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Wither the President?

President Putin has proved quite a surprise this fall. After the series of terrorist attacks in Russia in August and September, when one might have expected to hear him vow vengeance for the victims of terrorism, Putin called in a group of foreign journalists and academics and announced political reforms. Gone are the daggers for soldiers at the front line in Chechnya, now the President is offering up Inspectors General to assert the power vertical.

Granted, stripping the legislature even of a veneer of political opposition through changes to electoral procedures and attempting to re-subordinate the regions through de facto direct appointment of local leaderships appear as authoritarian, perhaps pre-planned measures meant to consolidate executive power in a siloviki-heavy presidency, but the regional initiatives, especially given the reaction they received at home and abroad, resemble nothing so much as the wishful thinking of Gorbachev’s land privatization decrees of the early 1990s – intriguing to western ears (granted for very different reasons), but largely unenforceable in the hinterland. Will the role of the security services, and more importantly their investment in the current political arrangement, lead to a significantly different outcome? Possibly. Assuming, that is, that the FSB hasn’t been subject to the same disintegrative trends that have struck every other former Soviet institution from the Armed Forces and Special Forces to the Communist Party and Trade Unions.
The security services would have a lot of work to do to maintain a friendly regime, even Putin's. Their portfolio suddenly would expand to encompass not only "managing" the population to keep it in line with the state's political agenda, but now, also protecting it from a no-longer-imaginary terrorist foe. Lest one underestimate this task, Beslan serves as a terrible reminder of the ease of access and mobility terrorists can have in Russia, and all of the recent incidents are grim evidence of the danger of rampant corruption. Their effort might be alleviated by the installation of friendly regimes in the states along the border, a buffer, of sorts (yes, a very familiar concept).

So, where is President Putin on all this? He has announced his political reforms, which may or may not be enacted. There have been no further arrests, no physical force response to the terrorist attacks. The Presidential Representative to the Caucasus, Dmitri Kozak, has discovered pervasive corruption in southern Russia, (1) and despite military bluster about the use of force in states of the FSU, Russia has suffered political defeats in its attempts to meddle in the Ukrainian election and Abkhazia, while still in play with a political settlement likely to favor Russian interests, represents another political thorn in Russia's side; a thorn that until recently stung only Georgia.

Vats of ink have been spilled over the direction of a Putin/siloviki-led Russian state. Recently however, questions about the strength of Putin's leadership and of the central authorities in general have emerged from the late summer's acts of terrorism. Perhaps only now, the blowback from the decision to reignite a war in the south to stave off the prosecution of an outgoing regime can be seen as the hopeless, selfish muddle it truly was.

Ukraine now finds itself facing a similar scenario to the one that propelled Putin to power: an oligarch-rich regime with heavy, criminal business and political baggage is slinking out of public life but trying desperately to install a new leadership, one that will not pursue criminal prosecutions or seek retaliation
against the previous administration. Putin's simpatico and support for the outgoing group and their chosen successors may have been understandable. His reaction to the popular Ukrainian response to this transparent attempt to circumvent the democratic process however, is pure, unadulterated Putin.

Speaking at a summit in Ankara, Turkey, Putin reiterated his claims that machinations by western government were responsible for the failure of properly rigged elections to produce their anticipated results: When asked about the situation in Ukraine, Putin decried the attempts to "tailor" existing laws for the benefit of a particular political force (isn't that rich?). (2)

"I do not want to see a divided Europe into westerners and easterners, into first and second [class] people, where first [class] people can live by democratic and stable laws, but second [class] people are, figuratively speaking, people with black political skin, and a kind but strict boss in a corkwood helmet will point out the political expediency by which they should live. And if, God forbid, an un[grateful] aborigine objects, he will be punished with a bomb or missile club, just as it happened in Belgrade. And that I think is absolutely unacceptable. Just as it is absolutely unacceptable to threaten people and leave them no choice, where a political leader says that no matter what the outcome of the election is, we will seize power anyway, including by force." (3)

