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Kasianov’s reforms and cabinet turmoil
Prime Minister Mikhail Kasianov, largely left by President Vladimir Putin to oversee the Russian economy, is facing rebellion in the ranks. Both Alexei Kudrin, the finance minister and deputy prime minister, and German Gref, the economic development minister, reportedly have challenged the direction of Kasianov’s policy proposals. Responding to President Vladimir Putin’s calls for greater economic growth, the prime minister upbraided Kudrin and Gref at a cabinet meeting 13 March and, in effect, blamed them for the lack of radical improvement in the Russian economy. Kasianov is beginning to play his political cards in preparation of the rumored upcoming administrative changes concerning the economy. (KOMMERSANT-VLAST, 17 Mar 03; via ISI Emerging Markets Database)

Most reports indicate that President Putin has left the country’s economic minutiae to Kasianov. However, the authoritarian nature of Putin’s governance is such that no real decisions are made without the president’s direct approval. And he has created the present environment. By allowing the competing factions of Kudrin/Gref and Kasianov to exist, Putin effectively has stopped any real change. As opposed to the security apparatus that he so clearly controls, the economy is much more vulnerable to external influences. Knowing this, Putin has made a conscious decision to stall for time and have in reserve a variety of ministerial fall guys to fire if any serious economic disasters occur. (YEZHENEDELNYI ZHURNAL, 25 Mar 03; via ISI Emerging Markets Database)
Should rumors of administrative reforms concerning the economy be translated into reality, they will be meaningful only if Putin ends factional infighting within the cabinet. That will entail the deliberate choosing of sides and, by necessity, the defeat and finally banishment from the government of one of the groups. Only if Putin feels politically comfortable will he make a decisive choice as to whom to back.

**The friends and ‘family’ plan**

President Putin appears to be trying to ensure that his clan of reliable "Petersburgers" is established in St. Petersburg itself. On 24 March, Leningrad Oblast’ legislator Damir Shadaev accused presidential administration head Aleksandr Voloshin of putting pressure on the oblast’ legislature to select a candidate favorable to the Kremlin to serve as its representative in the Federation Council. One of the leading candidates is Vladimir Churov, who once worked with Putin in the St. Petersburg mayoral administration. (RFE/RL NEWSLINE, 24 Mar 03)

Additionally, in a recent meeting with St. Petersburg Governor Vladimir Yakovlev, Putin reportedly urged the governor to give up attempts to legalize a run at a third term. (RFE/RL NEWSLINE, 28 Mar 03) At first it looked as if Yakovlev might continue to seek a referendum allowing him to run for a third term, but it appears now that his seat will be up for grabs. He announced on 2 April that he was ruling out attempts at staying in office. President Putin now seems to have promoted one of his own as a putative candidate for this governorship with the appointment of Valentina Matvienko as his plenipotentiary representative in the Northwest Region (which includes St. Petersburg), although some observers are skeptical. (REUTERS, 2 Apr 03; via Johnson’s Russia List)

With the anniversary of Putin’s third year in office, many experts are analyzing his progress, his popularity and even his psychological profile. A political psychology professor at Moscow State University claims that Putin is driven to
surround himself with like-minded persons. (ROSSIYSKAYA GAZETA, 26 Mar 03; via Johnson’s Russia List)

During the president’s early days in office, he lacked his own team, and was, instead, surrounded by the Yel’tsinites who got him elected. Progress and change came slowly. Since then he has built his squad based on who can get certain aims accomplished for him. However, while the latest round of personnel changes (THE NIS OBSERVED, 26 Mar 03) may demonstrate how he has increased the number of loyalists on the playing field, there are concerns that those appointees may not be the most competent. (NEZAVISIMAYA GAZETA, 24 Mar 03; via Johnson's Russia List)

Some argue that Putin’s team-building has resulted in a relatively effective government vertical. Nevertheless, despite the cult of loyalists around him, analysts observe that Putin is still too tolerant of (and still influenced by) the Yel’tsin "Family" that put him in power. This influence could threaten his political future. (GAZETA, 26 Mar 03; via Johnson’s Russia List) Some blame this influence for Putin’s sluggishness in reforming the bureaucracy. (RFE/RL RUSSIAN POLITICAL WEEKLY, 26 Mar 03)

**Will the Kremlin give up some of the president’s power?**

The presidential administration has drafted a bill on the formation of the government under which the right to form the cabinet would be handed over to the party that holds a majority of seats in the State Duma. Under the proposal, the prime minister would name a cabinet from a list of candidates compiled by the Duma’s majority party. (NEZAVISIMAYA GAZETA, 1 Apr 03; via RFE/RL Newsline) The president would select his prime minister from the party’s list. Despite this report and alleged evidence that the Kremlin has been leaning towards a party-based government, another theory is that such an amendment will not be permitted to pass. The proposed system would make the cabinet less dependent on the president and would make the majority party more powerful.
Any movement in this direction could threaten Putin’s "super-presidency" system of government. (NEZAVISIMAYA GAZETA, 2 Apr 03; via Johnson’s Russia List)

Either way, Putin will continue to reign. Recent polls marking Putin’s presidential anniversary indicate that his popularity is as solid as ever: 82% of Putin voters don’t regret their decision; 49% feel the hopes they pinned on him have been justified; 45% believe that Putin has improved order in Russia; 57% have not changed their opinion of Putin, while 26% now have a higher opinion. According to the polls, Putin is also the most popular Russian politician. (INTERFAX, 26 Mar 03; via Johnson’s Russia List)

Moreover, the polls rate Putin high in terms of public trust and political performance. Even a one-time skeptic, Mikhail Gorbachev, recently praised Putin for achieving his objectives of stability, authority and wage and pension payment goals. (AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE, 26 Mar 03; via Johnson’s Russia List)

Not all the numbers were positive, though. In one poll, 65% of respondents criticized the president for not doing enough to improve the economy. But this is unlikely to prevent him from increasing his power and his popularity, and with nobody in sight who could compete with Putin, (TRUD, 26 Mar 03; via Johnson’s Russia List) he should not have much trouble if he chooses to run for a second term next year.

Russian Federation: Security Services
By Scott Fleeher

Operational intelligence cells in Baghdad...
Recent coverage of the war in Iraq has accentuated the widening gap between Moscow and Washington. The post 9-11 relationship appears to have gone the way of the majority of T-72 tanks in and around Baghdad. This cooling (as a
result of recent actions by the Russian security services in Iraq) is likely to persist for the foreseeable future.

