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Russian Federation: Executive Branch

By Susan Cavan

Bitter fruit

President Putin is a man missing a sense of history, and this flaw is blinding as he responds to the Beslan tragedy. Putin also seems to suffer from a lack of basic human compassion, so aptly demonstrated by his immediate predecessor, but perhaps he just suffers by comparison. His political response to Beslan — the proposals to do away with single-candidate mandates, the de facto appointment of regional governors, the creation of a special commission on the Caucasus (with a somewhat confusing mandate) — all seem tossed like darts, wildly off the mark. Perhaps Putin’s post-Beslan prescriptions finally provide more insight into the weaknesses of his regime, rather than its strengths.

The internal political changes, as has been noted so aptly by many analysts, appear unlikely to have any impact on the ability of terrorists to strike within Russia. The emasculation of the Duma, including the removal of legislative initiative, simply weakens further political opposition to the regime, but cannot possibly be viewed as an effective tool in the struggle against terrorism. The Potemkin public oversight provided by the Public Chamber is farcical; the idea that the Duma is allowed only to vote up or down on bills spawned in the Chamber effectively destroys the separation of powers between the executive and legislative branches.

The de facto appointment of regional leaders presents another challenge to the definition of democracy in Russia. Apart from undermining the practice of federalism (it is, after all, the Russian Federation), this move to reinvigorate the "vertical of power" also seems misdirected. What does Putin, or the country,
stand to gain from the removal of local choice in local leadership and the imposition of centrally cast figures in local roles? While there is some speculation that Putin fears the "Gorbachev" variant, where regional leaders simply ignore Central commands, it seems more plausible that this President doesn't so much fear regional autonomy as he seeks a sense of control, expressed by the appointment of either trusted associates or loyal underlings. (1) He has many levers at his disposal to rein in local action, but he has chosen the move that not only subordinates the regional head directly to the Kremlin, but also keeps strict control over the upper house of parliament, and, oddly, forces his own personal identification with regional problems. If there is no heat in Karelia this winter, Putin will have no way to deflect the blame away from, the Kremlin initially, but eventually himself.

Putin’s decision to send Dmitri Kozak to the Caucasus is the most typical Kremlin response to problem-areas. If an area (be it of policy or territory) needs particular attention, unleash the reformer du jour on the situation. While it does seem comforting that it is Kozak and not, say, Viktor Ivanov, who is slated to oversee reforms in the Caucasus, it also resembles familiar chatter. As with the creation of the Public Chamber, it is hard to maintain high expectations of meaningful action when presented with the gauzy appearance of reform rather than a realistic plan to find solutions.

The most disconcerting aspect of Putin’s pronouncements to date is the quickly drawn conclusion that they are unlikely to accomplish anything positive for the Russian population in the wake of Beslan. They may make it easier for Putin to set the legislative agenda, to quell opposition to any presidential measures, to sidestep regional demands, to stamp out grass roots brush fires, and to continue the Putin presidency ad nauseum, but actually make citizens safer, or protect the regime from criticism in the unfortunate likelihood of further terrorist attacks? Not this plan.
Two conclusions arise: First, perhaps Putin believes he has nothing to fear from more attacks or popular unrest. Ruling with the siloviki around him, Putin may well believe that it is centralized control and in particular, control of the populace, that will stabilize Russia. Being particularly familiar with the workings of the police state, Putin may see it as the easiest model for Russia right now. He certainly is not concerned with the development of democracy. If it is to be a police state, he needs to make sure the security services are happy in their position, and prepared for their role in society. Beslan could not possibly have brought a sense of pride to the bandana-clad, semi-trained, poorly equipped, unprepared security forces. If this is the pillar of the state on which Putin hopes to rest his regime, he needs to take far greater care of the security services than has been evident thus far.

The other possibility is that Putin responded to Beslan in the only way he knew: according to a plan that drew power closer to the Kremlin without thinking through the ramifications in these circumstances. Putin is, after all, only pursuing a leadership path carved out during the Yel'tsin years. How many of those analyzing the Kremlin-drafted 1993 Constitution saw the potential development of a dictatorial executive? The broad strokes of powers granted to the President seemed, even then, to carry the caveat that while Yel'tsin might never exercise the range of authority allowable under the Constitution, changes would have to be made before someone came along who would push that particular envelope. The questionable ratification of the document in the December 1993 elections (and the regime’s subsequent insistence on a "Social Accord" in May 1994 to recognize the Constitution) seemed to highlight the temporary and personality-based nature of the Constitution (and the Yel'tsin years in general).

Putin is, in fact, hampered by the legacy of the leader who brought him to power. Yel'tsin’s resignation in December 1999 and the appointment of Putin as his successor presented the current President with a double-edged sword. Putin’s choice, on the evening of his accession, to fly to Chechnya and personally hand
out daggers to the troops speaks volumes. He assumed the mantle of the presidency, complete with the atrocities of Chechnya, as well as a system, heavily reliant on a "democracy for bureaucracy" happy civil service designed by Yel'tsin, to reward personal loyalty over state service and institutional development.

With a constitution malleable enough to form a strongly authoritarian, executive-driven regime, Putin was well situated to produce the kind of political system in Russia that would accomplish his goals. The alarm flags raised by analysts concerned about the encroachment of power organ officers in the halls of the Kremlin reflected their familiarity with the temptations of power without limits. One legacy Yel'tsin was not able to pass along to Putin was his ability to balance interests in his inner circle and keep individuals representing a variety of sectors of life around him. While one or two holdovers of the Yel'tsin Family may still occupy Kremlin space, the importance of the group is gone, leaving Putin alone with his siloviki clan.

Putin, in his conversation with western journalists and analysts following the Beslan siege, acknowledged that mistakes had been made in dealing with Chechnya, both by his administration and his predecessor's. He asked for positive recommendations on how to move beyond the past (a difficult task in any environment). Herewith, a modest suggestion for President Putin on an appropriate response to Beslan, one that, one hopes would make Russia more secure:

Putin has identified the southern regions (the North Caucasus) as the most pressing immediate problem: "in the south, where we face real danger, we have no borders at all." (2) There has also been tough rhetoric and pressure on the southern states of the former Soviet Union to cooperate with Russian "anti-terrorist" missions. Here, Putin must also wrestle with the Yel'tsin legacy, as must the southern states of the "near abroad."
Separatist movements, one of which has proven so devastating to Russia, have also plagued the Newly Independent States. Georgia, in particular, has been rent by separatist strife for a decade. If Russia wishes its neighbors' assistance, it is time for Putin, if not to acknowledge the role Russia played in destabilizing those neighbors, at least to renounce any territorial claims and create a firewall between indigenous separatists and Russian security services/military/governmental or monetary succor. Before Russia can reasonably expect a positive Georgian response to its requests with help in staunching the flow of Chechen refuges and, potentially, fighters, Russia must denounce the type of separatism that plagues the region, within and beyond Russia.

Putin, if he is to be an effectively strong leader, must set aside the prideful chauvinism of Soviet revanchism and make clear his intention to sever ties with those who would destabilize other sovereign states. After all, Georgia, must simply be expected to forget the Russian pilots flying for the "Abkhaz Air Force" or the sudden appearance of an Abkhaz Navy? A reasonable approach to securing Russia’s southern borders is to cooperate with neighboring regimes, and cooperation entails trust. Unfortunately, trust is a legacy squandered by previous regimes and unattended by the current Russian president.

Source Notes:

(1) Nezavisimaya gazeta, "Fortress on Sand," Interview with Lilia Shevtsova, 27 Sep 04 via Johnson’s Russia List (JRL), #8383, 28 Sep 04.
(2) President Putin’s Remarks at an Enlarged Government Session, 13 Sep 04 via (www.kremlin.ru).

Russian Federation: Security Services
By Eric Beene

Beslan certainly will prove a watershed event in Russia on many levels and in many areas, not least for the security services. A few additional details have emerged in the weeks since the event, although official investigations are not yet complete. In a closed session discussion at the Federation Council, Federal Security Service (FSB) Director Nikolai Patrushev claimed that security services had not planned to storm Beslan Middle School Number 1, overtaken by 30 or more hostage-takers holding over 1,000 hostages. "We simply weren't ready at that moment [that the firefight began, the morning of 3 September]." Patrushev also indicated that authorities on the scene did not intend to deceive the media and locals about the numbers of hostages and hostage-takers in the school, "but merely were reluctant to disseminate unconfirmed information for fear of escalating tensions in the region, especially between Ingush and Ossetians." (1)

The final casualty tally of the special forces is 11 dead (10 on the scene and one later in hospital) and 30 injured (Alfa and Vympel units, including the Alfa group commander). (2) The relatively high number of casualties indicates the lack of preparation may have been systemic, not just incidental for this event. Russian media showed footage of special forces members without their body armor during the siege as an indication that there was no plan to storm the building, but the evidence also seems to indicate there was no discipline or strong command and control among the troops. (3)

In a separate event, an FSB warrant officer in the border guards, recently resubordinated to the FSB, was arrested on suspicion of helping criminals flee the country. It’s unclear how many he helped, but the sting operation that led to the arrest also found blank passports, blank air tickets, and forged stamps. (4) These events, along with other such examples, reveal a level of corrosion even within the special services. This is the same corruption and lack of discipline to which President Putin referred in his comments immediately following the siege,
and indicates that corruption and low morale has invaded even the most elite of Russia’s security services; the systemic nature of this breakdown that presumably enabled the siege to take place in the first place, and indicates that Russian government, at some levels, acknowledges its existence and detrimental impact on providing the very security Putin seeks.