To parse that statement, apparently, the European/Eurasian states with less experience in democratic governance are segmented into second class citizens (Putin's use of overt racial characterizations is outlandish and best passed over), and those countries with longer traditions of democratic rule (first class states), should they attempt to assist in the democratic transition of their neighbors by monitoring electoral procedures and questioning corrupt practices are exhibiting "colonial" behavior. Should the leadership of a state in transition to democracy (an aborigine?) decide to launch a campaign of displacement and possible genocide against a segment of its population (thus, demonstrating ingratitude?),
"western" or "first class state" response or preemption is unacceptable. Putin's rhetoric clearly propelled him to finish with a flourish on the need to respect electoral outcomes – unless, of course, parliamentary, judicial and external judgments about fraud in the conduct of elections is a form of force for Putin.

To be fair, Putin's rather clouded outburst on western interference likely was motivated by the change in the west's "wink and a nod" response to elections across the FSU and in Russia (in addition to non-electoral based "transfers of power") in recent years. Why now, when Russia has so much on its hands, would the west insist on above board procedures? The possibility of actual popular action and mass-based demonstrations, as we've seen in Ukraine, are suspect to Putin, and must, therefore, be the result of western interference, a plot to destabilize Russia. With a little calculation, perhaps Putin and other leaders would recognize that a stable, truly democratic Russia would serve greater interests, and would likewise prove a reliable and valuable partner against a mutually-acknowledged terrorist enemy.

Source Notes:

(1) TAR-TASS, 1302 GMT, 8 Dec 04; BBC Monitoring via ISI Emerging Markets Database.
(2) Remarks by President Vladimir Putin in Ankara, Turkey, Channel One, Vremya News, 6 Dec 04; Official Kremlin International broadcast via Lexis-Nexis.
(3) Ibid.

Russian Federation: Security Services
By Eric Beene

More insight has been gained this month into the final look of Russian's reformed Federal Security Service (FSB). President Putin formally directed its
restructuring last July, although it appears the process was begun the summer before with the re-subordination of the Border Guard Service from the Interior Ministry to the FSB. Announcements and analysis of who now occupies which seat in the leadership of the security services, legislative changes, and increased funding for selected parts of the organization shed more light on the arc of reform in Russia and give food for thought on its future.

Now that the music appears to have stopped within the FSB and everyone has chosen a chair, it is worth reviewing who sits where. To review, FSB head Nikolai Patrushev now has four deputies (previously eleven). Patrushev’s two senior deputies are Colonel-General Vladimir Pronichev and Lieutenant-General Sergei Smirnov. Smirnov, Patrushev’s right-hand man and most intimate adviser, has been highlighted as Patrushev’s likely replacement should the latter move on to other administrative posts. Smirnov’s experience as head of the FSB’s own Security Service has given him valuable insight into the Kremlin network and designates him as one to watch for the future. Pronichev is Chief of the Border Service and, not surprisingly, a friend of Patrushev. He has been hailed as a very effective manager who is successfully, if slowly, reforming his department. Patrushev’s two regular deputies are Lieutenant-General Vyacheslav Ushakov (also with secretary status) and Lieutenant-General Vladimir Anisimov. Prior to this posting, Ushakov rose to head the Operative Information Coordination Office (UKOI) of the Analysis, Forecast and Strategic Planning Department (DAPSI) under then-FSB director Vladimir Putin—a clear indication of Putin’s trust, and a valuable position with ties to the Russian intelligence community, a point discussed in more detail later. Anisimov is personally quite close to Patrushev, although little else is known of the man. He does, however, have control over considerable capabilities of the department. (1)