Suspicions regarding the actions and intent of Russian Military Intelligence (GRU) and Foreign Intelligence Service (SVR) elements in Baghdad existed well before the commencement of the US-led coalition attack on the tyrannical regime of Saddam Hussein. US intelligence agencies allege that elements of the SVR were operating covertly, and in cooperation with Iraqi intelligence (Mukhabarat), in January 2003, or earlier. (WASHINGTON TIMES, 10 Jan 03) This revelation caused US security officials to worry that intelligence information provided to the United Nations (under the auspices of so-called "weapons inspections") might be transferred to the Iraqi regime via Russian agents.

However, an arguably more insidious maneuver by the Russian "partners" may have been shielded under the guise of a seemingly benign diplomatic visit. A 28 March report by Nezavisimaya gazeta suggests that the poorly publicized February 2003 meeting between Yevgeny Primakov and Saddam Hussein may have focused primarily on Russian access to secret Iraqi files, in the event of a collapse of the regime. (AP, 31 Mar 03; via www.moscowtimes.com) Shrouded in secrecy and conjecture, the meeting between Primakov and Hussein was portrayed officially as an attempt by the Russians to receive the dictator's "word" that he would cooperate with UN resolutions.

So, why all the spooks?
Why is the SVR so active in Baghdad? How did Saddam Hussein or Primakov know that the regime might be in jeopardy? Enter the Zaslon.

In addition to the normal day-to-day business of international espionage, the reported presence of at least two armed SVR Zaslon groups in Baghdad (with an alleged third poised in Iran) seems to be related to attempts to spirit Iraqi intelligence documents to Moscow: These documents could play a crucial role in
shoring up Russian interests in the post-conflict environment; they could contain proof of Iraqi weapons of mass destruction (a fact that Moscow may wish to conceal no less than Baghdad); finally, by using these documents, the SVR could successfully "turn" Iraqi agents, adding them to the Russian payroll. (NEZAVISIMAYA GAZETA, 31 Mar 03; via ISI Emerging Markets Database) The most sensitive of these documents could be passed to the Russian Embassy to be taken out of Iraq once the inevitable collapse of the Iraqi regime is evident.

**Here is our advice... we think it might be better if you took a seat...**

In addition to their ongoing pursuits under "file-mania," the Russian security services also are playing an active intelligence advisory role for the soon-to-be-extinct Iraqi regime. According to Russian analysts, the GRU holds a special place within Saddam Hussein’s closest intelligence circles. Reports by Russian journalists and analysts reveal that Russian intelligence personnel told Hussein that the main allied push to Baghdad would not occur for some time. (UPI, 1 Apr 03; via Lexis-Nexis) For Saddam and his sons, that was the good news. However, the same analysts advised Hussein against underestimating the resolve and determination of the US-led coalition. (UPI, 1 Apr 03; via Lexis-Nexis) That was the bad news.

In a 31 March report posted on the site iraqwar.ru (which is described as being based on GRU reports), an unidentified Russian analyst was quoted as saying, "Despite some obvious miscalculations and errors of the coalition’s high command, the (Allied) troops that have entered Iraq maintain high combat readiness and are willing to fight. The initiative in the war remains firmly in the hands of the coalition." (UPI, 1 Apr 03; via Lexis-Nexis) This may, in the final analysis, be the only piece of the intelligence puzzle in which the GRU "got it right."

Various elements of the Russian security services operating in Iraq may continue to assist the Iraqi regime into its final days, however, their predictions seem to
have been considerably off the mark regarding the entrance of American forces into Baghdad. This error has been highlighted by live international media coverage of coalition forces operating both in and around the city of Baghdad. Perhaps those operating in cahoots with Hussein might consider investigating one-way airfare from the newly named Baghdad International Airport. Rumor has it that fares to Grozny are reasonable this time of year.

Russian Federation: Foreign Relations

By Ansel Stein

Russia, Iraq and influence in the Arab world?

Until a couple of days ago, Moscow was steadily belittling the United States military and its operation. Russian defense analysts have been quick to question the tactics employed by coalition forces and have drawn hasty conclusions concerning the outcome of the campaign. Defense Minister Sergei Ivanov said in one interview that the operation was not proceeding "without mishaps and miscalculations" and that Iraq had successfully challenged the coalition both militarily and in terms of propaganda. (Komsomol'skaya Pravda, 31 Mar 03; via www.komsomolskayapravda.ru) The outcome could be problematic, he continued, since "Iraq still has a formidable army that has not yet begun to fight."

RIA-Novosti reported on 26 March that a panel of five retired senior military commanders–former Soviet ground forces commander Army General Valentin Varennikov, former Deputy Defense Ministers Colonel General Georgi Kondratev and Colonel General Valeri Manilov, Academy of Military Sciences President General Makhmut Gareev, and Duma Defense Committee Deputy Chairman Colonel General Eduard Vorobev–concluded that the coalition had seriously underestimated the ability and willingness of the Iraqi Army to resist. In addition, they said, coalition planners relied too much on their high-precision weaponry and neglected the basic techniques of close combat. (RFE/RFL, 1 Apr 03; via www.rferl.org/securitywatch/) Such conclusions have led the Russian military and
political establishments to assume that they have now the greatest window of opportunity since the end of the Cold War to increase Russian influence in the region. The basis of such influence would be twofold: Moscow’s membership in the anti-American "coalition of weasel" as well as Russian military and intelligence support.

The expectation of more military contracts for Russia was reflected in an article that stated, "the war underway in Iraq is playing into the hands of Russian producers of antiaircraft systems and weapons for the ground forces." It predicted "a growing demand for uncomplicated antiaircraft weapons and modern guided antitank missiles, particularly in the countries of the 'axis of evil' that may find themselves the next targets." (VEDOMOSTI, 1 Apr 03; What the Papers Say, via Lexis-Nexis)

Russian materiel is evident in the current conflict. Russians may have been directly involved in operating weapons systems and perhaps participating in the command and control of the Iraqi armed forces. A report revealed that two former top Soviet military officers visited Iraq less than two weeks before the start of war to advise the Iraqi military leadership. (www.gazeta.ru, 2 MAR 03) It featured photographs of the two generals receiving an award from Iraq's defense minister, Sultan Hashem Ahmed. One of the officers, Vladislav A. Achalov, a former Soviet deputy defense minister, declined to detail the visit, saying only that he "did not go to drink coffee," and that he and his colleague were "with the minister," eight days before the war began. "We left on Wednesday, and the war began the next Thursday." Achalov was accompanied by Igor Maltsev, the former head of the Soviet Union's Air Defense Forces. (THE NEW YORK TIMES, 4 Apr 03)

Moreover, members of Russia’s Foreign Intelligence Service (SVR) and military intelligence (GRU) were meeting constantly with high-ranking members of President Hussein's intelligence agencies. (Nezavisimaya gazeta, 27 Mar 03; via
Additionally, two Zaslon (shield) special-purpose SVR detachments reportedly were sent to Iraq. (RFE/RFL, 1 Apr 03)

