders, a third was a Ministry of the Interior (MVD) police chief and two, like Putin, were from the FSB. (BUSINESSWEEK ONLINE, 5 Jun 00) Moreover, administrators are not the only individuals serving as Moscow’s "eyes" and "ears" in the regions. Kremlin-appointed judges also endeavor to ensure that Putin’s policies are implemented. (THE NIS OBSERVED, 5 Mar 03) Some view these appointments and the creation of these positions as unconstitutional. (ST. PETERSBURG TIMES, 21 Mar 03)

The latest reamalgamation of the security ministries are causing renewed concern over a return to a Soviet-style KGB structure. The moves give the Federal Security Service (FSB) control over two other KGB successor agencies: the Border Guards and (sharing control with the defense ministry) the functions of the Federal Agency for Government Communications and Information (FAPSI), which itself was disbanded. (ASSOCIATED PRESS, 11 Mar 03; via Johnson’s Russia List) Leaders, as well as agencies, were reshuffled, including the appointment of Viktor Vasilievich Cherkesov to head the new state Committee on Drug Trafficking.

Cherkesov does not appear overwhelmingly qualified for his new position; however, he and Putin studied law together at Leningrad State University. Cherkesov, like Putin, is a veteran of the KGB and FSB, having served as the first deputy director of the latter. More recently Cherkesov served as the "superboss" of the Northwestern district. Putin had appointed him to that position in May 2000 supposedly to quash Putin's longtime rival, Vladimir Yakovlev, governor of St. Petersburg. (BUSINESSWEEK ONLINE, 5 Jun 00)
However, it is Cherkesov’s less recent past that worries many. In the 1980s he reportedly headed the KGB’s Fifth Chief Directorate with the responsibility for surveillance of the media, church, schools and trade unions. Dissidents who were victims of Cherkesov’s witch hunts of that period describe him in sinister terms. These victims and other critics express concern about the possibility of Cherkesov’s rise to power. (THE SUNDAY TIMES (London), 2 Apr 00)

Cherkesov’s latest appointment could be a reward for his success as Putin’s envoy in the Northwest Federal District, where he effectively prevented Yakovlev from seeking a third term as St. Petersburg governor by assembling an anti-Yakovlev coalition in the city’s legislative assembly. In his new position Cherkesov will have a staff of 40,000 persons, including regional-level and Moscow-based officials. (RFE/RL RUSSIAN POLITICAL WEEKLY, 13 Mar 03) Indeed, it is possible that this appointment is only temporary and that, once in Moscow, Cherkesov, who worked on Putin’s presidential campaign staff, will receive an even more serious political promotion. (ROSBALT NEWS AGENCY, 14 Mar 03)

Critics point out that Putin’s appointment of Cherkesov, and others, could harm Russia’s chances for improving the current social, political and economic situation. They claim the appointees’ competency and corruptibility are secondary to their personal relationship with Putin, and that the very loyalty which may seem attractive to the president is, in fact, hazardous to the rule of law. (TVS, 13 Mar 03; BBC Monitoring, via Johnson’s Russia List)

This appears to be Putin’s style — appoint loyal friends to lead agencies rather than reform them, hence the creation of the regional superbosses and the appointment of (former FSB colleague) Defense Minister Sergei Ivanov as well as this latest round of agency reshuffling and accompanying appointments. And, unlike Boris Yel’tsin, who focused on controlling the business "magnates," President Putin maintains his supervision of business by installing his trusted
followers in the leadership of the big five "power" ministries. (YEZHENEDENYI ZHURNAL, 19 Mar 03; What the Papers Say, via ISI Emerging Markets Database) So which option is more dangerous: the rebirth of the KGB, or a Russia led by incompetent, dangerous, but loyal puppets? Neither sounds promising to a country in need of leadership and concrete reforms, but what are friends for?

Russian Federation: Security Services
By Scott Fleeher

Back to the Future...
As world attention focused on the prelude to the conflict in Iraq, President Vladimir Putin availed himself of the opportunity to shore up yet another healthy dose of power at home. With a series of presidential decrees, Putin has significantly strengthened his own service (FSB).

Under the reorganization, the Federal Tax Police Service (FSNP) was abolished, with its responsibilities being transferred to the MVD. (RFE/RL RUSSIAN FOREIGN POLICY AND SECURITY WATCH, 11 Mar 03) The decrees also abolished the Federal Agency of Government Communications and Information (FAPSI), along with the Federal Border Guard Service (FSP). Both of these agencies will now fall directly under the Federal Security Service (FSB). Posting of both the FAPSI and FSP under the direct control of the FSB marks a return to an organizational structure strikingly similar to that of the Soviet-era KGB. (THE WASHINGTON POST, 12 Mar 03; via Lexis-Nexis)

Without question, Putin's decrees moved the already powerful FSB even further toward the status of a "super agency." In comments to the Moscow Times, Alexander Pikaev, a defense and security analyst with the Moscow Carnegie Center, said that, other than controlling the Foreign Intelligence Service (SVR)
and Federal Guard Service, the FSB was close to being "back on par" with its predecessor the KGB. (THE MOSCOW TIMES, 12 Mar 03; via Lexis-Nexis)

As part of the reorganization, the already dominant FSB will assume control of more than 150,000 Border Guards and their associated equipment, including thousands of artillery pieces, armored vehicles, patrol boats and aircraft. This complement of personnel and equipment will give the FSB additional intelligence-gathering capabilities, allowing operations well outside the country's borders. (THE MOSCOW TIMES, 12 Mar 03; via Lexis-Nexis)

Predictably, the recent security service shake-up drew mostly praise from within, along with considerable scrutiny and apprehension from outside observers.