Several actions have been proposed to help reverse this condition. In the immediate wake of the Beslan siege, Presidential Aide Aslambek Aslakhanov announced "measures to raise the efficiency of special services and law enforcement agencies. This will affect equipment, material and technical supplies, and welfare guarantees. Special services must have more financial resources for effective and quick work. There will be structural changes as well." (5) It is not clear what the specific structural changes will be, especially in light of the FSB restructuring plan undertaken last summer. Those changes included elevating the FSB to the status of a ministry, a recombination of departments to reduce the number of deputy chairmen from twelve to four, but to reward the remaining four with deputy minister titles and with corresponding increased salaries and benefits. The July announcement also indicated FSB Director Patrushev has three months to "come up with suggestions regarding the coordination of all existing legislative instruments pertaining to the FSB." That deadline would have been October, but events in Beslan may supersede such guidance. It is suggested, however, that real change will not be forthcoming until wages are raised and professionalism is encouraged and enhanced throughout all levels of the FSB. (6)

To that end, recently announced budget changes may suggest hope for reform. According to Finance Minister Aleksei Kudrin, the 2005 budget will see a total increase of 157 billion rubles ($5.4B) for security services, with 50 billion rubles earmarked specifically for the FSB and border guards to procure hardware and training. There will also be an undefined increase in the 2004 budget. (7) Of course, the budgets for these ministries have increased manifold under the Putin
administration already; and yet corruption pervades and, as was seen in Beslan, preparation for and prevention of terrorist attacks remains woefully inadequate. (8)

It also remains to be seen how training will change in the future following Beslan and the resulting reforms. During South Korean President Roh Moo-hyun’s visit to Kazakhstan and Russia, a Korean Special Warfare Command (KSWC) spokesman revealed that Russia’s Alfa unit conducted joint anti-terror training exercises in Korea in June of this year with the KSWC, the third in a series of such events since 2002. (9) Although Alfa thus has had the opportunity to share lessons learned and to attempt to learn from outsiders, these exercises proved of little value in real situations like Beslan.

Larger training budgets may allow for more exercises within Russia and cooperative efforts with a wider group of foreign forces, but western countries may take issue with the unit’s heritage and conduct. It must be remembered that Alpha was founded 30 years ago as Group A in the 7th Directorate of the KGB and tasked with counter-terrorism, international and internal. (10) Having a professional military counter-terror unit help train a former KGB unit may put off western officers. Recent FSB actions further complicate cooperation: Three weeks after the end of the Beslan siege, FSB agents discovered an explosives-laden car in Moscow destined for Kutuzovskii Prospekt, along President Putin’s motorcade route. The next day, the driver of the car, 38-year old Alexander Pumane, who was reportedly paid $1,000 to deliver the car from St. Petersburg, died "in the emergency room, reportedly suffering from a massive brain hemorrhage, skull fractures, and injuries to his back, stomach, and hips" after three hours of questioning by FSB agents. (11) The fact that the FSB prevented the detonation of the car bomb is encouraging; its interrogation methods — less so.
The announced budget supplements appear to be aimed at forces on the front-lines of terrorism, and the modifications to the "vertical of power" appear to target the highest levels of government; a glaring gap appears however, between these levels and command and control. Georgi Satarov, an advisor during the Yeltsin administration, claims that during the Beslan siege the Kremlin failed to communicate guidance and direction to the forces on the ground. Even when the hostage-takers appeared to want to negotiate, phone service had been disrupted, prohibiting negotiations. Aslakhanov himself claims he wanted to go to Beslan sooner, but unnamed officials in Moscow prevented it. (12) Clearly, there is pressure to respond and reform after the Beslan siege, especially given its similarities to previous attacks; the security services have unique lessons to learn from this event as well. It remains to be seen if they will.

Source Notes:

(2) "Russia: Eleven Special Forces Servicemen Killed in Beslan Tragedy," Interfax, Tuesday, 7 Sep 04; FBIS-SOV-2004-0907 via World News Connection.
(5) "Russia: Kremlin Aide Says Russia Has Immediate Plan to Reform Security Services," Interfax, 8 Sep 04; FBIS-SOV-2004-0908 via World News Connection.
Russian Federation: Foreign Relations

By Rebecca Mulder

Responses to Beslan

Russian President Vladimir Putin stated in his 4 September address, following the attacks in Beslan, that "terrorists meet the most effective resistance in places where they not only encounter the state’s power but also find themselves facing an organized and united civil society." (1) As the Kremlin takes action to solidify its "power vertical" in the face of terrorism, international responses to these actions, and to Putin’s admonitions, have surfaced with varying degrees of support.

In response to the assertion by "Russia’s most wanted," Shamil Basaev, of responsibility for the Beslan hostage taking and the airplane explosions (2), U.S. Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage stated that "Anyone who would use innocents for political aims is not worthy of existence." (3) The vehemence of this
condemnation reflects U.S. continued consciousness of the events of September 11. Thus, there is a degree of U.S. support for Putin’s "war on terror" but with reservations. After a meeting with U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell in New York on 23 September, during the 59th U.N. General Assembly, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov declared that "our proposals have met with quite a positive response on the part of our U.S. colleagues and other permanent members of the U.N. Security Council." (4) However, this follows negative comments from Powell, on 15 September, regarding some of Putin’s "power vertical" steps: "It would not be the best course of action to move in a direction which would be seen by the international community as moving toward the rear with respect to democratic reforms." (5) Lavrov responded that Washington had no right to impose its model of democracy on others, but EU External Relations Commissioner Chris Patten backed Powell’s remarks. (6) Russia responded with criticism of Western Asylum policies. During his address to the U.N., Lavrov called on the U.S. and the U.K. to "end the practice of extending political asylum to terrorists and their accomplices and sponsors." (7) This statement referred, of course, to the Chechens, Ilyas Akhmadov and Akhmed Zakaev, in the U.S. and U.K., respectively. Putin also criticized the U.S. and Britain for allegedly not counteracting drug trafficking from Afghanistan. In a recent meeting with Viktor Cherkesov of the Drug Enforcement Committee, Putin scolded the West for concealing from the general public the level of this threat. (8)

It seems that Georgia has the most to fear as Russia prepares to take preemptive strikes against any perceived terrorist threat. There have been attempts to connect the events in Beslan to South Ossetia, implying that there are Chechen villages in the Pankisi Gorge, which are "safe havens" for terrorists. This is just one more development in a long-standing bilateral dispute that has had Georgia on the defense for some time. Lavrov met with his Georgian counterpart, Ms. Salome Zurabishvili on 21 September and expressed that Russia desires friendly relations with Georgia. However, it is clear that the Kremlin wants a "friendship" on its own terms. Russian Foreign Ministry
spokesman Alexander Yakovenko: "We would like to see the reciprocal taking into consideration of our lawful interests, specifically...upholding Russia’s security, including the war on terrorism." (9) The situation continues to darken, as a Russian website (utro.ru) reported on 23 September that Basaev has left Russia for the Pankisi Gorge; the same website also quoted an unidentified source as saying that, in August, Basaev met with Georgian Interior Minister Irakli Okruashvili and that both men saw Russia as the enemy. (10) This news, as well as Moscow’s declaration that, as of 1 October, no Georgian aircraft would be allowed to land in Russia (Georgian airlines have been accused of not paying airport dues), does not bode well for Georgia. (11)

President Kirsan Ilyumzhinov of Kalmykia has encountered opposition demonstrations in Elista, after being reelected easily for the third time. His seemingly friendly relations with Chechen separatists regarding apportionment of lands for "Chechen villages" have brought, thus far, little condemnation from the Kremlin. (12) Press Secretary Fedor Shcherbakov of the presidential regional representation in the South Federal District said in response to the demonstrations: "Kirsan Ilyumzhinov is a legitimate president and questions about his dismissal should be solved only by political means. All attempts to solve this question by means of force will be suppressed." (13) Dmitri Kozak, the Presidential Envoy in the South Federal District, will go to Moscow to discuss the situation.