From 1958 to 1990, 8,174 Russian military officers, including 92 generals, were stationed in Iraq. According to Russian defense ministry data, 90 percent of Iraq's military equipment and technology was Soviet-made. "Cooperation with Iraq continued long after 1991," when the United Nations imposed sanctions on Iraq, one analyst said. "Sanctions were always being violated. That's how Iraq has military potential now." (THE NEW YORK TIMES, 4 Apr 03) In the wake of the war Russian companies will solicit the business of other "rogue states," marketing technologies that supposedly can neutralize US technological superiority. Deliveries to foreign customers of updated Pechora-2M air defense missile systems in a mobile version are planned to begin this year. (ITAR-TASS, 1126 GMT, 16 Mar 03; FBIS-SOV-2003-0316, via World News Connection) States that procure these items also will be able to purchase the advice of men like Achalov and Maltsev.

Russian Federation: Domestic Affairs and Legislative Branch
By Kate Martin

REGIONS
If at first you don't succeed,…
Despite Moscow’s apparent success last autumn in raising the Kaliningrad transit question to the international stage, it now appears that the European Union wasn't taken in by Russia’s supposed concerns quite as much as originally perceived.
A November 2002 agreement between the EU and Russia regarding transit from the Russian exclave through Lithuania had been interpreted by many as a slap in the face of Lithuanian sovereignty. Indeed, the interests of the Baltic state — wary of allowing unlimited transit from the highly militarized region — had largely been ignored. But the devil is in the details.

The November agreement reached in Brussels stipulated that Russians traveling to and from Kaliningrad by rail, car or bus would be allowed to do so with a simplified travel document, rather than a visa, effective 1 July 2003. Beginning in February, Russian citizens living in Kaliningrad no longer can use unaltered Soviet Union passports or military IDs as travel documents; moreover, children’s birth certificates are no longer sufficient for children traveling without their parents. Russian citizens can enter Lithuania only with: a Russian diplomatic, service or foreign passport, a Soviet Union passport that has a mark denoting Russian citizenship, a Russian internal passport (or Soviet Union internal passport with the mark about Russian citizenship), a seaman’s passport or a special return permit (issued to military personnel and to persons who have lost their documents while abroad). (BALTIC NEWS SERVICE, 5 Mar 03; via Lexis-Nexis)

During negotiations as to the specifics of the simplified travel document and the application procedure, Russia systematically has been trying to whittle away as many requirements as possible, no doubt perceiving the EU acquiescence in November as indicative of Russian-EU relations in the long term.

Dmitri Rogozin, the chairman of the Duma’s committee for international affairs, is Russia’s point man in the negotiations. Last month he charged that Lithuania was complicating the transit procedure by insisting on conditions that "contradict the spirit and the letter of the Russia-EU summit in Brussels."

(ROSBUSINESSCONSULTING DATABASE, 3 Mar 03; via Lexis-Nexis) "I wonder why a Russian citizen has to answer so many questions about his family
members when buying a ticket to Kaliningrad, while our specialists say that full name and precise date of birth are enough to identify an unwelcome element," Rogozin said. (BALTIC NEWS SERVICE, 5 Mar 03; via Lexis-Nexis) The State Duma was quick to back up Rogozin's stand, adopting — unanimously — a statement urging the European parliament (and similar assemblies in EU member countries) to prevent Lithuania from derailing agreements that are seen as strategically important to relations between Russia and the EU. (INTERFAX, 0952 GMT, 7 Mar 03; BBC Monitoring International Reports, via Lexis-Nexis)

However, Rogozin's wielding of the summit club did not pack the punch he clearly had hoped, since EU experts — not Lithuanians — were responsible for the form. Next came the Russian claim that "tens of thousands," (AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE, 7 Mar 03; via Lexis-Nexis) no, make that "several hundred thousand" (KAUNO DIENA, 8 Mar 03; BBC Monitoring International Reports, via Lexis-Nexis) Kaliningrad residents were stopped from traveling because of the new, stricter requirements. According to Lithuanian officials, there has been a drop in travel since the tougher requirements were put into effect, but nowhere near the level alleged by Moscow. "Compared to January, only 8,000 fewer passengers traveled in February. Because February is a shorter month, the actual difference may only be 5,000 people," Rokas Pukinskas, a spokesman for the Lithuanian State Border Guard Service, said. "In the first seven days of March, 7,272 passengers crossed the Lithuanian territory in transit," he said. Most of the passengers were let through, he added; border guards asked 93 persons who lacked proper documentation to disembark at the border. Of that number, 47 were Russian citizens and 46 were citizens of the Commonwealth of Independent States and other countries, he explained. (KAUNO DIENA, 8 Mar 03; BBC Monitoring International Reports, via Lexis-Nexis)

Still, Moscow has managed to get the number of questions on the application reduced, from the originally proposed 31 to 15. Yet that was not enough of a success, and the whittling knife once more appeared. Kaliningrad's first deputy
governor, Mikhail Tsikel, announced that officials "are astonished" at the demand that passengers must fill out any questionnaire before receiving railway tickets. (ITAR-TASS, 19 Mar 03; via Lexis-Nexis) That led to a new disagreement on just how the applications should be processed. Russia insisted that forms containing passenger information should be handed over to Lithuanian border guards — providing Lithuanian officials no time to check the documents — while Lithuania sought to have the forms filled in at the ticket office, which would then transfer the information to Lithuanian consular institutions for review before tickets were issued. (ITAR-TASS, 1906 GMT, 24 Mar 03; BBC Monitoring International Reports, via Lexis-Nexis) The EU has backed Lithuania’s procedure.

The Brussels agreement that has led to these negotiations contains two significant stipulations for Russia which, together with specifications for the document application and the application procedure itself, have made for interesting and difficult-to-surmount obstacles for the parties involved.

Included in the stipulations are a readmission treaty between Russia and Lithuania; after several false starts, a draft agreement was developed on 4 April. (BALTIC NEWS SERVICE, 4 Apr 03; via Lexis-Nexis) The second stipulation, however, has proven to be trickier: ratification of the border treaty between the two countries. Although signed in October 1997 and ratified by Lithuania in November 1999, the border agreement continues to await Duma approval. Moscow has been in no rush to get the treaty ratified: In fact, the need for ratification has become one of Russia’s standard weapons in its relations with the Baltic state, as clear border delineations are a requirement for EU entry. At this point, Russia is trying desperately to retain that weapon, clearly hoping that, if no mention is made of the Duma’s refusal to ratify, perhaps no one will notice that a key EU stipulation remains unmet.