The rest of the FSB leadership, though reduced in status to service chiefs instead of department heads, remains largely unchanged, with one notable exception. As with many other of the former departments within the FSB, the
Department for Defense of Constitutional State System and Counter-Terrorism was re-designated as a service, with Alexander Bragin, former head of the FSB in Chelyabinsk, as its head since summer of 2003. Within this service, however, a new department has been created: the Department for Countering International Terrorism. Appointed to direct this operation is Major-General Yuri Sapunov, former head of the FSB in the Astrakhan region. If the name sounds familiar, it is probably from his involvement in the state’s efforts in Chechnya, and the FSB’s use of severe counter-terror tactics in the region. With this appointment, Sapunov is hailed as the chief Russian fighter against bin Laden.²

At the end of November, members of the Duma met to consider a new counter-terrorism bill that would significantly change the way the state responds to terrorist incidents. Among the provisions, it allows government agents to negotiate with terrorists for the purpose of saving lives or preventing injury, protecting material valuables, or identifying possibilities for stopping a terrorist attack without the use of force." This marks a notable departure from President Putin’s policy of no negotiations, but it limits these negotiations to essentially life-saving measures. The bill also discusses the role of the Federal Anti-Terrorism Commission, discussed previously in this column. It draws the chain of command from the regional anti-terrorism commanders directly to the FSB, not through the state’s regional leadership. It specifies that "[t]he Federal Security Service (FSB) is unequivocally defined as playing the leading role in carrying out measures aimed at preventing terrorist activity," removing any confusion whether regional leaders, elected or appointed, are part of the anti-terrorism chain of command. (3) A final significant element of this legislation is the introduction of terrorist threat modes, or TTMs. These include terrorist danger mode, counter-terrorist operation mode, and state of emergency mode, with the latter being the most severe. A local on-scene commander has the authority to declare the appropriate TTM. One of the implications of a TTM is restricted or even banned media access to the scene. The [local] leader decides how and to what extent
the public will be informed about a terrorist attack, and can even deny journalists any access to the operation zone.² (4) Yet another implication is a temporary reduction of civil liberties, including stepped-up identification checks, phone and e-mail monitoring, and restrictions on public gatherings. While there is a 60-day limit on a TTM declaration, commanders have fairly wide authority to declare such measures, even in anticipation of an event. (5) Two of the more troubling elements of this legislation, should it pass, are the opportunities for abuse, especially regarding a TTM declaration simply to prevent public demonstrations against the government, and the lack of public accountability for its use, since the chain of command no longer includes elected leaders. While clearly intended to tighten the command and control during a terrorism event, the legislation also smacks of old Soviet ways.

A final noteworthy announcement concerns the restructuring and increased funding for the Border Guard Service (BGS), led by Colonel-General Vladimir Pronichev. The BGS announced the details of its own reform program, "State Border of the Russian Federation in 2003-2010." This program plans what it calls a three-phase program, with the first phase focused on enhanced quality of life initiatives for the border guards and their families, the second phase focused on improved communications within the department, with a real-time picture of border status sent from the regions to a centralized control station at the Lubyanka, and a third phase that improves and modernizes the hardware and equipment used to monitor the borders. The goal is enhanced border security in the Caucasus, Central Asia (Kazakhstan), the Baltic States, and the border with Ukraine by 2011, at an estimated total cost of 60 billion rubles. (6) As the Caucasus remains the most critical region, that area will obtain priority in the short term, with 14.8 billion rubles required by 2006 to build dozens of new cantonments and detachment commands in the region (many already under construction), a training center in Stavropol for standardized training, and new or improved roads between outposts. (7) Perhaps realizing that some lawmakers may be reluctant to redistribute so much money so late in the state’s budget
cycle, President Putin himself has been emphasizing the need for this reform, appearing in a well-reported meeting with senior FSB leadership. Perhaps also realizing the need to change a fundamental mindset in his most trusted departments, he emphasized the importance of border security: 

³[A]ny errors on the border have a negative effect on the entire system of national security.² Indeed, this will demand that the border guards themselves, long accustomed to relying on military personnel to help protect the borders, assume greater responsibility. (8)