A number of Russian officials lauded the consolidation, making nonanalogous comparisons with American attempts to strengthen national security. In a strong vote of support, Nikolai Kovalev, former FSB director from 1996 to 1998, commented: "This is a very logical decision of our president. I think we all understand very well...how much our country needs a strong security service." (THE WASHINGTON POST, 12 Mar 03; via Lexis-Nexis)

Lyudmila Alexeeva, a Soviet-era dissident and head of the Moscow Helsinki Group, was less sanguine in her assessment of the recent changes. Addressing the reorganization, she said "They are recreating the same old monster...It will definitely have a negative impact on civil society." (THE GUARDIAN, 12 Mar 03; via Lexis-Nexis) Voicing further concern regarding the consolidation, independent defense analyst Pavel Felgenhauer added, "In a normal country, border guards are never part of the special services...They were part of the KGB in Soviet times to isolate the country from the rest of the world." (AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE, 11 Mar 03; via Lexis-Nexis)
This recent expansion of the FSB is certain to strengthen Putin's power base; however, it remains to be seen if the restructuring will have any positive impact on the ham-handed antics of the increasingly dominant agency in which the president once served.

**Alpha less than pleased**

Six months subsequent to its catastrophic and still mysterious ending, the October 2002 Nord-Ost hostage saga continues to demand attention. In a letter to the president, unidentified officers of the elite antiterrorism force Alpha expressed their dissatisfaction with Putin's recent awarding of the Hero of Russia award to two top FSB generals. The officers allege that Putin secretly awarded the state honor to five individuals associated with the hostage crisis earlier this year. In addition to the two FSB recipients, the award was also given to an officer from Alpha, another from Vympel, along with a "chemical specialist" who administered the lethal gas into the theater. (RFE/RL RUSSIAN FOREIGN POLICY AND SECURITY WATCH, 11 Mar 03)

In their remarks to Putin, the dissatisfied members of Alpha commented, "The First Deputy FSB Director Vladimir Pronichev, and the head of the FSB Special Operations Center, General Aleksandr Tikhonov, should have been disciplined for allowing the Chechen fighters to penetrate the center of Moscow and take more than 800 theatre goers hostage, but instead they were given awards that should rightly have gone to men who risked their lives to save the hostages." Such remarks indicate that in addition to the predictable range of challenges that is certain to arise following the recent KGB-ization of the Russian security apparatus, dissent regarding the happenings at Nord-Ost may not fade as far from view as many would like.

**Why so many secrets?**

The correspondence from Putin's colleagues at Alpha surfaced around the same time Novaya gazeta published some noteworthy statistics regarding awards
given for service during the Soviet war in Afghanistan, and more recent operations in Chechnya. According to the report, a mere 58 Hero of the Soviet Union Awards were presented during the entire nine-year Soviet conflict with Afghanistan. (RFE/RL RUSSIAN FOREIGN POLICY AND SECURITY WATCH, 11 Mar 03) Information provided by the Association of Heroes of the Soviet Union and Russia indicates that Hero of Russia awards presented in connection with operations in Chechnya are considered state secrets, with an estimated 90% of these being awarded posthumously. (RFE/RL RUSSIAN FOREIGN POLICY AND SECURITY WATCH, 11 Mar 03) If Russia's "war on terror" in Chechnya merits legitimacy in the eyes of the world, why then do heroes slain in the conflict not merit the same public recognition afforded high-level FSB officials, Alpha officers, and "chemical specialists"?

Russian Federation: Foreign Relations
By Ansel Stein

With friends like these who needs enemies?
In addition to Russia’s continued diplomatic campaign against the United States, Washington made public on Sunday, 23 March, a long-standing complaint that Russian companies have been supplying Iraq with military hardware and advisors in breach of UN sanctions. This revelation should not come as a surprise to any devoted NIS Observed reader.

Specifically, the US has learned that technicians from a Moscow-based company, Aviakonversiya, are currently in Baghdad teaching Iraqi specialists how to use portable jamming units which are capable of scrambling the GPS signals used to locate the targets for most US precision-guided munitions. Two other Russian companies are suspected of recently providing to Iraq militarily significant numbers of wire-guided Kornet antitank missiles, and thousands of night-vision goggles. Russian experts say all three companies named in the US
complaint do brisk export business, with customers that include the United Arab Emirates, Syria, Jordan, and India. While Aviakonversiya's director, Oleg Antonov, dismissed the American complaint as "nonsense," he went on to add that Iraq "might have constructed such devices itself or purchased them from a third company." (THE CHRISTIAN SCIENCE MONITOR, 26 Mar 03; via Lexis-Nexis)

In addition to this revelation, the Russian media are reporting that Russian military intelligence (GRU) and the Foreign Intelligence Service (SVR) stations in Iraq have been on special alert status since the onset of military actions against Saddam Hussein's regime. Nezavisimaya gazeta reported on 21 March that the stations have been issuing bulletins to Russia's political leadership on a constant, rolling basis. Russia's intelligence agencies also have activated their resources globally in order to monitor the military operation, the international situation, and US and British plans for post-Hussein Iraq. TVS on 20 March quoted Igor Morozov, a former Soviet foreign intelligence officer in Baghdad during the 1980s, as saying that Russia has very powerful intelligence assets in Iraq, including within its military commands, its political leadership, and its security services. This implies that Russian "technicians" may be doing more than simply teaching the Iraqis how to use the equipment.