In an interview last month, Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Razov repeatedly danced away from any and all questions about ratification, and
commented instead only on the readmission treaty, which Moscow evidently has conceded. (IZVESTIA, 28 Mar 03; What the Papers Say, via Lexis-Nexis) When the border treaty is mentioned, legislators are quick to disassociate ratification from the Kaliningrad transit negotiations. "[It] is necessary to come to an agreement on matters that cannot wait before discussions on common issues which can wait," Duma Deputy Speaker Vladimir Lukin said. "Borders will not go anywhere. They are as they are, but Russian passengers in trains, departing from Kaliningrad for other Russian regions and coming back, cannot feel normal." (ITAR-TASS, 27 Mar 03; via Lexis-Nexis)

But Lithuania has a political ace in the hole that it can play with the EU's blessing. Gediminas Kirkilas, the Lithuanian president's special representative on the Kaliningrad issue, warned that his country "is worried that Moscow has no political will to sign a treaty on readmission as well as to ratify a treaty on the state border." If ratification does not occur by 1 July, he said, Lithuania "will impose a visa regime on the same day, and Russian politicians will be responsible for this." (ITAR-TASS, 27 Mar 03; via Lexis-Nexis) EU officials reportedly have warned Moscow that some Russian demands are unacceptable, that the EU has shown maximum flexibility, and that negotiations were boiling down to "take it or leave it" for the Russian side. Moreover, if the "leave it" option is taken, Russia would have to cope with a visa regime. (EUROPEAN REPORT, 29 Mar 03; via Lexis-Nexis)

As of press time, final agreements had not been reached despite tripartite talks, and the deadline for effective action fast approaches. While an additional negotiation session has been scheduled for this week, some wheels are being greased the old-fashioned way — with financial incentives. During tense negotiations last autumn, the EU committed itself to funds for Lithuania, and early in March European Commission and Lithuanian officials signed a 12 million euro agreement to pay for the new transit procedures. "The financing memorandum will deliver on the EU's pledge to cover additional costs to Lithuania of fulfilling
the provisions of the Schengen Agreement and the EU-Russia joint statement of November 2002," according to an announcement of the agreement. (THE BALTIC TIMES, 6 Mar 03; Global News Wire, via Lexis-Nexis) Then, noting his optimism that a compromise on the transit issue will be found, the head of the EC mission in Russia, Richard Right, said that all sides are working to realize the economic and political aims of the agreements already reached, and that the European Union is prepared to render technical aid to the Kaliningrad region in this context. (ITAR-TASS, 27 Mar 03; via Lexis-Nexis) Moreover, the European Commission subsequently announced a new EU-funded project to promote innovative small- and medium-sized enterprises in Russia’s Baltic region — to the tune of 1.8 million euros. (EUROPEAN REPORT, 2 Apr 03; via Lexis-Nexis)

Such incentives may have been responsible, in part, for Rogozin’s backtracking. "The statement of a representative of the Lithuanian foreign ministry that the Russian proposal of automatic selling of tickets at booking offices without a prior notification of Lithuanian consular services may have been caused by problems in the translation into Lithuanian. Moscow has not considered such proposals," he said. (ITAR-TASS, 28 Mar 03; via Lexis-Nexis) One apparently should dwell on the new stand rather than on the explanation, since ITAR-TASS ran the article that mentioned the (now denied) demand.

Meanwhile, old-style harassment seems to be making a comeback. During Duma deliberations about the documents, Aleksandr Mitrofanov, a deputy from the Liberal Democratic Party, suggested an interesting "diplomatic" gambit: granting amnesty to recently convicted (of attacking and killing a Chechen girl) Col. Yuri Budanov, "give him a regiment and let him assume a new position in Kaliningrad." Then, if Lithuania persists in imposing barriers, Budanov should be "given a tank — that is the only language to be used when dealing with Lithuania." (KAUNO DIENA, 8 Mar 03; BBC Monitoring International Reports, via Lexis-Nexis) Yet, despite the return of anti-Lithuanian rhetoric, Russian foreign ministry officials — apparently with a straight face — urged Vilnius not to connect
a hooligan attack against the Lithuanian consul general in St. Petersburg with Russian characterization of Kaliningrad transit discussions. "Lithuania’s attempt to link the incident with the evaluations stated by some Russian politicians regarding occurring transit difficulties is absolutely fake," according to the note from the foreign ministry that was forwarded to the Lithuanian embassy in Moscow. The attack featured a woman throwing ketchup on Consul General Gintaras Ronkaitis while shouting that she was protesting Lithuania’s policy in Kaliningrad. At the same time, leaflets signed by Russian extremist Eduard Limonov accusing the Baltic state of attempts to separate the military exclave from mainland Russia were thrown around. (BALTIC NEWS SERVICE, 25 Mar 03; via Lexis-Nexis)

Of course, the travel document brouhaha only covers ground transit, as Russia well knows, and there are other options. Indeed, the Baltic Fleet press service announced a decision by the Russian defense ministry and naval command to use military airplanes and ferries to transport servicemen to and from Kaliningrad. (ITAR-TASS, 24 Mar 03; via Lexis-Nexis)

Russian Federation: Armed Forces
By Steve Kwast and Dan Rozelle

Moscow’s reckless arms sales threaten world security…
As the US fights its war with Iraq, it is finding Russian-made weapons and Russian advisers inside Iraq–violations of international law (i.e., the sanctions) established by the UN. Three companies have been singled out as selling specific capabilities to Iraq. The first capability is a global positioning system (GPS) jamming system developed by the Moscow-based Aviaconversiya firm. US intelligence has been able to match an electronic signal emitted by the system in Iraq specifically to the system sold by the Russian firm. The second capability is the Kornet anti-tank missile made by a Russian company named
KBP Tula. And finally, the US is accusing a Russian firm of selling thousands of night vision goggles (NVGs) to Iraq. (AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE, 24 Mar 03; via Lexis-Nexis) While these capabilities are of military concern, the much larger problem is how to deal with a Russian military sales infrastructure that threatens world security by violating international law and allowing rogue states to acquire illegal weapons.