The hope is for the creation of a more effective layered defense highlighted by close cooperation between the government organizations involved in guarding the country’s borders—the Defense Ministry, local police, regional authorities, and even local citizens. To help such this effective defense, the BGS is attempting to create a more professional force, one less reliant on conscripts. In the words of Colonel-General Pronichev, ³The Border Service [already] has abandoned 6,000 conscripts. At the moment, we are handing over 2,300 additional servicemen to the Defense Ministry, while next year we'll abandon 10,000 conscripts. Thus we'll be gradually ensuring the approach of a professional border service.² (9)

These reform efforts, especially the reform of the BGS, appear to describe a new chapter in President Putin’s process of change, previously marked by his attempts to enhance the vertical of power, his blind faith in the FSB, whose forces have proved time and again they are incapable of protecting the nation against terrorists, and silovikization—Putin’s habit of inserting well-known former KGB personnel into positions of power throughout the government and industry. In this instance, he has not simply inserted his favored personnel into a top leadership position in the Border Guards Service; he has taken the entire BGS away from the Interior Ministry and transplanted it directly into the FSB. Only now that it is well imbedded in his favored ministry does he ask to increase radically its budget and make the long-needed improvements. In this scenario,
Putin has established a staff of trusted agents to supervise what is possibly one of the most significant organizational reform efforts in his tenure. If he is successful—if the money is re-allocated, if the advertised enhancements are made, and if this reform effort is able to show any kind of enhanced capability, helping to make Russia more secure—he may have established a new model for future organizational reform: incorporate the target organization into the FSB first, then begin the reform process.

The scale of change in this case is large, and it is unlikely real progress will be evident before 2006 or 2007. By that time, it may be too late to undertake major change in any other organization using a similar technique. However, there may be other, smaller organizations ripe for change that could follow this model in the meantime and possibly even show improvement sooner. Perhaps one of the next candidates for this process is the Foreign Intelligence Service (SVR). This organization, even under its current head, Lieutenant-General Sergei Lebedev, has yet to recover fully from the break up of the Soviet Union, which saw territories formerly considered "interior" become "foreign." (10) Reform of the SVR could also fall under the aegis of counter-terrorism as intelligence and intelligence-sharing between countries is crucial to pre-empting acts of terrorism originating abroad. As President Putin continues to highlight the involvement of non-Russians in acts of terrorism within Russia, this could be a relatively easy "sell" to the rest of the apparatus. And with a deputy director in the FSB having the experience of Lieutenant-General Ushakov, the management pieces appear to be already in place. The irony is that, since such an effort would probably be classified (beyond what the newspapers are permitted to report), barring a leak, most of us would not be aware of such an attempt until after it has already proven itself.

Source Notes:
(1) Alexander Sokolov, ³The FSB Has Been Transformed,² Kommersant, 15 Nov 04; What the Papers Say - Defense and Security via ISI Emerging Markets; ³FSB Reform,² CCPR - Russia Federal Politics, Center for Current Political Research, 23 Nov 04 via ISI Emerging Markets; and Andrei Skrobot, ³The FSB Appoints A New Person To Fight Osama Bin Laden,² Nezavisimaya gazeta, 5 Nov 04; What the Papers Say via Lexis-Nexis.


(3) Yuri Politov, ³The Duma Aims to Permit Negotiation With Terrorists,² Izvestia, 2 Dec 04; What the Papers Say via ISI Emerging Markets.

(4) Ibid.

(5) Suzanna Farizova, ³The Terrorist Threat Mode Front,² Kommersant, 1 Dec 04; What the Papers Say via ISI Emerging Markets.

(6) ³Russia to Spend About R60bn to Reinforce Its Borders With Former CIS States,² ITAR-TASS, 29 Nov 04; BBC Monitoring via ISI Emerging Markets.

(7) Ivan Safronov, ³A Race of Barriers,² Kommersant, 2 Dec 04; What the Papers Say via ISI Emerging Markets.

(8) Ibid.