The senior US official quoted in the Washington Post article that broke the story said that US intelligence had been able to match an electronic signal emitted by the system in Iraq specifically to the system sold by Aviakonversiya. The official also confirmed that complaints about the sales of jamming devices by the firm had begun in June 2002. At the time the Russians denied that the company even existed, despite the fact that it maintained an Internet site and was the subject of extensive media coverage in Russia. "It was ridiculous, but now it's gone beyond that," the official said. "It is grotesque." (Agence France-Presse, 24 Mar 03; via Lexis-Nexis)
Despite telephone calls from President Bush and Colin Powell to their Russian counterparts, Moscow has refused even to acknowledge a problem. "Russia strictly observes its international obligations," said Igor Ivanov, on Russian television. "It did not sell any equipment, including military equipment, in violation" of sanctions. (The New York Times, 24 Mar 03) No doubt further proof acquired in the liberation of Iraq will be met with similar denials. The real question is not how Russia would react to such evidence, it is whether there will be a realization that Putin and his entourage may not be precisely "allies."

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

By Kate Martin

**Tell it to the judge**

Could the Russian government be getting soft on crime? Analysts with an eye on history may be startled to learn that Vladimir Putin seems to be aiming for a kinder, gentler nation, at least for petty criminals without government IDs. For all others committing crimes, however, the story is a bit different.

One indication that the former FSB agent-cum-president may have a gooey middle came with his submission of more than 50 amendments that would reform the criminal code and change the punishment for some minor crimes from imprisonment to fines. While deputy chief of staff Dmitri Kozak was quick to point out that the presidential amendments do not envisage amnesty for convicted criminals, he described the current criminal code as a "rudiment of criminal legislation of the last century’s totalitarian state." Younger criminals also should benefit, as courts would be given greater discretion when dealing with minors. (ITAR-TASS, 1610 GMT, 11 Mar 03; FBIS-SOV-2003-0311, via World News Connection)
The situation also has improved for female criminals. According to the justice ministry’s penitentiary directorate, 8,000 of the country’s 50,000 female prisoners were amnestied in 2001. Directorate head Sergei Boltkov explained that the department "is seeking to humanize imprisonment." In fact, he said, a "social assistance service for prisoners has been operating since last year," including the housing of 526 children in special homes at women’s prisons. (ITAR-TASS, 1518 GMT, 8 Mar 03; FBIS-SOV-2003-0308, via World News Connection)

Yet not all scofflaws can throw themselves on the court’s mercy. Indeed, if a member of the Duma legislation committee has her way, the state will be getting tougher on individuals who believe they’re not committing crimes at all (but perhaps they should know better). MP Yelena Mizulina and the working group she leads recommended last month that individuals trafficking in other individuals should be prosecuted. "Such grave crimes as trade in humans for the use of their organs in transplants, for forcing mothers to become surrogate mothers or for exploiting people as slaves are not punishable by law in this country. Our bill envisions exhaustive and differentiated liability for such crimes," Mizulina said. The bill was drafted with help from the international community, including the United Nations, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe and the American Bar Association. (Interfax, 1540 GMT, 17 Feb 03; FBIS-SOV-2003-0217, via World News Connection)

Government officials also will need to start looking over their shoulders. In addition to continued discussions of the proposed legislation "On Combating Corruption," which is bound to affect a large number of administrators, the Duma recently held the first reading (and approved) amendments to the criminal code establishing punishment for officials who are responsible for the use of torture in the course of their official duties. (ITAR-TASS, 1259 GMT, 19 Mar 03; FBIS-SOV-2003-0319, via World News Connection)
REGIONS
Passing the buck
Proposed governmental reform purportedly will include the transfer of some areas of responsibility to the regions. Yet, funding for those areas remains a sticky issue. Earlier this month, Federation Council Speaker Sergei Mironov assured officials in the Yaroslavl region that, beginning in 2004, half of the tax collected locally will remain in the region. (ITAR-TASS, 1246 GMT, 5 Mar 03; FBIS-SOV-2003-0305, via World News Connection)

Not only administrators needed that assurance. Strikes by medical and educational personnel demanding wage raises, as well as payment of back wages, were held in many regions across the country. Workers voiced concern over the nonpayment of wages, and saw no reason to cheer proposals that would move the already unmet burden to local shoulders. The Kamchatka unions of medics and educators warned that such a change would lead to a crisis in public education, health, science and culture. A similar group from Yuzhno-Sakalinsk sent a telegram to Prime Minister Mikhail Kasyanov noting its displeasure with the proposed shift of wage responsibility to regional and municipal budgets. (ITAR-TASS, 1239 GMT, 27 Feb 03; FBIS-SOV-2003-0227, via World News Connection) Given that many regions grew dark and cold this winter as utility bills remained unpaid, the workers’ concern is completely understandable.

Russian Federation: Armed Forces
By Steve Kwast and Dan Rozelle

Housing crisis threatens overall military reform
The Russian military has not provided adequate housing for its troops. The problem is so large, and the solution so expensive, that fixing the root cause could prevent any hope of reforming the military overall and bringing it up to
modern standards. Currently over 200,000 military personnel do not have housing, according to a report recently presented to the State Duma. (ITAR-TASS, 1537 GMT, 10 Feb 03; via Lexis-Nexis)

The Russian government tried to tackle this problem in 1997 with a targeted program called the "State Housing Certificate" (GZhS). Its goal was to put a roof over 210,000 needy military officers by 2002. The program was designed to provide officers without housing a certificate that would cover up to 80 percent of the average "statistical price" of an apartment. However, the statistical price dictated by the military was too low. Additionally, the military officers didn’t have any extra spending money to pay the remaining 20 percent of the rent.