Moscow’s denials of these charges are not unexpected. Russia blames other countries, including the US, for passing on the weapons to Iraq. Russian Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov rejected US accusations outright. "Russia strictly fulfils all its international obligations and has not supplied any equipment, including military, to Iraq in violation of the sanctions regime," Ivanov said. (AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE, 1657 GMT, 24 Mar 03; WPS Defense and Security, via ISI Emerging Markets Database) The director of the Moscow-based Aviaconversiya firm, Oleg Antonov, said, "It is rather the Americans who bought our equipment to test its effect on their weapons. The Pentagon was irate after tests showed that the Russian system caused complete loss of effectiveness to US precision weapons." (DEUTSCHE PRESSE-AGENTUR, 24 Mar 03; via Lexis-Nexis) "The use of strategic bombers for blanket bombing of Iraq testifies that the aviation of the coalition forces is experiencing serious problems with the use of high-precision weapons that are not fulfilling their functions. Only this can explain the search for a ‘scapegoat’ and the attempts to accuse our firm," Antonov claimed. (ITAR-TASS, 1143 GMT, 24 Mar 03; BBC Monitoring, via ISI Emerging Markets Database)

Russian President Putin essentially has thumbed his nose at the US over this issue. In a telephone conversation with US President George W. Bush, Putin said, threateningly, "This is a matter of unfounded public allegations which are capable of damaging relations between our two countries." Ivanov, along with former SVR chief Yevgeny Primakov (who, significantly, went to Iraq on 23 February to meet with high officials), cited a statement attributed to former British
Foreign Secretary Robin Cook that the United Kingdom and the United States supplied sophisticated military equipment to Hussein’s regime. (RFE/RL NEWSLINE, 25 Mar 03) Of course, the time lines were blurred. Cook was referring to assistance the US gave to Iraq during the Iran-Iraq war when no UN sanctions existed.

Despite the war of words, the fact remains that Soviet-made military hardware in Iraq is still operational. MiG-23, MiG-25, and MiG-29 fighters still fly, radars operate and anti-aircraft missiles are launched in defense of Baghdad. Somehow Russian spare parts and weapons have been supplied to Iraq. Leonid Roshal, deputy chief engineer at the Russian design bureau for foreign economic connections, said Turkey, Jordan, Romania, Yugoslavia, Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Ukraine and Belarus could be possible intermediaries. Additionally, design bureau representatives said they had signed an agreement with Syria in 1998 to supply 1,000 Kornet missiles. This "black" weapons trade is well developed. A deliberately forged end-user certificate is issued (the US says Yemen was used to cover Kornet missiles supplied to Iraq). The weapons are never delivered to the permitted country, but are re-routed and delivered to the "real" customer. The chief engineer at a large Russian weapon-design company said, "Our specialists have made business trips to Baghdad to adjust and repair Iraqi military equipment, including newly bought equipment. What do you expect us to do? The Russian government does not pay us anything, so we have to go to Baghdad to make a living." (NOVAYA GAZETA, 27 Mar 03; WPS Defense and Security, via ISI Emerging Markets Database)

The military implications of the GPS jammers are fairly insignificant. The US is aware of Russia’s technology and has effective countermeasures. In fact, according to US military briefings about the war, GPS guided weapons were used to destroy one of the GPS jammers. Of more military significance are the anti-tank missiles and NVGs. Such "old-fashioned" weapons can cost US lives if
Iraqi solders lie in wait to attack US tanks. This is the politically charged point: Russian apathy about unbridled proliferation of its weapons costs American lives.

This black market transfer of weapons that Russian companies support is a real threat to international security, especially in a world increasingly filled with terrorist organizations. Today the threats are GPS jammers and anti-tank weapons with NVGs, but tomorrow the same unregulated process of Russian military proliferation could place nuclear, biological and chemical weapons in the hands of terrorists.

It is a mistake for the US to be satisfied with the few positive comments coming out of the Kremlin. Putin promised to provide greater disclosure on military sales with regard to the integrity of arms export control systems and the legality of the contracts. It remains to be seen whether this constitutes a step in the right direction, or whether one may so view Ivanov’s statement that he will treat as a "serious criminal offense" any discovery that Russian firms have violated UN sanctions against Iraq. But to think that such statements will fix a process filled with corruption and profit is to invite disaster. (PRIME-TASS, 1135 GMT, 25 Mar 03; WPS Defense and Security, via ISI Emerging Markets Database)

Yet, US Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage said that "the United States is satisfied with recent Russian efforts to look into accusations that Russian firms sold jamming equipment and anti-tank missiles to Iraq." (AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE, 1096 GMT, 27 Mar 03; WPS Defense and Security, via ISI Emerging Markets Database) The only concrete action suggested came from American Ambassador in Russia Alexander Vershbow. "The US may introduce sanctions against Russian companies that Washington suspects of armament and combat material supply to Iraq, thus bypassing the agreements reached under the UN," Vershbow said. (RUSSIAN BUSINESS MONITOR, 28 Mar 03; WPS Defense and Security, via ISI Emerging Markets Database)
However, such suggestions for actions are inadequate. The world community must get serious about shutting down the weapons proliferation markets and start developing methods to cut off any possible profit in such activity. Only then will opportunistic sources around the world turn to other ventures for profit. In the meantime, the US must not allow this situation to pass without making it an international issue. The loss of American soldiers at the hands of Russian weapons makes action imperative.

...While angling for the advantage in post-war Iraq

Denied both the opportunity to embarrass the United States with a UN Security Council veto and to recover billions of dollars allegedly owed by Iraq, the Russians have opted for a strategy of developing influence in post-war Iraq. If press reports coming from Russia have any measure of validity, then every possible angle will be pursued -- military, diplomatic, economic, legal and clandestine -- to strengthen Moscow's tenuous hold on influence in the Middle East.

The first, though least likely, measure was noted in this column last month with the description of a planned deployment of Russian warships to the Indian Ocean. (THE NIS OBSERVED, 5 Mar 03) To date, the Russians haven't lived up to their publicity on the deployment. It is no longer clear how many vessels will take part, where they will go and when they will depart Russia. (AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE, 2 Apr 03; via Lexis-Nexis) However, a new twist to the story now has a marine landing group attached to the deploying ships: The idea is to have the group enter Iraq to "participate" in the peacekeeping forces. Other means and routes also are being considered to insert Russian troops as "peacekeepers," including via Syria or Iran. While this tactic has merit -- remember attempts to implement a quick Russian entrance into a Kosovo airport before the NATO peacekeepers arrived -- it is unlikely to yield any success in this instance because the US and coalition forces will be largely in control of the entire country and it may be some time before the UN approves a peacekeeping
force. (Nezavisimaya Gazeta, 21 Mar 03; What the Papers Say, via ISI Defense and Security Database)

On the diplomatic front, Russia is using a variety of arguments to assert its desires with respect to a post-war Iraq. Trying to appear as if it is acting only out of generosity and noble concern, Moscow has argued for the protection of Iraq’s numerous cultural relics. Russia even has gone so far as to deliver, to the US ambassador in Russia, a list of the cultural and historical sites that are of concern. All sites on the list, including the city of Baghdad, are well-known to world cultural bodies and, certainly, to the US military. (ITAR-TASS, 31 Mar 03; via Lexis-Nexis) Russia has also developed a newfound "concern" for a potential humanitarian crisis in Iraq and is strongly advocating immediate UN humanitarian aid to the country. Of course Moscow plans to be one of the major suppliers of that aid, claiming that — through the "Oil for Food" program — it already holds contracts valued at over $1 billion for nearly one-third of all aid to be delivered. (ITAR-TASS, 2 Apr 03; via Lexis-Nexis) The idea here, of course, is that Russia is ready to accept $1 billion for its generosity. Moreover, as an aid provider, the Russians would need access to Iraq, thereby gaining the ability to include whatever Moscow wants in the supply chain. It should be noted that Russia already has been caught using humanitarian aid shipments in the UN "Oil for Food" program to conceal weapons destined for the Iraqi military. What better way to continue arming such paramilitary groups as may exist and harass the new Iraqi government after the war?