One of the most interesting reactions to Putin’s latest initiatives has come from former Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev. He stated that, unlike Putin, he believes the recent terrorism is linked directly to the military operations in the Caucasus and that he understood the consequences, back in 1994, of the first Chechen war. In a recent interview, he commented critically, "How can we possibly eliminate corruption without a normal parliament, a free press or without public oversight? Yet, there is in fact no progress…Exactly the opposite is happening…Under the banner of fighting terrorism, it is planned to limit sharply democratic
freedoms and deprive the citizens of the right to directly express their attitude toward the ruling authority — in free elections." (14) Gorbachev advocates "stamping out terrorism through political means, not by the use of force." (15) Gorbachev once initiated a campaign for "glasnost'," but Putin seems to be leading his country away from such "openness" in the name of security.

The Tehran Connection
The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), the U.N.’s atomic watchdog, has called on Iran to suspend all uranium enrichment activities; Moscow also supports this call. It is helping Tehran build a nuclear reactor at the port of Bushehr despite pressure from the U.S., which is concerned that Tehran is seeking atomic weapons. Putin has delayed action to open the plant until the IAEA declares Iran clean. (16) Moscow's position on Iran's nuclear future will most likely be guided by IAEA findings and will further be formulated during the 25 November board of governors session. (17)

The Strategic East and the SOC
Russian Prime Minister, Mikhail Fradkov, described the 24 September talks with Chinese Premier Wen Jibao as "very fruitful." China is willing to invest sizeable sums in gas extraction projects in the Russian Far East and Eastern Siberia. This year's total Russian-Chinese trade turnover is expected to hit $20 billion. A joint statement was signed saying that amount will meet, and possibly exceed, $60 billion by 2010. China is interested in securing a closer partnership with Russia on a variety of issues, including bio-engineering, space efforts, the nuclear power industry and other R&D fields. (18) The construction of an oil pipeline from Russia to China remains on the agenda. (19) As Russia's strategic partner, China also supports Russia's entrance into the World Trade Organization (WTO). It is expected that a protocol on Russian accession to the WTO will be signed when Putin visits China in October. The Russian government expects to complete all WTO talks before the end of the year and to join in 2005-2007. (20)
The Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SOC) met in Bishkek on 23 September with much discussion of the establishment of a free trade zone and common market. China urged Central Asia and Russia to form a common market but Moscow fears China’s economic dominance in post-Soviet territory. In spite of the growing Sino-Russian partnership, a Russian official stated, "We turned the idea down, knowing all too well that China was after expansion into our markets." (21) Fradkov said that SOC concentration should be on pilot projects, such as tax legislation unification. However, Prime Minister Danial Akhmatov of Kazakhstan urged for a movement of goods, capitals and services among the SOC, and Uzbek Deputy Premier Utir Sultanov backed Beijing’s call for a common market, saying that the establishment of a free trade zone should be a priority. Interestingly enough, in spite of the recent terrorism in Russia, the Bishkek meeting only mentioned problems with terrorism in passing. (22) Their Regional Counter-Terrorism Center was established in 2003. The SOC is comprised of Russia, China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan.

Source Notes:

(1) Kremlin.ru, 4 Sep 04 via Johnson’s Russia List (JRL).
(2) Moscow News, 22 Sep 04; What the Papers Say (WPS) via ISI Emerging Markets.
(3) Ibid.
(5) BBC News, 15 Sep 04;
(6) Ibid.
(8) Ibid.
(11) BBC News, 14 Sep 04; news.bbc.co.uk
(12) Moskovskii komsomolets, 24 Sep 04; WPS via ISI Emerging Markets.
Russian Federation: Domestic Issues and Legislative Branch

By Robyn Angley

In the aftermath of Beslan

The terrorist attacks in Beslan have provided a catalyst for certain changes in Russia, not the least of which concern President Vladimir Putin’s newly proposed attempts to strengthen "the vertical of power," introducing a new — or possibly a rather old — dimension to Russian politics. If passed, these changes will consolidate Putin’s control of the legislative and executive branches as well as the Kremlin-sponsored United Russia party.

The three primary aspects of these proposals are: First, governors will no longer be directly elected by the population of their regions. Instead, their candidatures will be recommended by the president and confirmed by the territorial legislatures. (1) Consequently, the Federation Council will be emasculated even more than now. The second element concerns the lower house. Putin recommends electing all Duma members from proportional election lists,
effectively eliminating single-member districts and independent candidates. (2) Moreover, the Duma will lose legislative initiative. The third element is the creation of a Public Chamber. "...This chamber should become a place for conducting public examinations of key state decisions....This essentially means civilian control of the work of the state system, including the law-enforcement bodies and the special services...," said Putin in his address concerning the new institution. (3) "Civilian control" is rather limited, given the advisory role of the chamber. Should the public voice its concerns using the forum of the Public Chamber without there being an impact on government decisions, that body would lose any representational pretense.

Putin claims that the changes will increase the ability of the government to respond quickly to terrorist situations. Several Russian analysts have contested this claim, however. Mark Urnov, of the Ekspertiza Analytical Programs Foundation, commented that "...this will intensify inefficiency, it will intensify delay, it will intensify bureaucratization, and it will intensify the corruption within the state power." (4) Stanislav Belkovsky, a member of the Institute of National Strategy, criticized the reform because of its potential impact on established elites. "...What is happening now will lead to utter chaos this year — because the elite that is being removed from power will do everything possible to sabotage the process and also to plunder everything that has not been plundered already." (5)

Even a Duma Deputy Speaker, Oleg Morozov, admits that the connection between the proposed changes and terrorism is weak. "Of course, there is no absolutely direct connection between the fight against terrorism and appointment of governors," he said. (6) Morozov went on to resist any comparison of Putin’s actions with Russia’s Communist history. "...I do not see any parallels with the Soviet Union or the one-party system....inside a political system called democratic there are certain options for movement in one or other direction [sic] while still preserving rules of a democratic society....You can even find some
unique examples elsewhere in the world: the Chinese political and economic systems. In that country, a huge amount of economic freedoms exist against the backdrop of a rigid, authoritarian, and, if you will, totalitarian political system." (7)

Comparing the Russian government with the world's largest remaining Communist country can hardly be considered an effective argument in favor of the changes.

Putin's announcement of the proposed nomination of governors has already had a major effect. Ten governors have joined the United Russia party since Putin's announcement, with another twenty waiting in line, according to party leader Boris Gryzlov. "I see this as a growth of trust in our party," said Gryzlov. (8) Trust in the party aside, United Russia is the party favored by the Kremlin. The exodus of so many regional leaders — around half of Russia's 89 governors are now members of United Russia (9) — indicates a clear bid on the part of governors to retain office.

Putin defended the elimination of single-member constitutions in a speech at the World Congress of News Agencies. "I want to note that the majority system in many countries of the world is regarded as archaic, and many countries are gradually giving it up because a person elected by a one-seat constituency to a country's supreme representative body of power can promise much of everything in the course of campaigning, but he or she is absolutely incapable of bringing at least one of his ideas to fruition or of keeping any one of his promises. Such a person has to form links to a major party." (10)

The Federation Council agreed on important elements of a draft resolution on counter-terrorism to be voted on September 29. (11) The Federation Council was also expected to make an announcement concerning the legislative investigation into Beslan. Sergei Mironov, speaker of the Federation Council, said that the investigation commission would be made up of eleven members of the Federation Council and ten State Duma deputies. (12)
North Ossetia seethes

North Ossetia has experienced its share of political upheaval following the hostage situation. On September 8, 3,000 irate North Ossetians rallied outside the headquarters of Aleksander Dzasokhov, North Ossetia's President, seeking his resignation. (13) Dzasokhov responded to the pressure by announcing that he was dismissing all of his ministers. Dzasokhov began replacing the ministers (14) even as the Russian Prosecutor General launched negligence charges against several North Ossetian officials. (15)

I-R-O-N-Y

Beginning on September 24, Moscow is hosting the World Congress of News Agencies. President Putin addressed issues of terrorism and media freedom in his speech to the Congress. "We have no right to forget the terrorists are cynically using the potentialities of media and democracy in general to multiply the psychological and information impact in the event of hostage taking and staging other terrorist acts in order to eliminate the freedom of the press and democracy. It is obvious that the struggle against terrorism must not become a reason for impairment of the freedom and independence of the press." (16)

Putin’s statement is ironic considering the recent resignation of Raf Shakirov, editor of Izvestia, over coverage of the events in Beslan. Izvestia published an issue on September 4 featuring prominent pictures of the events in Beslan on the front page. Shakirov stated that his resignation was due to a dispute with Izvestia’s owner, Vladimir Potanin. However, an unidentified staff member claimed that the Kremlin requested Shakirov’s dismissal. (17)

Shakirov is not the only journalist to have trouble because of Beslan. Several journalists were initially detained from reaching the site of the hostage situation. A reporter for Novaya gazeta, Anna Politkovskaya, was admitted to a hospital on September 1 after fainting on a Karat Airlines flight. Politkovskaya apparently
was poisoned as a means of keeping her from Beslan. Two other journalists, Andrei Babitsky and Jana Dlooglie, were prevented from boarding planes to Beslan. (18) Georgian journalist Nana Lezhava was drugged with benzodiazepines at the Vladikavkaz remand center. (19) Regardless of Putin's speeches, media freedom does not reign unfettered in today's Russia.