Last month the program ended with discouraging results. Only about half of the 60 billion rubles needed to finance the program actually got through to military officers. The head of the Joint Directorate for Investment Program Implementation of Russia, Anatoly Mishanov, said the program will be extended until 2003 with three important changes: 100 percent of the housing cost (instead of 80 percent) will be funded; the time allowed for military members to apply for the program will be expanded; and limits on cost per square meter of housing (based on the local economy) will be lifted. Additionally, Mishanov announced that the ministries of economic development, trade, finance and defense together will draw up a new targeted program to ensure servicemen receive adequate housing through 2010. (TRUD, 8 Feb 03; FBIS-SOV-2003-0210, via World News Connection)

It’s hard to know how soon such a new program can meet immediate needs. Currently 6,000 officers of the Siberian Military District do not have housing. According to district commander Col-Gen Nikolay Makarov, "This social problem is one of [the] most acute for military units deployed in the dangerous climatic conditions of Siberia." (FINANCIAL TIMES, 11 Feb 03; via Lexis-Nexis) Additionally, an officer currently must wait six to seven years to get an apartment.
Attitudes among the young officers, understandably, are skeptical. "In my opinion, all these [generals who run the programs] have arrived from another planet. They do not know how the army lives and see only what they want to see. God knows what they report to the leadership," one officer said. Another officer compared his situation to the proposed plight of others: "I do not understand why a contract serviceman must receive more than I do and live in an apartment. I have served for nine years, and do not have housing. Every day I come to the regiment at 8:00 a.m. and go home at 10:00 p.m. Contract servicemen will work from 9:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m., and will have two days-off." (ROSSIYA, 28 Feb 03; WPS Defense and Security, via ISI Emerging Markets Database) President Putin, however, continues to encourage military officers in the face of these grim realities. Meeting with junior officers last month, Putin said, "If utilities and housing bills make up more than 20 percent of a family's total income, then the serviceman has the right to ask for a compensation of any costs exceeding the 20 percent of his family's income. Everybody must be aware of that and must take advantage of this benefit." (CHANNEL ONE TV, 1200 GMT, 21 Feb 03; WPS Defense and Security, via ISI Emerging Markets Database)

The current disaster with the management and implementation of the GZhs program is a subject for Russia's auditing and law enforcement structures. The general military prosecutor's office says that investigators will soon charge high-ranking generals in some central departments of the defense ministry with financial misconduct uncovered by the State Auditing Commission in 2002. Housing programs are the first priority. In their initial report, investigators found that only 31 percent of ministry-owned apartments have been passed over to servicemen and their families. The overwhelming majority of these apartments are occupied by civilians who have bribed their way into the system and purchased these apartments from corrupt officials. The State Auditing
Commission also says that the government and the defense ministry can account for only 32 percent of the money provided to fix the housing problem. (OBSERVER, 21 Feb 03; WPS Defense and Security, via ISI Emerging Markets Database)

The Duma opened hearings recently about this issue. Deputy chairman of the State Duma, Petr Ramanov, proposed that private construction companies could lend large tracts of land to the military in return for the contracts to build housing for the servicemen. The president of the interregional association of builders, Nikolay Karasev, said that his organization could double the amount of housing being built for service personnel under such a plan. (ITAR-TASS, 1537 GMT, 10 Feb 03; FBIS-SOV-2003-0210, via World News Connection)

President Putin and his administration have noted their displeasure with the absence of progress on military reform. The housing issue is a perfect example. Russia’s first "civilian" defense minister, Sergey Ivanov (actually an FSB officer), was appointed two years ago and charged with kick-starting the military reform; he seems to have failed the task. Radical changes in the military leadership may begin in the middle of March. Sergey Ivanov may be moved to another post and be replaced either with Andrey Nikolaev, chairman of the State Duma and former commander of the Border Troops, Vladislav Putilin, deputy minister of Economic Development, or Valentin Bobryshev, commander-in-chief of the Leningrad military district. Even more interesting will be the question whom Putin replaces as chief of the General Staff. Currently, General Anatoly Kvashnin is known to be the main "silent opponent" of army reform and of much-needed changes throughout the armed forces. Possible replacements include the chief of the General Staff’s Main Intelligence Department (GRU), Valentin Korabelnikov, or the deputy foreign minister (and former chief of the Foreign Intelligence Service), Vyacheslav Trubnikov. (VREMYA, 11 Feb 03; via Lexis-Nexis) In the final analysis, Moscow’s inability to supply its servicemen with the basic need of housing is indicative of its inability to function as a military.
The housing issue could become the largest single roadblock to military reform because it will require so much money to fix. Additionally, officers in the military will not work hard for reform if their leadership isn’t even willing to provide adequate housing. Until Moscow can fix the small problems, like housing, it will be unable to fix the large problems of modernization.

**Funding woes continue to mount for Russia’s military**

New army officers receiving only a single field uniform, air force pilots tallying only 23 hours of flight time per year on average, exercises without the use of weapons and hardware — what’s going on with Russia’s military? All of these issues presently are affecting Russia’s armed forces due to a lack of funding; moreover, despite promises of additional money, it appears that this may become a normal course of existence.

Information leaked from the office of the defense minister’s financial advisor indicates that the budget for supply and logistics organizations will constitute only 50% of the amounts required. For example, transportation services and Central Food Department are set to receive 60% and 76%, respectively, of the funding needed for expenditures. Only one-third of the requested funds for military medicine will be allocated, while the Central Clothing Department will receive only 20%. It is this last cutback that could have the greatest impact on the troops. Officers provided with only a single uniform will find it difficult to combine dirty field operations with any formal parade or inspection functions. (VREMYA NOVOSTEI, 27 Feb 03; What the Papers Say, via ISI Defense and Security Database)

The air force hasn't been immune to the cutbacks either. According to a defense ministry commission that inspected long-range aviation units, it is possible that the units will face serious troubles in a few years. A lack of funding for fuel is preventing young pilots from gaining the necessary training and experience to
operate their aircraft and its weapons competently. "Pilots are becoming old. Experienced pilots are over 40 years old," one inspector said. "We do not have enough time to train a younger generation of pilots… At present we have a few experienced pilots who can launch missiles or refuel bombers in the air. They must teach the younger pilots. The problem is that long-range aviation does not have enough kerosene…" Other military sources, however, tried to emphasize positive aspects of the training, saying that pilots averaged 23 hours of flight time in all of 2002 compared to just eight hours in 2000. (US pilots by comparison generally fly between 15 and 25 hours each month depending on the type of aircraft.) (IZVESTIA, 9 Feb 03; What the Papers Say, via ISI Defense and Security Database)

Lest one believe that the only effect of an aviation fuel shortage for Russia's air force is limited training, it must be noted that 32 aircraft accidents have killed 44 crew members and 111 passengers since January 2000. In addition, 31 aircraft and 21 helicopters were damaged due to accidents in the same time period. The air force is not alone in experiencing aviation accidents. The aviation branches of the three security services have experienced 969 air accidents since January 2000 (not including army losses in Chechnya).