Russia’s efforts at salvaging any real for-profit ventures in Iraq, such as oil and construction contracts, also are gathering momentum. With the US letting the world know, in no uncertain terms, that American companies will be favored for reconstruction contracts, Russian companies, no doubt, are putting serious pressure on politicians in Moscow. In fact, the Duma has approved an appeal to President Putin to provide measures that will protect Russian economic interests in Iraq. (ROSBUSINESS CONSULTING DATABASE, 26 Mar 03; via Lexis-
Nexis) Russia’s UN representative has demanded that no changes be made to contracts for construction and oil development signed under the "Oil for Food" program. (BBC MONITORING, 27 Mar 03; via Lexis-Nexis)

It is clear that the Russians also are preparing to engage in the "mother of all legal battles" upon conclusion of the war. Oil, transportation and construction companies all are planning legal strategies for compensation from the new Iraqi government. Using the same legal basis pursued by US firms after the 1979 overthrow of the shah in Iran, they likely will claim compensation from the US- and British-led government in Iraq for revenue losses if the government reneges on contracts or deals signed by Saddam Hussein's regime. (THE EVENING STANDARD, 27 Mar 03; via Lexis-Nexis)

Regardless of the success of the measures detailed above, what undoubtedly will occur is a coordinated effort by Russia's intelligence and diplomatic services to gather as many documents and archives as possible from Saddam Hussein's regime. The Russian foreign intelligence service (SVR) agents in Iraq reportedly are being directed to find and send the Iraqi regime's intelligence archives to Moscow. Iraqi officials who cooperate by handing over the material may be offered evacuation to Russia as well. Recent press reports already acknowledge the presence of the SVR's Zaslon groups in Baghdad. The arrival in Iran of an additional group also has been noted. Most likely the aim of these units will be to protect the diplomatic mission working in Iraq and then relocate both diplomats and any Iraqi intelligence files gathered to Iran. (NEZAVISIMOYE VOENNOE OBOZRENNIE, 28 Mar 03; What the Papers Say, via ISI Defense and Security Database)

It is quite possible that former SVR Chief Yevgeny Primakov discussed just such a scenario with Saddam Hussein during a visit to Baghdad in February (prior to the start of the war). Outwardly the meeting was described as an attempt to impress upon Saddam Hussein the need to comply with UN Security Council
Resolution 1441. In reality, it probably was an attempt to gain Hussein’s cooperation in acquiring the archives, perhaps in exchange for weapons to be used in the war.

There are at least three major reasons for Moscow to want Iraqi intelligence service files. First, the documents would be an important bargaining chip in pursuing Russia’s interests and exerting pressure on the new political and military officials in Iraq after the war. Second, the files may show that Saddam financed or otherwise influenced Russian political parties and politicians. This would provide the Kremlin the opportunity to manipulate any politicians involved. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, Iraqi intelligence agents outside Iraq could be identified and possibly convinced to work for Russia. (Nezavisimaya Gazeta, 28 Mar 03; What the Papers Say, via ISI Defense and Security Database)

Russia’s actions and increasingly strident diplomatic demands over the situation only serve to underscore its desperation to gain access to a post-war Iraq. Moscow’s desire to retain oil contracts is understandable, but Russian tactics to this point have been designed to do anything but that. Supporting the US and then participating in the reconstruction would have been a wiser move. However, Moscow’s aims clearly are directed elsewhere. One can only wonder why. What is certain, though, is that, once the coalition forces enter Baghdad, Iraqi leaders will be forced to deal with the damning evidence of their atrocities, their weapons of mass destruction and their intelligence efforts. No doubt Russia hopes to help, by smuggling out documentary evidence.

Newly Independent States: Western Region

By Nadezda Kinsky and Scott Fleeher

Ukraine
Sitting between the chairs
Like many of its foreign policy issues, the Ukrainian stance on Iraq has given the impression of ambivalence. Surprisingly, the Rhada approved sending a Ukrainian anti-nuclear, biological and chemical (NBC) battalion to Kuwait on 20 March with the backing of 253 lawmakers. On the same day, the Rhada adopted a resolution condemning the military actions of the United States, Great Britain and their allies in Iraq.

The battalion of 450 men began leaving for Kuwait on 25 March. It is not to take part in any military action and its purpose in the region is to provide humanitarian aid and to be present and ready to act in the case of a chemical attack. Many more lawmakers had been expected to vote against the deployment, since many had spoken out against what was perceived as military involvement on the US side in the war. The bulk of the vote came from members of the presidential caucus, who had also been vociferously critical: 44 votes from the Our Ukraine faction tipped the balance. Victor Yushchenko abstained from the vote. The opposition factions voted largely against the deployment, suspecting that the move was an attempt on the part of President Leonid Kuchma to ingratiate himself with the United States government. Socialist Party leader Oleksandr Moroz went so far as to say that Ukraine should stay entirely out of the conflict since it needed to "sort [things] out" with "its own Hussein." (RFE/RL Poland, Belarus, and Ukraine Report, 26 Mar 03) Ukraine still rejects US allegations that it had sold Kolchuga anti-missile systems to Iraq, and recently has been burdened with reports that Ukrainian dealers were involved in the sale of 500 Russian Kornet antitank missiles to Iraq. These latest accusations were denied by Foreign Ministry spokesman Markiyan Lubkivskyy on 1 April, who called them "yet another attempt" to undermine Ukraine's international image. (RFE/RL NEWSLINE, 1 Apr 03)

During the same press conference, Lubkivskyy also denied that Ukraine had consented to be included among the "coalition of the willing." After the US listed Ukraine among coalition members on 29 March, despite the country's official
stance against the war, US Ambassador to Ukraine Carlos Pascual claimed that the Ukrainian leadership had consented to be included in the list.