Source Notes:

(1) "Speech at the Enlarged Government Meeting with the Government and Heads of the Regions," 13 Sep 04 via (kremlin.ru).
(2) "Putin's 13 Sep Speech on Political System Changes Seen; 'One-Man' Rule Expected," Nezavisimaya gazeta, 14 Sep 04; FBIS-SOV-2004-0914 via World News Connection.
(3) "Speech at the Enlarged Government Meeting with the Government and Heads of the Regions," 13 Sep 04 via (kremlin.ru).
(5) Ibid.
(6) "Duma Vice Speaker Interviewed on Putin-Proposed Changes to Political System," Nezavisimaya gazeta, 15 Sep 04; FBIS-SOV-2004-0916 via World News Connection.
(7) Ibid.
(8) "Governors Lining Up to Join the Party," Moscow Times, 24 Sep 04 via ISI Emerging Markets.
(9) Ibid.
(10) "President Putin’s Final Words at the World Congress of News Agencies," 24 Sep 04 via (kremlin.ru).
The phrase "military reform" seemed to have left the vocabulary of Defense Minister Sergei Ivanov over the summer. After the Duma passed legislation making the General Staff clearly subordinate to the Defense Ministry, and following the departure of former Chief of the General Staff, Gen. Anatoli Kvashnin, Mr. Ivanov could be heard saying that reforms were finished and the time had come to focus on arms procurement. In the aftermath of the recent terrorist attacks on Russian soil, capped by the siege of the elementary school at Beslan, pundits and analysts were quick to highlight the need for real reform in the nation’s security apparatus. (1) Is it possible that these recent tragedies could
provide the defense minister with a unique opportunity actually to accomplish the reforms required to modernize and professionalize the Russian military? Several key ingredients seem to be in place: Fewer bureaucratic obstacles, a larger defense budget, and a clear and present threat.

Ivanov, himself, reintroduced the idea of military reforms in a TV interview on September 12, less than 10 days after the tragic end to the Beslan crisis. He acknowledged the many shortfalls of the reforms initiated thus far, particularly the slow transition to a contract, professional force. He was also quick to point out that the defense ministry troops played only secondary roles in the government's response to the Beslan crisis, providing transportation, external cordon, and medical care. (2) However, future scenarios could be very different. In testimony to the Federation Council during their special session to appoint members to the commission that will probe into the Beslan crisis, Russian Chief of the General Staff, Gen. Yuri Baluyevsky, recommended legislation that would allow the use of defense ministry troops to resolve similar crises, suggesting that defense ministry forces play a much more central role. (3) The attitude reflected in this comment marks a departure from the General Staff’s attitude on this issue and adds urgency to real military reform.

The Russian armed forces still rest on a foundation of conscripted soldiers. But two related phenomena are undermining that base which could destabilize the whole system. Due to changing national demographics, a large number of deferment categories, and corruption, the army has a smaller pool from which to draw its conscripts. Combined with the significant problems of draft dodging, desertion and suicide, the army is left with poorer quality soldiers, manning shortfalls, and the requirement to spend scarce resources in efforts to address the maladies listed. (4)

Problems with the conscripts have also forced the Defense Ministry into a political quagmire: In an effort to increase the pool from which to select its
conscripts, the Defense Ministry is preparing a proposal for the Duma that recommends reducing the number of schools that have state accreditation, thus removing the deferment opportunity for a significant number of conscription-eligible students. (5) Any discussion about cutting back deferments receives a very cool public reception. The suggestion of eliminating the student deferment has provoked a distinctly negative response from certain vocal segments of society. The most outspoken of these groups, the Union of Committees of Soldiers’ Mothers, announced on 17 September their initiative for a national referendum on the question of conscription. The proposed referendum would pose two questions: Should the government abolish conscription by 2008; and should current deferments stay in place until then? Although the attempt to hold a referendum is subject to a new law that confronts such an effort with major hurdles, the mothers' group enjoys popular support for its position, according to recent opinion polls. (6) Despite the Defense Ministry’s desire to improve the number and quality of the available conscripts, there is neither political nor popular support for an overhaul of deferments, and any attempts at change may carry significant political consequences. (7)

It appears that the defense ministry has felt the political pressure. In an apparent attempt to diffuse the energy being generated by the referendum effort, Major-General Nikolai Bezborodov, a member of the State Duma Defense Committee, issued a statement, highlighting the 2005 defense budget expenditure for contract servicemen. Gen Bezborodov claimed that R19.71 billion ($674.58 million) was allocated for continued development of the contract force, funding levels which are "...more than twice as high as those of 2004." (8) The statement is simply a reiteration of the fact that the government intends to fund fully the four-year federal program concerning the professional force covering the period through 2007. Despite the upbeat tone of this release, designed to show the defense ministry was serious about the transition to a professional force, Sergei Ivanov had explained previously that "fully funded" meant that most new contract soldiers would be offered a paltry R6,000 ($205) per month. Low salaries,
combined with a severe housing shortage, suggest that the creation of a professional force is still in jeopardy. (9)

Planned force reductions may also have a negative impact on the Armed forces. A report leaked from the Defense Ministry, (although likely with approval from higher up), stated that the Russian Army would have 100,000 fewer troops by 1 January 2005. (10) This force reduction apparently has been in the works for nearly a year and is well coordinated through the defense ministry's departments and military districts. This comes as a surprise primarily because Sergei Ivanov has stated, as recently as 12 September, that there have been enough cuts in the force, and that the current 1.2 million troops constitutes the right number. (11) Although the reductions would come primarily from the ranks of club managers, construction workers and sportsmen, other specialties, such as drivers, mechanics and teachers, would suffer cuts as well. There is real concern that these cuts could reduce readiness of frontline units and have an impact on the future effectiveness of the military. Even when the cuts are enacted, it will be difficult to assess their impact on readiness, as many of the details will remain classified and therefore not verifiable by outside sources.

This current cut comes without any clearly identified change in strategy or approach to combating potential threats. The potential is high that without an accompanying reduction in force structure (units, ships, aircraft), the manpower cuts will mean that forces in the field will degrade in terms of readiness. Baltic Fleet headquarters told Nezavisimaya gazeta that "with the current complement of 28,000 naval personnel, a further reduction of several thousand could see warships simply left to rust in their moorings." (12)

Victor Ozerov, the Chairman of the Federation Council Committee for Defense and Security clearly articulates the two largest obstacles to rebuilding the Russian military into a force that can be responsive to threats: "I will not be revealing a great secret if I say that with any check on any articles of military
budget expenditure quite a long list of violations and nontargeted expenditure of monetary funds and sometimes even their direct embezzlement is brought to light." (13) According to Irina Khakamada, former deputy chairman of the Duma, unlike the defense budget of other modernized nations, with the Russian defense budget "...everything is classified — from salaries to the cost of chow. It follows that the Defense Ministry is controlling itself. This system generates corruption." (14)

Mr. Ozerov highlighted another obstacle to effective military reform when he said, "I believe that without making specific assessment of the threats to national security, appropriate measures to neutralize them cannot be worked out." (15) Major-General Vladimir Dvorkin, a retired army general who now heads a group known as "Officers Are for Military Reform," asserts that no special study for reforming the Armed Force was carried out by the Defense Ministry. (16)

If the Defense Ministry is to capitalize on the prevailing political environment and make the transition into a force that offers security, efficiency is key. Resources are scarce given the monstrous task of modernizing the Russian army behemoth. In order for any reform to succeed, the Defense Ministry must be accountable for the items to be acquired, and it must develop a comprehensive consensus on genuine threats, formulate a grand strategy and build a force that counters those threats. Until these tasks are done, the promise of reform will once again flail in a bureaucratic purgatory.

Source Notes:

(2) Russian Defense Minister Talks Beslan, Terror, Military Problems in TV Interview, NTV, Moscow 12 Sep 04; BBC Worldwide Monitoring via Lexis-Nexis.
(3) "Federation’s Secret," Kommersant, 21 Sep 04 via Lexis-Nexis.