At least half of all these accidents are directly attributable to human factors linked to a lack of available flight time and associated training. Another factor is airframe fatigue. For example, many of Russia's helicopters average 15-20 years in age. Other reasons can be traced to poor maintenance of aging aircraft and severely outdated ground communication and navigation systems. The poor condition of runways also contributes to the high rate of accidents. Some specialists are saying that, unless improvements are made, the Russian air force will pose a threat to Russia itself by 2010, killing not only pilots and passengers but the residents of towns and villages. Others believe that at the present rate of attrition, Russia's air force will cease to exist by 2010 unless money is made available to purchase replacement aircraft for those lost. (NEZAVISIMOYE VOENNOE
The fuel shortages are not just limited to the air forces. In a recent interview, the head of training for the Baltic Fleet's ground troops, Vladimir Makarov, stated that recent combat exercises were conducted without either weapons or other equipment due to lack of fuel. "The circumstance does not make it possible to use weapons and military hardware in exercises," he said. "We had to simplify the training process owing to this cause." (STRAZH BALTIKI, 28 Jan 03; What the Papers Say, via ISI Defense and Security Database)

Russia hopes to prevent Kazakhstan's Caspian navy
The announcement by Kazakhstan of its plan to establish a navy drew an immediate negative response from Russia. "Russia does not approve of Kazakhstan's intention to create its own navy in the Caspian Sea," said Russia's special envoy for Caspian issues, Deputy Foreign Minister Viktor Kalyuzhny. "It is not feasible to raise the issue of setting up additional armed forces in the Caspian," he added at a recent meeting of the five Caspian littoral states in Baku, Azerbaijan. (ITAR-TASS, 26 Feb 03; BBC Monitoring, via Lexis-Nexis)

The Kazakhstan government, of course, disagrees. Of the five countries bordering the Caspian — Russia, Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan, Iran, Azerbaijan — only Kazakhstan does not possess any naval forces. Kazakhstan's senior deputy foreign minister, Kairat Abuseidov, explained his country's intention as protection against the threat of terrorism, weapons and drug trafficking and illegal migration. "Establishment of small naval forces by Kazakhstan in the Caspian Sea will influence only the Kazakh territorial waters and will not be aimed against the countries of the region," he added. Unstated is the fact that Kazakhstan clearly has linked its future to the oil and gas reserves of the Caspian. The Kazakh armed forces already are oriented to protect the country's industrial infrastructure, largely oil-producing assets, in the western part of the country; this
spring large-scale military exercises in the Caspian Sea are planned. Solidifying Kazakhstan's claim to Caspian resources is especially important considering the ongoing dispute between Iran and Azerbaijan over a portion of the southern part of the sea. (Russian Oil and Gas report, 26 Feb 03; What the Papers Say, via Lexis-Nexis)

One can only question what threat Russia perceives from Kazakhstan's yet-to-be-established navy. Are the vocal protests simply meant to mask the potential erosion of Moscow's ability to control its southern neighbors and the resources of the Caspian region?

**Ministry releases statistics on number of women in armed forces and holds beauty contest**

According to the defense ministry, Russia has approximately 93,000 women serving in its armed forces: Almost 4,000 of them are officers (300 are either colonels or lieutenant colonels and 800 are majors). The average age of female officers is 30. Overall, 72.5% serve in medical units, 7% are in the communication forces, 4.3% in the financial services and 2% are military interpreters. The remaining percentages were undisclosed.

Russia has an armed force of approximately 1 million personnel including about 330,000 conscripts. Women are not conscripted into the military but are allowed to volunteer. (MOSKOVSKY KOMSOMOLETS, 7 Mar 03; What the Papers Say, via ISI Defense and Security Database)

In a conspicuously related event that underscores both the numbers above and how far Moscow has yet to go in modernizing its forces, Russia's military held a beauty contest recently. Female service members, representing ranks from private to captain, were encouraged to participate in the finals of the armed forces' "Miss Shoulder- straps" contest. The event was held at the Russian army's central theater on 4-8 March. Sixteen winners from preliminary army and navy
competitions vied for the title. The program included a contest in general military skills and Russia's military history. Sponsors of the contest included the defense ministry, the Moscow government and other organizations. (ITAR-TASS, 28 Feb 03; via Lexis-Nexis)

Newly Independent States: Western Region

By Nadezda Kinsky

UKRAINE

Reform and protests back on the agenda
After a lengthy hiatus, the opposition has reawakened its Rise Up Ukraine campaign in time for spring. Even Victor Yushchenko called for unity among the opposition "at any price" at the 2 March Congress at which the opposition announced plans for a large protest on 9 March. (RFE/RL NEWSLINE, 3 Mar 03)