According to a poll taken by the Razumkov Center for Economic and Political Studies that was carried out between 27 February and 5 March in all Ukrainian regions, 90.5% of Ukrainians do not support military action in Iraq. In the same poll, about 80% of those questioned declared that they opposed the deployment of the NBC battalion. (ITAR-TASS, 22 Mar 03; FBIS-SOV-2003-0322, via World News Connection)

Some Ukrainian commentators and newspapers have indicated that Yushchenko's cautiously neutral stance, which appeared to be bordering on supporting the battalion's deployment, might harm his standing with the population. Yushchenko himself summed up the situation in which Ukraine once again finds itself: "Because of the foreign policy course pursued by Ukraine in recent years, we always find ourselves sitting on two chairs." (RFE/RL Poland, Belarus, and Ukraine Report, 26 Mar 03)

**Belarus**

**Looking West**

Having staged a workshop recently, during which he sounded fairly confident on matters ideological, President Alyaksandr Lukashenka has been somewhat indecisive regarding foreign policy.

On 21 March he replaced his foreign minister with Syarhey Martynau. The new appointment, Lukashenka said, was aimed at strengthening the "Western vector" of Belarusian foreign policy. The new minister previously had been ambassador to Belgium, Luxembourg and the Netherlands, as well as representative to the EU and NATO. Lukashenka was clear on what the "Western vector" meant: "We cannot build relations with the US on a confrontational basis." (RFE/RL NEWSLINE, 24 Mar 03) Moreover, he said, European diplomats in Minsk "should
take the improvement of relations with Belarus more seriously." (INTERFAX, 24 Mar 03; FBIS-SOV-2003-0324, via World News Connection) At the same time, he assured his audience that this new "Western" outlook did not constitute a change in Belarusian foreign policy, which is aimed primarily at integration with Russia.

Lukashenka has continued to be assertive toward Russia, as discussions on economic union and the draft of the Union constitution continue. The foreign ministers of Russia and Belarus met to discuss their countries' international role and concluded that both "are interested in expanding cooperation with Europe and strengthening the European system." (ITAR-TASS, 1323 GMT, 2 Apr 03; FBIS-SOV-2003-0402, via World News Connection) Lukashenka missed the mark somewhat with his concept of how the West assesses Belarus when he tried to assure Russian leaders that, in order to maintain good connections to the West, they would need Belarus: "Speaking about the European Union and its enlargement with some post-socialist and post-Soviet countries, the nearest country, from the viewpoint of EU entry, is Belarus. Belarus means order, manageability, transparent economy, the lack of all those criminal elements, etc. This is how the West assesses us." (RFE/RL NEWSLINE, 27 Mar 03)

The same week that Lukashenka made this claim, the Belarus Democracy Act of 2003 was introduced to the US Congress. The proposed aid package is intended to help Belarus attain higher standards regarding human rights and democracy and to become "a genuine European country." In its annual human rights report, the State Department on 31 March said the Belarus regime's record "remained very poor and worsened in several areas" during 2002. (www.state.gov) A new foreign minister certainly is not the only requirement if President Lukashenka is serious about wanting to improve his relations with the West.

MOLDOVA
Pending conflict in Moldova?
As the temperature rises with spring in the air, so do tensions between Chisinau and Tiraspol. As has been the case in the past, a flurry of ambiguous statements, combined with equally confounding actions by both parties, characterizes the current imbroglio. The rising tension began with the circulation of a document stating that martial law would be declared in Transdniestra as of 1 April. (WPS, 2 Apr 03; via ISI Emerging Markets Database) Officials from within the unrecognized republic stated that the move to martial law was a result of "aggravation of an economic war unleashed by Kishinev’s [Moldova’s] extremists and the withdrawal of Russian troops from the republic."

Moldovan authorities reacted promptly, with a mix of surprise and concern, immediately seeking increased attention by international intermediaries. Vasily Shova, the Moldovan minister of reintegration, summarized Chisinau’s position on the emerging crisis: "We want to understand the motivation of activities aimed at making military preparations, putting the security structures on a war footing, and declaring martial law in the Transdniester territory. We think that these measures are aimed at destabilizing the situation in the security zone and undermining negotiations on the settlement of the Transdniester problem." (WPS, 2 Apr 03; via ISI Emerging Markets Database)

**Why all the tension?**

Only days prior to the escalation, Grigorii Marakutsa, Supreme Soviet chairman of Transdniestr, had displayed a somewhat optimistic air of cooperation with regard to Moldova. In his 26 March public statement, Marakutsa told journalists, "the legislature is ready to set up a joint commission with the Moldovan Parliament to work on a joint constitution, in line with President Voronin’s proposals." (RFE/RL NEWSLINE, 28 Mar 03) Marakutsa added that the separatist authorities "continue to envisage the future federation as a common state, formed by two different subjects, and a new constitution based on the assumption that the common state would be unitary [is] not acceptable." (RFE/RL NEWSLINE, 28 Mar 03)
In a diametrically opposed series of statements, Moldovan President Valdimir Voronin added anything but clarity to the rapidly unfolding drama. On 27 March, Voronin said, "the Tiraspol authorities intend to announce a general mobilization of military forces and to declare a state of war." Just days later, in an almost schizophrenic shift of tone, Voronin informed US Ambassador Pamela Hyde Smith that he saw a "real opportunity" to continue talks on resolution of the Transdniestr conflict. (RFE/RL NEWSLINE, 1 Apr 03)

Moldovan officials deny that the current scenario is a ploy to bolster the Russian military presence in Moldova, while some analysts within the country disagree. A statement by Oleg Astakhov, a Russian representative of the Joint Monitoring Commission for the trilateral peacekeeping force in Moldova, tends to reinforce the latter view. While Astakhov denied rumors that Russia intended to establish a military base in Transdniestr, he proceeded to state that a "military operation might become a logical consequence of the current peacekeeping operation." (WPS, 2 Apr 03; via ISI Emerging Markets Database)

One man's "logic" could result in another man's occupation. Only time will tell what the likes of Voronin, Marakutsa and others really have in store for the people of Moldova.

Newly Independent States: Central Asia
By David Montgomery

Kyrgyz bus murders and returning allegiances to Russia
As the war in Iraq continues, what began as rhetorical concern about and even dissent from the coalition’s operations is starting to translate into shifts of allegiances that could have long-term implications for the future of Central Asia. However, despite the world’s focus on the war in Iraq, a recent robbery and bus
attack in Kyrgyzstan temporarily drew attention to Kyrgyz-Chinese foreign relations.