(5) "Russian Army Gets Tough with Draft-Dodgers," Global News Wire — Asia Africa Intelligence Wire, 6 Jun 04; BBC Monitoring International Reports via Lexis-Nexis.

(6) "Last Conscription," Noviye izvestia, 20 Sep 04 via Lexis-Nexis.


(8) "Russia to Spend 675m Dollars on Transition to Professional Army in 2005," Interfax-AVN military news agency web site; BBC Worldwide Monitoring via Lexis-Nexis.

(9) Russian Defense Minister Talks Beslan, Terror, Military Problems in TV Interview, NTV, Moscow 12 Sep 04; BBC Worldwide Monitoring via Lexis-Nexis.


(11) Russian Defense Minister Talks Beslan, Terror, Military Problems in TV Interview, ibid.


(14) "Irina Khakamada: The Regime and Businesses Hate Each Other's Guts," Noviye izvestia, 21 Sep 04; What the Papers Say via Lexis-Nexis.

(15) "Russian Defense Committee Head Speaks on Preventive Strikes," ibid.

(16) "Last Conscription," ibid.
EXTERNAL

Russia talks tough, but are they just empty threats?

On 8 September, Chief of the General Staff, General Yuri Baluyevsky, was quoted as saying that "Russia is prepared, if necessary, to conduct preemptive strikes against terrorist bases anywhere in the world." (1) Defense Minister Sergei Ivanov confirmed the possibility of preemptive strikes against terrorist targets the next day. Both Ivanov and Baluyevsky have reiterated the threat several times since September 8th.

President Putin set the tone in his meeting with western academicians and journalists on September 4. The tough talk benefits Russia in several ways: It helps to diminish the perception of Russian weakness, draws attention away from the security services' performance at Beslan, and may place psychological pressure on the terrorists, who seem to move with impunity throughout the North Caucasus. Also, the putative preemptive strikes reassure the Russian populous that the military is pursuing an active role in the anti-terror war. Additionally, Moscow may hope to garner support from the American and British governments due to their engagement in the Global War on Terrorism (GWOT). The aggressive nature of the stance brings pressure on CIS countries to enhance their own counter terrorism efforts and assist Russia with its effort.

President Putin made immediate political changes in the wake of the Beslan tragedy. He dealt a major blow to regional and legislative authority, but has not even pursued reforms in the security services. The Russian government's threats raise an important question: Without truly reforming the security services and having realized all putative preemptive strike threat-based benefits, is a military show of the force the next step in Russia's War on Terrorism?

Military capability
Since 1986, the American military has used stand-off, low-risk, high precision guided munitions for both preemptive and reprisal strikes. While Russia and the United States now appear to share the same unilateral strategy of preemptive attacks for combating terrorism, they do not share the same military readiness for conducting these strikes. The United States invested billions of dollars into precision weapons and trained its military to use these weapons against time critical targets such as a terrorist meeting.

Russia possesses some precision weapons, but they have not been widely used. Repeatedly Russian Military has displayed a distinct lack of precision, most recently in Chechnya, where Russia has chosen to level entire towns, rather than target single buildings. Additionally, the Russian command and control is focused on centralized control that limits the execution of long range strikes against time sensitive targets.

Military experts, including Colonel General Leonid Ivashov, Vice President of the Academy of Geopolitical Problems, doubt that Russia could deliver effective preventive strikes against terrorist bases abroad. "Russia does not have any technical capability to destroy a terrorist gang that is stationed, let's say, a thousand kilometers away from its borders," Ivashov said. (2) "It is ridiculous to imagine that we would launch cruise missiles from a submarine or a ship to destroy some terrorist base, taking into account that it would be next to impossible to make the strike lethal and precise. We can strike an area, but not the command post. It is necessary to locate the command post or a gang in the field, rather than to deliver a strike into the area where they are presumably deployed," Colonel Ivashov said. (3)

"When I talk of preventative strikes, that does not at all mean that we should use military combined units, front-line aviation, warships, and so on," Defense Minister Sergei Ivanov explained. (4) Instead of a cruise missile or long range
aviation strike, the precise use of combat ready special forces from the North Caucasus military district would be the most likely show of force.

Russia has shown the capability to airlift troops in force into an exercise hostile environment. The military exercise, Mobility-2004, conducted earlier this year, displayed Russia's prowess in airlifting more than 900 personnel and over one hundred combat vehicles from permanent readiness units in the western military districts to the Far East military district. With a severely limited and basically unproven strike capability, Russia would most likely use this type of military operation for any upcoming counterterrorism operation.

Possible targets
Though Russia has not stated officially any potential targets or whether it would launch attacks beyond the confines of the (nominal) Commonwealth of Independent States, the possible target list seems to start and end with Georgia. Georgia and its small Chechen population in the Pankisi Gorge, seem to constitute number one on Russia's preemptive options list. The Pankisi Gorge has long been identified by Moscow, although not by other countries, as an allegedly safe haven for terrorists. Pankisi Gorge is located close enough to Russian airspace to execute the kind of quick special forces insertion that Russian could look to achieve.

Georgia was not helped by comments from U.S. Ambassador Richard Miles. He surprised Georgian politicians and journalists with his remarks about the Pankisi Gorge, on September 13. Miles unexpectedly stated, "a few international terrorists" are still present near Georgia's northeastern mountainous Pankisi Gorge. (5) The U.S. State Department quickly issued a retraction saying that Pankisi Gorge "is no longer a haven for terrorists," and added that the U.S. will continue to cooperate with Georgia in combating terrorism in the region. (6)
Kodori Gorge, from which Georgian militia has engaged in clashes with Abkhaz elements, is another putative target for a preemptive strike. Georgian officials have reported several unauthorized overflights of both Kodori and Pankisi Gorges since 14 September. Russia has denied that any military aircraft have violated Georgian airspace. Moscow could be conducting reconnaissance in preparation for nighttime air and ground operations against either the Kodori or Pankisi Gorges.

If European or U.S. diplomatic pressure proves too high for attacks on Georgian territory, Moscow could attempt to strike much further south, beyond the former Soviet republics. This would be much more difficult but also more impressive militarily and politically. Iraq would be an interesting choice. Russia could simultaneously show military strength and increase cooperation with the United States. The operation would have to be chosen with extreme caution, so as not to represent a reversal of Russian opposition to the U.S.-led Iraqi war. This mission is not likely for a number of reasons. It would rely on precision munitions, which is not Russia's strong suit. Also, Russia would need actionable U.S. military targeting of a Al-Qaeda position, which the U.S. would probably prefer to strike for itself.

Russia could target an area in the Southern Caucasus or Central Asia. These areas are close to Russian airspace, which means they could support a special forces type operation, but there are more problems with this region. In the first place, there is not a single internationally recognized terrorist stronghold. Targeting a group of terrorists that has a loose connection, at best, to the attacks in Russia or might appear to be a weak response, politically, suggesting an inability to strike at real terrorist targets. Additionally, Russia might have to create at least the appearance of an effort to manufacture a CIS coalition before dropping troops onto another CIS country's territory.

Conclusion
Russia has already gained whatever benefits it might derive from its threats and any possible military action is of high risk and quite problematic. Putin does not need a military strike to drum up national resolve or scare bordering countries. If Russia feels compelled to make some sort of military show of force, it is pressure that it is exerting on itself. Perhaps more importantly, Russia cannot risk any possible impression of failure. It needs to choose a target that fits its limited military proficiency and expertise. With significant risk and limited options, it appears unlikely that Russia will conduct an operation for little or no gain.

Source Notes:

(1) RFE/RL NEWSLINE Vol. 8, No. 172, Part I, 9 Sept 04.
(2) Moscow Agentstvo voyennykh novostey, 17 Sept 04; FBIS-SOV-2004-0917
(3) via World News Connection.
(4) Ibid.
(5) NTV, Sept 12 04 via Eurasia Daily Monitor Volume 1, Issue 86.
(6) Eurasia Daily Monitor Volume 1, Issue 86, 16 Sept 04

Newly Independent States: Western Region
By Elena Selyuk

UKRAINE
Has Yanukovich won?
According to the recent election poll conducted by "Deminitsiativa" fond and "Sotsis" center, the gap between two main presidential candidates — Victor Yushchenko and Victor Yanukovich is 6% in the first and 7% in the second round of voting, with Yushchenko winning the polls. (1) The two independent organizations, which conducted the poll asked 2000 persons and stated that the margin of error was not more than 2.2%. The gap between the candidates is
rather substantial but certainly not big enough to stand in Yanukovich’s way to do his best to bridge it with both his pre-election tactics and machinations during the actual voting day.