Before the protest took place, President Leonid Kuchma in the Verkhovna Rada announced his plans for political reform in Ukraine, a subject he had begun discussing in November with the appointment of his new Prime Minister Viktor Yanukovich. The constitutional amendment to introduce a "parliamentary-presidential model of government," which he submitted to the Rada on 6 March, proposes a bicameral system with a lower house of 300 representatives elected under a party-list system (the State Assembly) and an upper house with 81 members (the House of Regions). Furthermore, Kuchma seeks presidential rights to dissolve the parliament and appoint the ("power") ministers for defense, internal affairs, foreign affairs and emergency situations. All other ministers, including the prime minister, would be appointed by the parliament. Elections would be held every five years according to the proposal, with parliamentary and presidential elections falling in the same year.
The opposition reacted negatively, saying that this reform was aimed at strengthening presidential power, extending Kuchma’s term in power and further obfuscating the political system vis-à-vis a public already deeply mistrustful of politics in Ukraine. Kuchma said on 14 March that he wanted his reforms to be voted on — they would need a 300 majority in parliament in order to pass — while he was still in office, because he wanted the next president to be acting under the new system. "The head of state who will be elected in 2004 should run the country with a reformed political system, including with new powers," he said. (INTERFAX, 14 Mar 03; FBIS-SOV-2003-0314, via World News Connection)

The protests of 9 March, marking the birthday of the Ukrainian poet Taras Shevchenko, drew tens of thousands. The statement adopted at the rally covered many grievances concerning repression and low living standards, but also included a call for early presidential elections and political reform — presumably not the plan suggested by Kuchma himself. The tone of unification among the opposition forces is new and suggests a new resolve against the president. In contrast to earlier signals, the opposition leaders announced that they would be attempting to field a single common candidate in the upcoming presidential elections, underlining again the necessity to unite in opposition to the presidential forces. Yushchenko stated that anything but the choice of a single candidate "will be a defeat for all." (ITAR-TASS, 9 Mar 03; FBIS-SOV-2003-0309, via World News Connection) Yuliya Tymoshenko later noted that this was the first of a series of ongoing protests, and that other actions, including a human chain across Ukraine, were being planned.

Indeed, political reform is essential in Ukraine, where recent polls have displayed a dismally low level of trust in the political system and its representatives, institutions of authority and the media. Kuchma is most unlikely to be the right candidate for leading successful reforms, however; his popularity is remarkably low again at the moment. The issue probably will remain open until the presidential elections, which are the driving factor behind the sudden rush to
reform. The question that remains is whether Kuchma is trying to extend his own powers, or whether the reform — which actually reduces presidential power per se — is aimed at limiting a future adversary's power while securing his own immunity after his presidential term ends. With an eye to the presidential election, another important question to ask is whether the opposition can retain its current belief that unity is necessary for another one and a half years until the election, and back up this belief by unified action — and even a single candidate.

BELARUS
For a better life
In Belarus, the protest mood has also risen, though less successfully so. The local elections held at the beginning of the month have been widely denounced as not meeting fair election standards, by, among others, the Belarusian Helsinki Committee, which called the elections "undemocratic" on 4 March, just days after they had been held. Complaints focused on inadequate funding, inconsistent treatment of candidates depending on what element they represented and reduced access for election observers. Cecilia Wigstrom of the Swedish Liberal Party, a member of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly that just recently allowed Belarus to regain its seat, also spent the election period in Belarus and noted several "peculiarities." (RFE/RL NEWSLINE, 6 Mar 03) More recently, the Belarusian opposition complained that these elections had displayed even lower standards than were seen during voting in 2000 and 2001. The opposition parties had taken part in the local elections for the first time in five years, hoping to gain more influence, but this backfired judging by the election results. Partly due to the earlier boycotting strategy, but also to the divisiveness of the Belarusian opposition itself, the parties’ standing with the population does seem to be very low indeed. Despite the part played by the aforementioned electoral violations, the opposition certainly needs to raise its own profile with the population if it wants to become a more successful force in Belarus. Participation in this election may have been a first step.
Partly in response to complaints about electoral standards, as well as continuing grievances on issues of human rights and living standards in Belarus, the opposition and the human rights group Charter 97 called for a "march for a better life" to be held on 12 March. After initially refusing, the authorities finally granted permission for individuals to assemble but not to march. Amnesty International stated it would be keeping a close eye on the event and would consider any arrested participants to be prisoners of conscience. A number of persons were arrested after protesters decided to march without authorization. Four organizers from Charter 97 — Andrei Sannikov, Lyudmila Gryaznova, Dmitri Bondarenko and Leonid Malakhov — were sentenced to 15 days in jail on 13 March.

(INTERFAX, 13 Mar 03; FBIS-SOV-2003-0313, via World News Connection) An immediate response from Belarusian opposition and international organizations collected 70 signatures demanding their immediate release: "The severe sentences prove that the current authorities will give the Belarusian citizens neither freedom nor democracy, nor normal and decent lives ... It is evident that the authorities fear mass, well-organized, nonviolent protests." (RFE/RL NEWSLINE, 19 Mar 03) The deputy chairman of the Belarusian People's Front, Yuri Khodyko, was detained on 17 March; administrative reasons delayed his sentencing, he went into hiding. However, despite the government’s overreaction, which points to some nervousness, the turnout for the demonstration (roughly 3,000 persons) appears unexpectedly and disturbingly low, as the Institute for War & Peace Reporting's Belarus Report contends.

Although most in Belarus are unsatisfied with living conditions, surveys show that less than 20 percent are willing to protest rather than put up with or find other ways to deal with their situation. A stronger, more trusted and more visible opposition in the country might be able to change that.

Newly Independent States: Caucasus

By Miriam Lanskoy
A way out of the quagmire?

Some skeptics may say that the peace proposal presented by Ilyas Akhmadov, the foreign minister of Chechnya, at a press conference in Washington DC on 18 March is a utopian dream and an academic exercise. Indeed, it is hard to imagine that the plan could be implemented in the current political context. However, every serious observer of the war expects hostilities to continue for years to come – long enough for political alignments and priorities to change substantially. In 1995 few would have expected Slobodan Milosevic to stand trial for genocide against the Bosnians or for the Baltic states to accede to NATO.