Sometime during the evening of 27 March, a passenger bus enroute from Bishkek to Kashgar was attacked and set ablaze. The bus was found 150 meters off the Bishkek-Torugart road, approximately 260 kilometers from Bishkek (between Kochkor and Naryn). Twenty-one persons were shot (5.45 mm cartridge cases were found at the scene) prior to what appears to have been a staged crash and burning of the bus, possibly to cover up a robbery.

While police are still investigating the incident, most theories favor the scenario of a planned robbery, possibly connected to Uyghur business activity in Kyrgyzstan. (The Uyghurs are Turko-Chinese Muslims who live in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region in Western China; approximately 6,000 live in Kyrgyzstan, whereas over 6.5 million live in Xinjiang.) The identities of the passengers have not been released, but most, if not all, appear to be Chinese citizens who were in Kyrgyzstan on business. There are conflicting reports as to the exact number of individuals who left Bishkek — Col. Rasulberdi Raimberdiev, first deputy interior minister of Kyrgyzstan, informed Interfax that the number was 21, whereas the preliminary investigation put the number at 22 (no one can account for the missing person) — but it is clear that the incident was planned.

Some sources suggest the bus passengers likely were carrying large sums of money (up to $10,000) as businessmen and traders going between the markets in Bishkek and Kashgar. (TIMES OF CENTRAL ASIA, 3 Apr 03, via: www.times.kg, and ITAR-TASS, 1225 GMT, 2 Apr 03; FBIS-SOV-2003-0402, XINHUA, 1607 GMT, 28 Mar 03; FBIS-CHI-2003-0328, INTERFAX, 1121 GMT, 28 Mar 03; FBIS-SOV-2003-0328, and HONG KONG AFP, 0446 GMT, 29 Mar 03; FBIS-SOV-2003-0329, via World News Connection) While the incident does not pose a threat to political relations between Kyrgyzstan and China, it does make the Chinese community in Kyrgyzstan uneasy. The Uyghur mafia, as well
as the Uyghur separatist movement, have been known to target Chinese businessmen, especially ethnic Uyghurs, and certainly such attacks threaten the business relations between the two countries.

**Returning allegiances to Russia**

At a broader level, while Uzbekistan has been the only strong Central Asian supporter of US actions in Iraq, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan all seem to be reevaluating their relationship with the US, taking steps towards favoring relations with Russia.

Uzbek President Islam Karimov referred to the war as "a consequence of Saddam Hussein's reckless policy of conquest." Deputy Prime Minister Rustam Azimov added, "The war in Iraq will primarily influence oil prices, which does not have a significant effect on our economy." (INTERFA\_X, 1709 GMT, 21 Mar 03; FBIS-SOV-2003-0321, and INTERFA\_X, 1144 GMT, 27 Mar 03; FBIS-SOV-2003-0327, via World News Connection) The recent actions of Kyrgyzstan, however, are in marked contrast to the support Uzbekistan has offered. While Bishkek continues to condemn military action, paralleling Russia's argument that resolution of the Iraqi crisis should have gone through the UN Security Council, Kyrgyzstan has made significant steps towards favoring Russian regional influence over that of the US. Though Russia has always played an important role in Kyrgyz policy, the US-led campaign in Afghanistan brought Kyrgyzstan and the US closer together.

The opening of the Russian airbase in Kant was seen as a political move by the Russian government to counter the US presence at the Gramci airbase just outside Bishkek. The speaker of the Assembly of People’s Representatives (the Kyrgyz upper house of parliament), Altay Borubaev, reiterated the view of Russia as the country’s main strategic ally and noted that the forces present at the base would be part of the Collective Rapid-Reaction Forces in accordance with the Collective Security Treaty. (ITAR-TASS, 1413 GMT, 2 Apr 03; FBIS-SOV-2003-
In light of the concern that the situation in Iraq could have repercussions for Central Asia, Sergei Mironov, chairman of the upper chamber of the Russian parliament, offered a note of support and independence from the US, boasting that "the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and the CIS Collective Security Treaty are quite capable of ensuring stability and security in the Central Asian region." (ITAR-TASS, 0827 GMT, 1 Apr 03; FBIS-SOV-2003-0401, via World News Connection)

In steps indicative of the closeness of the Russian-Kyrgyz relationship, Kyrgyzstan is allowing the Russian defense ministry to purchase land near Kant for the construction of military housing. (ITAR-TASS, 1719 GMT, 25 Mar 03; FBIS-SOV-2003-0325, via World News Connection) The two countries have also granted each other mutual access to their criminal databases and the information systems of the interior ministry. (KABAR, 1347 GMT, 27 Mar 03; FBIS-SOV-2003-0327, via World News Connection) And in commenting on the relationship and the need to intensify cooperation at the educational institutional level, Kyrgyz President Askar Akaev remarked, "We are gladdened at the reviving might of Russia as a great power.…" (KABAR, 0714 GMT, 24 Mar 03; FBIS-SOV-2003-0324, via World News Connection)

Elsewhere, Kazakhstan continues to side with Russia on its approach to the Iraqi crisis, (ITAR-TASS, 1626 GMT, 25 Mar 03; FBIS-SOV-2003-0325, via World News Connection) whereas Tajik President Imomali Rahmonov, who had been trying to steer the country towards a pro-American alliance, has changed his rhetoric since the war began. (EURASIANET, 4 Apr 03; via www.eurasianet.org) As one Friday prayer leader at the Sar-Asia mosque in Dushanbe condemned the US- and British-led operations in Iraq, calling them "illegitimate" and "an insult to [the] Muslim community," (IRNA, 1146 GMT, 21 Mar 03; FBIS-NES-2003-0321, via World News Connection) Russian troops, as part of the Collective Rapid-Reaction Forces in Central Asia, continued to train in Tajikistan. (ITAR-TASS, 0843 GMT, 2 Apr 03; FBIS-SOV-2003-0402, via World News Connection)
This just in
At press time, reports from the 6 April election in Turkmenistan were just coming in. At stake were 65 seats in the National People’s Assembly (which meets annually but issues “guidance” rather than legislation) and 5,535 local council seats. Four parliamentary by-elections were scheduled, but were canceled at the last minute; parliamentary elections are scheduled for next year. Just under 90 percent of the electorate voted and, as expected, there were many irregularities. Among the irregularities was great “flexibility” in affording people the opportunity to vote (e.g., the 7 p.m. poll closing time was not strictly followed and in some instances, ballot boxes were taken directly to voters). There were no official election observers, and the general consensus is that the elections were far from Western standards of a democratic election. (AFP, 7 Apr 03; via www.times.kg, and TEHRAN TIMES, 7 Apr 03; via www.times.kg) The outcome of the elections, in some ways, appears inconsequential; President Saparmurat Niyazov had total power before the elections and certainly his control of power was neither threatened nor altered by the elections.