Presenting material inducements to Ukrainians is one way in which Yanukovich is planning to assure his victory. After years of not paying pensions and wages on time and leaving citizens at the brink of poverty, Yanukovich decided to double the minimum monthly pension from $27 to $54 per month, and to raise wages to state workers. His cabinet announced the decision on 18 September, less than a month and a half before the elections. (2) The intentions of such a decision are clear — to bring to Yanukovich’s side those remaining pensioners who might have been considering voting for Yushchenko. The question is: where did the money come from? The government has either switched on the money printing machine, which will undoubtedly mean inflation and price increases after the elections, and, consequently, the effective elimination of any wage and pension increases (leaving the population at the same poverty level as before), or the authorities have simply decide to use a "secret stash" of funds, widely believed to be reserved by the leadership for just such the occasion. Finance Minister Mykola Azarov stated, however, that the pension surge became possible "due to a surplus in the budget’s revenues from privatization." (3) If that is really the case, then the timing could not have been better for the authorities. Victor Yushchenko criticized this move as a matter of "stealing millions from us and then throwing a few crumbs from the table ahead of the elections." (4)

Another, rather radical, attempt to bridge the gap between the two candidates was allegedly taken by the authorities. Victor Yushchenko allegedly was poisoned at the beginning of September. Even though Austrian doctors recently made a statement that they had no medical proof of poisoning, they admitted that Yushchenko had "chemical substances which are not normally contained in food products" in his system. (5) Austrian doctors diagnosed Yushchenko with acute pancreatitis, which killed a deputy of "Our Ukraine," Oleg Aleksenko, in 2002.
Since the doctors have not interfered at an early stage of Yushchenko's poisoning, the probability of the fatal outcome was as high as 80%. (6) Consequently, whoever poisoned Yushchenko, certainly did it if not with the intention to kill, then definitely with the intention to injure him enough so that he is either dropped out of the presidential race completely or at least for a substantial amount of time to considerably jeopardize his chances for winning this election.

This attempt to stop Yushchenko’s political activity surely was not the first try. Ukrainskaya pravda describes a whole range of criminal activities that have been carried out against Yushchenko and his family in the past years. In 2000, liquid silver was given to Yushchenko's newborn daughter, after which the baby stopped breathing and the doctors barely managed to bring her out of a coma. In 2004, in Herson oblast’, a Kamaz truck attempted to push Yushchenko's car into a ditch three times and when asked for explanations, the truck driver, from a nearby farm, quoted Article 63 of the Constitution, allowing him not to testify against himself. The recent spying on Yushchenko, according to the militia, was intended actually as "prevention of any crime against a presidential candidate." (7) For some reason, this very militia failed to prevent his poisoning.

Yushchenko, of course, is not the only victim of the current government’s thirst for power and its efforts to silence critics of the current ruling group of oligarchs. Names such as Georgy Gongadze (the journalist murdered in 2000), nationalist leader Vyacheslav Chornovil (who died when his car hit a Kamaz truck in 1999), Vadym Hetman (Yushchenko’s predecessor as head of the National Bank of Ukraine, who was shot dead in 1998), serve to remind of the depths of ambition in certain government members.

Outside pressure might force some change: Not the constant international requests for free and fair elections, to stop pressure on the media and allow the opposition to conduct their pre-election campaign free of interference from the authorities. No, the Ukrainian government does not seem to take these requests
seriously. The only lever that might work is frightening the authorities directly with deprivation of their personal privileges (e.g., refusal of visas to the U.S. and Europe, confiscation of property abroad, etc.) A bill of this nature was recently submitted to the U.S. House of Representatives by Congressman Dana Rohrbacher, but it is languishing. (8)

Meanwhile, Yushchenko, with his face swollen and in visible pain after the poisoning, held two opposition rallies in Kiev and Zhitomir, attended by approximately 100,000 people. He gave an inspiring speech and assured all Ukrainians that they would win this election and that Ukraine would have a chance for a democratic and prosperous future. After the speech, he was surrounded by hundreds of people who wanted to shake hands with him and get his autograph. While there is at least some outside pressure and interest in the future of Ukraine, and while Yushchenko stands strong, Yanukovich has not won… yet.

MOLDOVA

Resignation of Moldovan presidential aid
On September 17, Alexandru Petcov, a presidential adviser for foreign policy issues, was dismissed from his post by presidential decree. It is believed that from now on Petcov will be a part of the Communist Party’s central staff and will deal with the upcoming 2005 parliamentary elections. (9)

Transdniestr region loses economically
Transdniestr loses around $1 million per day due to the economic blockade imposed by Moldova — a substantial blow to an already impoverished area. Deliveries to EU countries have practically stopped, but CIS republics continue to buy products from Transdniestr. Transdniestr authorities are planning to reorient the majority of their exports to Russia in the near future. (10) The blockade was imposed by Moldova after the closure of Moldovan schools in Transdniestr, which refused to teach in Moldovan using Cyrillic script.
BELARUS

Opposition funding

Being well aware of the sources that finance the opposition, Lukashenko warned of serious consequences to any businessmen who sponsor or consider sponsoring opposition candidates. Lukashenko said that he was keeping an eye on some big businesses. According to him, the businessmen were sponsoring the opposition candidates for the whole purpose of getting their money back when the opposition comes to power. "It will not come to power and will not pay them back. No matter how much money is invested in Lukashenko’s downfall, this will never come to pass," said Lukashenko, strangely referring to himself, yet again, in the third person. (11)

OCSE refuses to monitor the referendum

The OSCE has refused to assess the referendum to approve Lukashenko’s stay in power by OSCE standards. The OSCE compared Lukashenko’s sudden announcement of the referendum to parliamentary elections in Kazakhstan, where the elections were unexpectedly conducted through the electronic voting system. The OSCE has not monitored previous referenda in Belarus, nor did it monitor the 2000-01 presidential and parliamentary elections. (12)

Source Notes:
(1) Ukrainskaya pravda website, 20 Sep 04 via (www.ukrpravda.com/cgi-bin/print_ru.cgi).
(2) RFE/RL Newsline Vol. 8, No. 179, Part II, 20 Sep 04.
(3) Ibid.
(4) TV5 Kanal, 18 Sep 04; BBC Monitoring via Lexis-Nexis.
(5) Ukrainskaya Pravda website, 17 Sep 04 via (www.ukrpradva.com/cgi-bin/print_ru.cgi).
(6) Ibid.
GEORGIA

Russia on the prowl...

Russia, post-Beslan, has gone on the hunt for culprits, and in its sights lies Georgia. While talk of preemptive strikes against suspected terrorist bases in third countries emerges from the Kremlin, Moscow is recirculating old complaints that terrorists roam the Pankisi Gorge. In response, Georgia is trying to accommodate Russia, while seeking assistance in the U.N., the CIS and its warm relationship with the U.S..

However, the U.S. is playing its cards ambiguously in siding with Tbilisi over Moscow, as indicated by a September 13 announcement by U.S. Ambassador Richard Miles that international terrorists remain in Georgia's Pankisi Gorge. (1) Although the State Department tried to revise Miles' statement by issuing briefs on 14 and 16 September that the Georgian counter-terrorism operations over the past two years had "shown a lot of success" in dealing with terrorism in the Gorge, (2) the damage was done. In order to demonstrate that the Pankisi Gorge represents no terrorism threat, Georgian Interior Ministry forces, in cooperation with the Security Ministry, carried out an "inspection" of the Pankisi Gorge. The
operation, which was supervised by both the Deputy Interior and the Deputy Security Ministers, involved a door-to-door check of identification documents of Chechen refugees living in the Gorge. (3) According to Georgian official estimates the number of Chechen refugees in this area has dwindled by nearly half over the last few years and now stands at about 2,650. (4) As expected, no evidence of terrorist operations was found in the Pankisi. As a further gesture of good faith to Moscow, the Interior Ministry and Security Ministry plan to establish brigades from the various law enforcement agencies, which will carry out 24 hour patrolling of the Pankisi. (5) In an attempt to prevent cross-border movement of illegal arms and persons, the Georgian Border Guard Department reported on 21 September that Georgian and Russian border guard officials have intensified their cooperation and have agreed on close ties to exchange information. (6) Georgia is also offering the possibility of talks with South Ossetia, despite the 18 September kidnapping of four Georgian peacekeepers. On 19 September, Nato Chikovani, the spokeswoman for the Georgian Foreign Ministry, stated that Tbilisi is ready to hold top-level talks with South Ossetian leader Eduard Kokoev. (7) Both Kokoev and the Georgian Prime Minister previously had expressed readiness to meet each other, but Tbilisi insisted that the issue of South Ossetia’s political status be included in the talks.