"The Russian-Chechen Tragedy: The Way to Peace and Democracy," a 50-page document, represents the most elaborate and articulate statement of the aspirations of the Chechen resistance that has ever appeared. It contains a proposal for a peace process that would entail a temporary international trusteeship and eventual independence for Chechnya. (See text posted on the web page of the Chechen foreign ministry, www.chechnya-mfa.info/)

The basic mechanism of the plan is that the Russian military would withdraw, to be replaced by international peacekeepers with a UN mandate to establish an international protectorate, deliver aid and oversee the demilitarization process (i.e., train the civil service, judiciary and military). With regard to Chechnya’s status, the relevant passage states: "granting de jure statehood on completion of the international trusteeship term should be explicitly defined as a purpose of the trusteeship system, conditional on Chechnya’s transformation into a viable democratic state." In other words, if after a transitional period of several years Chechnya democratizes to the satisfaction of the international community, it will be automatically recognized then as an independent state.

This represents a significant hardening of the official Chechen position on independence. For the last three years President Aslan Maskhadov and his
representatives have been calling for talks with no preconditions — leaving open the question of status. Moreover, Maskhadov's representatives had offered to begin negotiations on the basis of a compromise status within Russia on at least three occasions. Ivan Rybkin, the former secretary of the Security Council, said that he was approached in the Spring of 2000 by Ingush President Ruslan Aushev and North Ossetia's President Aleksandr Dzasokhov, acting as intermediaries, who wanted to explore the possibility of negotiating on the basis of a treaty drafted by Rybkin in 1997 and rejected by the Chechens at the time. Reportedly, at their meeting in the Moscow airport in November 2001, the Chechen president's representative, Akhmad Zakaev, handed a set of proposals to the Russian representative, General Viktor Kazantsev, which included the offer to negotiate a status within Russia. In July 2002 Zakaev repeated this offer to Rybkin at the informal talks in Liechtenstein. (CHECHNYA WEEKLY, 9 Sep 02, and Liz Fuller, RFE/RL CAUCUS REPORT, 29 Sep 02)

Russia has persistently rejected all such offers. For well over three years of brutal war in Chechnya there have been no cease-fires or official negotiations. Naturally, as the number of Chechen dead grows, so does the determination to obtain full independence.

The utter failure of the 1996 Khasavyurt peace has created a sense of hopelessness about Chechen independence among many in Russia and in Chechnya. Significantly the new peace plan acknowledges the failures of the 1996-1999 Chechen government and addresses them. "The unruly, lawless situation in Chechnya between the two wars however understandable its causes, is clearly not what the Chechen people want and need. (...) Democracy is what the Chechens have fought for ... " but have not experienced. If international donors and peacekeepers step in to alleviate the chaos and poverty reigning in Chechnya, many of the defects of the post-Khasavyurt Chechen Republic could be addressed. Most crucially, Akhmadov's proposal envisions that after a short initial period of cooperation with the international authorities, Maskhadov would
submit himself to elections. This provision should satisfy Maskhadov’s staunchest critics.

Finally, the document identifies specific measures that can be implemented immediately:

• The US and EU countries should assign the issue of Chechnya top priority in their relations with Russia.
• The UN secretary-general should designate a representative to promote a political resolution to the Russian-Chechen conflict.
• Track two conferences should be undertaken by the International Crisis Group and the Center for European Policy Studies in Brussels.
• The Council of Europe should organize conferences of civil society leaders from Russia, Chechnya and Europe.
• Parliamentary cooperation among the European Parliament, the parliaments of member countries, and the US Congress should be undertaken. To this end Ilyas Akhmadov conducted several meetings with US congressmen.

In recent years the UN has had a surprisingly good record of rebuilding states such as East Timor and Cambodia. Over the same period, the post-17th-century Peace of Westphalia system, which established the principle of the territorial integrity of states, has been under assault, most notably in Yugoslavia, where Kosovo is expected to attain statehood after a period of international trusteeship. Additionally, US-endorsed peace plans for the Middle East hold out the prospect of a Palestinian state on the condition that the corrupt and repressive Palestinian Authority can transform itself into a democratic institution. Actually, the Chechens have stronger military, legal, historical and moral claims to independence than the Kosovars or the Palestinians: What they lack is a powerful international lobby, but that is changing.
Newly Independent States: Central Asia

By David Montgomery

Iraq, regional security and government structure
The US-led operation in Iraq has forced Central Asia to prepare for the potential consequences of the war, including what a distraction from US interest in the region may mean in terms of economic assistance. Nonetheless, regional security relations continue to be negotiated and constitutional strictures continue to be modified.

IRAQ
In a recent press conference, Uzbek President Islam Karimov remarked, "we unequivocally support the US policy for resolving the Iraq problem." While the comments were made prior to military action being taken by the US, Karimov did make it clear that his country’s support extended to war without the support of the UN Security Council. (ROSSIYSKAYA GAZETA, 12 Mar 03; FBIS-SOV-2003-0312, via World News Connection)

While Uzbekistan had been the only country in the region to support the US position openly (it is no coincidence that Uzbekistan is receiving more economic assistance from the US than ever before), Turkmenistan President Saparurat Niyazov, who previously had expressed neutrality, unexpectedly stated that "the Turkmenistan leadership supports Washington’s position on Iraq."
(Rossiyiskaya GAZETA, 12 Mar 03; FBIS-SOV-2003-0312, via World News Connection)