Despite these peaceful overtures, Moscow has turned its war of words into belligerent actions. This is demonstrated by the closure of Georgian transportation routes to Russia on 14 September, and Moscow’s pledge to prevent Georgian commercial airliners from using airspace until the airlines pay their $3.6 million debt. (8) According to the head of Georgia’s Northern Customs Department, Kakha Mikeladze, the loss of customs revenue from the Larsi checkpoint alone are between 3-4 million Lari. (9) Russia has denied that these moves constitute an economic blockade, but the detention of 60 Georgian citizens on 21 September at a Moscow airport for "visa irregularities" (10) indicates the Kremlin is not currently amenable to reconciliation with Tbilisi.
On another front, the sparing match between Saakashvili and Putin at the CIS conference, held in Astana on 16 September, indicates that the CIS is not an appropriate venue for Georgia to establish a balanced relationship with Russia. The main topic under consideration was the restoration of the railway between Russia and Abkhazia, a measure Georgia views as inadmissible, and one which Putin claims was previously agreed with former Georgian President Shevardnadze. Putin argued that the CIS ban on contact with the Abkhaz secessionist government does not apply to the Moscow-Sokhumi railway situation since the rail linkage is operated by a private Russian company. (11) This is in stark contrast to the practice of international law which states that sanctions against a state or a territory are extended by the regime to all of its actors, governmental or commercial. Along similarly specious lines, Putin stated that Russia had the right to renew the railway line with Abkhazia because 50-60 thousand displaced ethnic Georgians had returned to the Gali region since being driven from the area in the early 1990’s. (12) However, as Saakashvili pointed out, the majority of these displaced persons are treated as slaves, subject to kidnappings, random arrests, and beatings while their basic rights to education and property aren’t met. (13) Apparently, the notion of "returning in security and dignity" as favored by the U.N. has not penetrated the walls of the Kremlin.

Despite Russia’s confrontational stance, Saakashvili stated, at a press conference on 20 September in New York, that Georgia will seek to accommodate Russia’s interests, adding that he has no intention of being confrontational with Russia. (14)

In his 21 September speech at the U.N. General Assembly, Saakashvili tried to amend relations with Moscow by aligning Russian and Georgian interests in combating separatist conflicts in Chechnya, South Ossetia and Abkhazia. He identified terrorism and its perpetrators, in particular Basaev, as the "common enemy" of Georgia and Russia. Saakashvili underscored the need for collaboration between Moscow’s and Tbilisi’s military efforts to fight terrorism in
Russia and the Russian Federation. Saakashvili also compared the separatist conflicts in Grozny with those in Tskhinvali and Sokhumi. (15) By means of this comparison, Saakashvili desired to include South Ossetia and Abkhazia in the patchwork of rogue, terrorist states. In this way, Saakashvili hopes to cement international support for Georgia's current policy of reunification with Sokhumi and Tskhinvali.

**South Ossetian conflicts fuels opposition**

The unresolved conflict with South Ossetia fueled the creation of a new Georgian opposition bloc. On 15 September, Parliamentary deputies Koba Davitashvili and Zviad Dzidziguri informed journalists that their respective political parties, the Union for Georgia’s Unity and the Union of National Forces, will merge to create a new opposition party. (16) Davitashvili, who quit President Saakashvili’s National Movement in February to join the opposition, claims that the new right-of-center party will oppose both the domestic and foreign policy of the present Tbilisi government. In particular, Davitashvili stated that the decisions to fire Chief of Staff of the Armed Forces, followed by Saakashvili’s move to merge the Internal Troops with the Defense Ministry indicates a total lack of coordination between the various ministries in Tbilisi. (17)

The recent consolidation of the two Union parties has provided a watershed for other oppositionists to attack the Saakashvili government. On 16 September, deputies from the New Rightists and the Republican Party criticized Georgian military tactics displayed during clashes in South Ossetia over the past three months. While New Rightists leader David Gamkrelidze labeled the military tactics as "impulsive, chaotic, and resulting in an absolute fiasco," Republican Ivliane Khaindrava accused the Georgian leadership of reacting irresponsibly to the crisis. (18) Labor Party Chairman Shalva Natelashvili displayed brighter nationalistic colors than his fellow opposition members in demanding an explanation at to why Georgia does not control South Ossetia. Natelashvili has
also challenged Saakashvili to a live televised debate and argues that Saakashvili has failed to deliver on many of his pre-election promises. (19)

Although the Labor Party’s irredentist leanings are not echoed in the other opposition parties’ agendas, the South Ossetian conflict has united these factions around a common theme. This newfound oppositionist unity could either radicalize Saakashvili’s South Ossetian policy or destabilize the present Tbilisi government, unless, of course, Saakashvili is able to resolve the South Ossetian situation quickly and bloodlessly.

CHECHNYA

No answers, but lots of guesses

Two weeks after the Beslan tragedy neither the Russian secret services, nor the terrorists, nor the hostages have a complete picture of what happened at Beslan. In the miasma of disinformation and accusations, Moscow at least has a familiar face on which to refocus international and domestic outrage: Shamil Basaev.

On 20 September, Shamil Basaev ostensibly sent a letter to the Kavkaz-Center site, claiming responsibility for the Beslan terrorists act, and the blasts in the Russian jetliners and near the Rizhskaya subway station. (20) None too coincidentally, Basayev’s letter was posted just over a week after Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov informed Al-Jazeera that he "is certain" that the Beslan hostage taking was organized by Basaev. (21)

In the letter purported from Basaev, he stated that 33 guerillas, including two women, participated in the school siege, and that the group was commanded by Colonel Orstkhoyev. In contrast to Basayev’s tally, the authorities claim that there were 32 terrorists and that all of them, save for Nur-Pasha Kulayev, were killed before they could be identified or questioned. (22) Former hostages and Secret Service agencies claim that there were actually between 40-50 terrorists. (23) To date, there exist no exact data on the number of hostages: In his report to Putin,
Prosecutor General Ustinov stated there were around 1,156 hostages. (24) However, teachers at the school claim the hostages numbered around 1,345. At present, 82 hostages are unaccounted for with doctors assuming that most of the missing are among the 73 bodies whose visual identification is impossible. (25)

The fog around Beslan and its immediate aftermath indicates that either Moscow is still scrambling for answers or that the Kremlin is concealing information from the public. As proven by past Chechen terror attacks, such as Ahmed Kadyrov’s assassination, the Nord-Ost tragedy and the June Nazran raid, the facts will remain concealed until they are of no consequence.

**Save the children**
The Beslan tragedy revealed both the ineptitude of the Russian government to prevent or deal with terrorist attacks and the hopelessness of Moscow’s Chechen "normalization" policy. As such, the Kremlin has been the focus of much critique from military, political and grass-roots organizations. On 23 September, General Yevgeni Abreshin sent a letter to Izvestia in which he slammed Russia’s security structures for failing to prevent the Beslan hostage tragedy. (26) Meanwhile, European and Russian human rights groups gathered in Grozny on 22 September for a conference to discuss ways to break the Chechen war deadlock. The conference’s goal was to find solutions "to escape the logic of violence and destruction for the good of…the Chechen population," Alvaro Gil-Robles, the Council of Europe’s Human Rights Commissioner said at the opening of the conference. (27) The meeting, which was organized by the head of the Russian presidential human rights commission, Ella Pamfilova, and Vladimir Lukin, brought together human rights representatives as well as top Russian and Chechen governmental and security officials. Organizations attending the conference included Human Rights Watch, the Helsinki Group, and the Russian human rights organization Memorial, all of which regularly denounce rights violations committed by Russian and pro-Russian forces in Chechnya.
Source Notes:

(1) Associated Press, 13 Sep 04; BBC Monitoring via ISI Emerging Markets.
(2) Interfax, 14 Sep 04; BBC Monitoring via ISI Emerging Markets; Rustavi-2 TV Tbilisi, 16 Sep 04; BBC Monitoring via Lexis-Nexis.
(3) Rustavi-2 TV Tbilisi, 20 Sep 04; via BBC Monitoring via Lexis-Nexis.
(4) Civil Georgia Newsletter, 20 Sep 04, see "Officials: Police Reveal No Terrorists in Pankisi" (http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=78835).
(5) Ibid.
(6) Itar-Tass Moscow, 17 Sep 04; BBC Monitoring via ISI Emerging Markets.
(7) Civil Georgia Newsletter, 20 Sep 04, (www.civil.ge), see "Tbilisi Ready for Top-Level Talks with Tskhinvali."
(8) Imedi 2 TV Tbilisi, 14 Sep 04; Financial Times; BBC Monitoring via ISI Emerging Markets.
(9) Civil Georgia Newsletter, 23 Sep 04, (www.civil.ge), see "Georgia’s Visa, Border Burden with Russia."
(10) Itar-Tass, 21 Sep 04; BBC Monitoring via Lexis-Nexis.
(11) Kavkasia- Press Tbilisi, 16 Sep 04; BBC Monitoring via ISI Emerging Markets.
(12) Civil Georgia Newsletter, Sep 16 04, (www.civil.ge), see "Putin, Saakashvili Spar at CIS Summit."
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(14) Civil Georgia Newsletter, 21 Sep 04, (www.civil.ge), see "Saakashvili: Tbilisi will not be Confrontational with Russia."
(15) Civil Georgia Newsletter, 22 Sep 04, (www.civil.ge), see "Saakashvili’s Speech at UN General Assembly."
(16) Interfax, 15 Sep 04; BBC Monitoring via Lexis-Nexis.
(17) Civil Georgia Newsletter, 16 Sep 04, (www.civil.ge), see "Opposition Slams Government over South Ossetia."
(18) Imedi-TV, 16 Sep 04; Financial Times; BBC Monitoring via Lexis-Nexis.
(19) Rustavi-2 TV Tbilisi, 17 Sep 04; BBC Monitoring via ISI Emerging Markets.
Kazakh election results

One week ago, on Sunday 19 September, Kazakhstan held its second parliamentary elections since obtaining independence in 1991. During the spring and summer months, there were announcements and political machinations which seemed destined to affect the outcome of the polls.