Kazakhstan, however, was quick to express its concern for the failure of the UN Security Council to resolve the situation. (ITAR-TASS, 1514 GMT, 18 Mar 03; FBIS-SOV-2003-0318, via World News Connection) Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbaev reiterated his concern about the potential threat the war presented to
decreasing oil and gas prices — which could result in a destabilization of the Kazakh economy. (EURASIANET, 20 Mar 03; via www.eurasianet.org)

Nonetheless, the Kazakh foreign ministry officially blamed Iraqi President Saddam Hussein for the developments of the conflict. (INTERFAX-KAZAKHSTAN, 1313 GMT, 15 Feb 03; via www.times.kg)

Kyrgyzstan once again stated its concern for the situation (INTERFAX, 1111 GMT, 19 Mar 03; FBIS-SOV-2003-0319, via World News Connection), insisting that the allied airbases in Kyrgyzstan could be used only for combating terrorism in Afghanistan and for humanitarian shipments. (ITAR-TASS, 1004 GMT, 4 Mar 03; FBIS-SOV-2003-0304, via World News Connection) Both Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan have taken steps to increase security out of fear that there may be a backlash by anti-American terrorist or militant groups. (MOSCOW TIMES, 24 Mar 03; via www.times.kg)

Tajikistan has been cautious in its statements about the war, expressing its hopes that civilian casualties be minimal. Tajik officials fear that the Iraq war may threaten further destabilization of Central Asia, but President Imomali Rakhmonov did not address the issue in his recent annual Nawruz speech to the country. (RFE/RL NEWSLINE, 24 Mar 03)

REGIONAL SECURITY

Although the war in Iraq looms ever-present in the minds of Central Asian government leaders, regional security issues remain their focus. Russia has stated that it will delay the transfer of attack planes, at least until June, from a Tajik air base to a new air base in Kant, Kyrgyzstan. (ITAR-TASS, 0832 GMT, 18 Mar 03; FBIS-SOV-2003-0318, via World News Connection) The Kant air base (roughly 40 kilometers from the US air base in Kyrgyzstan) will have about 500 troops and is scheduled to be functional in April. (ITAR-TASS, 1505 GMT, 14 Mar 03; FBIS-SOV-2003-0314, via World News Connection) The transfer of the
planes from Dushanbe to Kant makes little strategic difference, but does send a strong political message about Russia's presence in the region.

Regarding the issue of borders, Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan have negotiated an agreement allowing residents of Barak, a 200-hectare Kyrgyz enclave located in Uzbekistan, free travel through Uzbekistan to Kyrgyzstan. (INTERFAX, 1820 GMT, 13 Mar 03; FBIS-SOV-2003-0313, via World News Connection)

Uzbekistan had closed the borders, leading residents of Barak (a remnant of the Soviet National Delimitation Program of the 1920s) to ask Kyrgyz Prime Minister Nikolai Tanaev to negotiate travel rights for them or to resettle them onto Kyrgyz territory. (INTERFAX, 1205 GMT, 7 Mar 03; FBIS-SOV-2003-0307, via World News Connection)

While only 690 kilometers (out of 1490 km of shared border) have been delimited between Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan, the opening of border posts allowing travel for Barak residents is a positive step towards resolving outstanding boundary issues. A further step towards improving those relations is Uzbek willingness to provide a map of the minefields along the border. The border was mined in 1999 (in response to the incursion by the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan), but despite the six deaths, eleven injuries and multiple requests, Uzbekistan had been unwilling to provide location information to Kyrgyz officials. (ITAR-TASS, 1745 GMT, 11 Mar 03; FBIS-SOV-2003-0311, via World News Connection)

Also of note for security in the region, 17 March marked the first anniversary of the Aksy riots in Kyrgyzstan in which six residents were killed and 40 injured. While the commemoration of the first anniversary of death is significant in the Islamic tradition, according to Kyrgyz Interior Minister Bakirdin Subanbekov, "no additional police forces [would] be sent to Aksy on 17 March." (INTERFAX, 0931 GMT, 16 Mar 03; FBIS-SOV-2003-0316, via World News Connection) Arguing that organizers were not properly registered, Kyrgyz officials did ban a 17 March
rally in Bishkek that was to mark the anniversary of the riots. (INTERFAX, 0958 GMT, 17 Mar 03; FBIS-SOV-2003-0317, via World News Connection)

**GOVERNMENT STRUCTURE**

Despite the banning of the rally in Bishkek, in his State of the Union address on 12 March President Askar Akaev remarked that "democracy in Kyrgyzstan is acquiring more and more mature, developed forms, by reinforcing the attraction of values and connected to it and creating conditions for its deeper and wider expansion." (KABAR, 0000 GMT, 12 Mar 03; FBIS-SOV-2003-0312, via World News Connection) Clearly there remains some distance between rhetoric of reform and practice.

Turkmenistan, for example, announced in December 2002 that there would be elections to the Halk Maslahaty (People’s Council) as well as to the Mejlis (parliament). The elections are scheduled for 6 April. But with just a few weeks before the election, the identity of the candidates and the exact number of seats up for election remain unknown. (RFE/RL NEWSLINE, 15 Mar 03)

Meanwhile, in Tajikistan, a referendum on amendments to the constitution is scheduled for 22 June. The current referendum offers nearly 100 amendments to 55 constitutional articles, one of which would allow President Rakhmonov to run for two more terms. (ITAR-TASS, 0933 GMT, 19 Mar 03; FBIS-SOV-2003-0319, via World News Connection) The current constitution prohibits the president from running for reelection once the seven-year term ends. Rakhmonov’s current term is up in 2006; if the referendum passes it would give him the opportunity to rule until 2020. While the debate over the constitution ensues, the goal seems to be strengthening Rakhmonov’s control over the country and shifting blame for government shortcomings onto local officials. (EURASIANET, 17 Mar 03; via www.eurasianet.org)