First, President Nursultan Nazarbaev announced in March that some of the voting would take place electronically. (1) Two of Kazakhstan’s three opposition groups, the Communist and Democratic People’s Choice Parties, responded by filing a (quickly dismissed) lawsuit with Kazakhstan’s Supreme Court, claiming that the possibility of "equal elections" would be damaged if electronic machines were used. (2) In late August, Asylbek Kozakhmetov, co-Chairman of the coordinating council between the two parties stated that the two groups might boycott the elections unless the number of regions to be polled electronically was significantly reduced. (3)
In July President Nazarbaev appointed Altynbek Sarsenbayev, a co-Chairman of Kazakhstan’s third opposition party Ak Zhol, to the position of Information Minister. Days later, Ak Zhol’s second co-Chairman, Bolat Abilov, was convicted of slander in what was viewed as a politically motivated case, and thus banned from participating in the elections. (4)

Finally, President Nazarbaev’s oldest daughter, Dariga Nazarbaeva, leader of Kazakhstan’s newest party, Asar, began to speak out publicly on the eve of the elections, decrying corruption in her father’s Otan Party, and advocating the education of Kazakhstan’s electorate on its rights and duties. (5) In light of Nazarbaeva’s emergence as a political force, it seems possible that President Nazarbaev has suborned the opposition parties in order to clear a path for Nazarbaeva, presumably his preferred successor. (6)

Kazakhstan’s elections were split between votes for Party lists and single member districts. Of the 77 seats in the Majlis, 10 were to be distributed based on lists, provided they passed the 7% hurdle, while the remaining 67 were directly elected by district. The Kazakh Central Election Commission on 23 September announced the following returns: The Pro-Presidential Otan party obtained 60.6% of party-list votes, thereby winning seven of the ten distributed seats. In the single member district vote, Otan obtained 33 of the remaining seats. (7) Meanwhile, Asar, Nazarbaeva’s party, won 11.4% of the party-list vote (one seat), and two seats in direct votes. The second major pro-Presidential party, Aist, won nine seats through direct ballots, and one through party lists. (8) Kazakhstan’s opposition parties fared miserably in the polls. Ak Zhol obtained only one seat in the election, which was awarded on the basis of list-votes (12%), but did not win any seats in the direct-vote districts. Neither the Communist Party nor the Democratic Choice of Kazakhstan passed the 7% threshold necessary to win seats. (9) Eight seats were won by independent candidates, while 22 will need runoff elections to determine a clear victor. (10) These results mean that Nazarbaeva is now head of the second largest pro-Presidential party in the
Kazakh parliamentary system, after the Aist bloc of the Agrarian and Civic parties, which achieved a total of ten seats, and is therefore well positioned for a succession when her father decides to leave office. But while the 19 September elections might be considered a success for a possible Nazarbaev dynasty, they were less successful in presenting a democratic image either at home or abroad.

On Monday 20 September, Altynbek Sarsenbayev submitted his resignation to President Nazarbaev. Speaking to the press, he stated that he had resigned because the election "was not fair, trustworthy and free." He added that he could no longer remain a member of a government that "actively interfered with the election campaign, juggled and falsified results of the expression of people's will." (11) Sarsenbayev was not the only member of Ak Zhol to speak out. Bolat Abilov, who is currently serving an 18 month suspended sentence for slander, stated that in his opinion, the party should properly have received 40-50% of the vote. (12) Ak Zhol has again filed suit with the Kazakh supreme court against the Central Election Commission for "flagrant violations of constitutional rights of citizens" during the electoral process. (13) Based on the Supreme Court’s rejection of Ak Zhol’s pre-election law-suit, it must be stated that the present complaint has little or no chance of success. At the same time, Sarsenbayev’s outburst should be viewed with some cynicism, since the question could easily be posed as to why he trusted President Nazarbaev’s promise of "open and honest" elections when he accepted his ministerial post in July. (14) One answer may be that Sarsenbayev accepted the post in order to draw attention to Kazakhstan’s democratic deficit and the plight of the opposition parties.

Kazakhstan’s image abroad has not been helped by the elections either. The OSCE, which had over 300 observers from 33 countries present to monitor the elections, released its preliminary findings just a day after the elections. The organization found that the media had displayed "consistent bias" (15) in favor of pro-presidential parties. Moreover, the organization noted multiple instances of suspected voter intimidation, and irregularities with respect to electronic voting
machines, and that the CEC had exhibited a "lack of transparency" throughout
the process. (16) Ihor Ostash, head of the OSCE mission noted that the elections
"fell short of OSCE and Council of Europe standards for democratic elections."
(17) The organization’s full report is to be released at the end of October. It is
unlikely to provide much hope that Kazakhstan will make a transition to a full,
transparent democracy once President Nazarbaev departs the scene.

**Kyrgyz elections**

Kyrgyzstan’s parliamentary elections are due to take place in February next year.
In preparation for the polls, a number of opposition parties in the country,
including the Communist Party of Kyrgyzstan, the Democratic Movement of
Kyrgyzstan, and the Republican Party of Kyrgyzstan decided on 24 September to
create an electoral coalition. The new block, which is to be led by former Prime
Minister Kurmanbek Bakiyev has the aim of "ensuring free and fair elections" in
the Republic. (18)

In another important political development, a group of Members of Parliament
asked Kyrgyzstan’s Constitutional Court to issue a ruling banning President
currently has a two-term limit on the Presidency. But another group of Members
of Parliament believes that the new edition of the Constitution, approved in
February 2003, allows for a third Presidential term. On 21 September, the Court
struck a blow to the group opposing a third term, when it refused to make a ruling
on the legality of a possible third term. The leader of the opposition in Parliament,
Azimbek Beknazarov responded to the Court’s decision, stating that "now the
acting power has the option of once more extending the authority of the acting
head of state." (20) It is interesting that Kyrgyz opposition groups have brought
the issue of a third term to the forefront a full year before Presidential elections
are due to occur, especially since President Akaev has stated recently that he
does not intend to stand for re-election in 2005. With some justification, the
opposition does not take him at his word. There have already been calls from
several prominent business and financial groups (believed to be connected to the President's family) for Akaev to extend his stay in office. (21) Moreover, an extension in office or a change in the Constitution would not be a new development in Central Asia. All three of Kyrgyzstan's neighbors have amended their constitutions, or held referenda allowing Presidents Nazarbaev, Rahmonov and Karimov to extend their terms further than permitted. There is no reason why Kyrgyzstan should prove any different.

Source Notes:

(2) Ibid.
(3) Ibid.
(4) Ibid.
(5) Ibid.
(6) Ibid.
(7) Weekday Magazine-Kazakhstan, 23 Sept 04; RFE/RL via ISI Emerging Markets Database.
(8) Ibid.
(10) Weekday Magazine-Kazakhstan, 23 Sept 04; RFE/RL via ISI Emerging Markets Database.
(12) RFE/RL, 23 Sept 04 via (www.rferl.org).

(16) Nezavisimaya gazeta 22 Sept 04; BBC Monitoring via ISI Emerging Markets Database.

(17) Central Asia Report, 21 Sept 04; RFE/RL via ISI Emerging Markets Database.

(18) BBC Monitoring, 24 Sept 04; AKI Press Agency via ISI Emerging Markets Database.


(20) Moscow Interfax, 1453 GMT, 21 Sept 04; FBIS-SOV-2004-0921 via World News Connection.

(21) "Kyrgyzstan: Civic Group Calls For Another Term For Akaev, Despite Constitution", Kyrgyzstan Development Gateway, 23 Oct 03; (www.eng.gateway.kg/cgi-bin/page.pl?id=28&story_name=doc4125.shtml).

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