(10) ³FSB Reform,² CCPR - Russia Federal Politics, Center for Current Political Research, 23 Nov 04 via ISI Emerging Markets; and Gordon Bennett, Vladimir Putin and Russia’s Special Services, Conflict Studies Research Center, Surrey, England, Aug 2002.

Russian Federation: Foreign Relations

By Rebecca Mulder
Ukraine prepares for a new runoff election putatively to be held 26 December. In response, the Russian Parliament has adopted a resolution accusing the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and the European Union of fomenting unrest in Ukraine. Throughout the entire disputed Ukrainian election process, President Putin has continued to back both President Leonid Kuchma and his chosen successor, Prime Minister Viktor Yanukovich over the opposition leader, Viktor Yushchenko.

The popular response to the election results has exposed stark divisions that not only reflect divergent views within Ukraine but between Russia and the West. The United States and many European countries have expressed the desire that Ukraine have a free and fair electoral process; the Kremlin has been opposed to a new runoff election, wishing to see the widely-criticized vote for Yanukovich certified. Although largely unsupported by the actual positions of the candidates, support for Yanukovich or Yushchenko mirrors an east-west split.

The Supreme Court's decision to throw out the election results is a victory for those who saw the massive electoral violations (which included intimidation, voting restrictions, misuse of absentee ballots, even pens with invisible ink) as an erosion of the fundamental right of the Ukrainian people freely and fairly to elect the president of their choice. Yanukovich represents Ukraine’s Russian-leaning ruling elite and Yushchenko, who has promised to turn Ukraine towards NATO membership and the E.U., represents western aspirations. The Supreme Court's decision, if implemented, would enable Ukraine to move forward within the framework of its constitution and toward more transparency in its governance.
Kuchma suggested that Yanukovich should withdraw from the election, a move that could complicate Yushchenko’s efforts to achieve a legitimate victory. Kuchma, in his waning days as president, is attempting to shift greater power to Parliament, thus weakening a presidency that Yushchenko might inherit. (1) In response to the mass demonstration in Kiev, Kuchma commented cynically,³ “Revolutions are prepared by dreamers. And I always recall 1917: They are carried out by fanatics, and they are exploited by scoundrels.”² (2)

The popular response in Ukraine, which hearkens back to the waning years of the Soviet Union and the east European ³revolutions² of 1989, has disrupted Putin’s plans to keep a leader in Ukraine who would be more pliant to Russia’s wishes. Putin’s personal efforts, unmistakable though they were, have thus far been largely ineffective. Ukraine is Russia’s ³near West² and Europe’s ³near East² and Putin claims that a Western-focused leader would undermine his own efforts to retain Russia’s influence on its former Soviet neighbors. Should Yushchenko win, Putin could attempt to absorb Ukraine’s pro-Russian east at the price of a clash with the West, jeopardizing his own power.

Several Russian liberals, who have criticized Russia’s role in the Ukrainian election crisis, support a new runoff election and do not wish to see Putin divide Ukraine any further. Yabloko Vice Chairman Sergei Mitrokhin stated that Russian liberals must demand that events in Ukraine remain non-violent and reflect a ³strict² and ³authentic² expression of the will of the people. (3) He said, ³We must not support any manifestation of separatism in Ukraine — western or eastern — and must also demand from the Russian authorities that they reject impudent interference in the situation in Ukraine that will lead to such grievous consequences as a split in the country.”² (4) Boris Nemtsov, a leader of the Union of Rightist Forces (SPS) who backed Yushchenko, stated, ³The choice of the Ukrainian people, whatever it is, must be respected even if the Kremlin doesn’t share it.”² (5) Nemtsov argued that should Russia involve itself in any sort of
separatist activities in eastern Ukraine, it could set an unwelcome precedent for Russia itself. (6)

The United States supports a repeated runoff election. The U.S. Ambassador to Russia, Alexander Vershbow, stated that the U.S. does not regard Ukraine as an area of confrontation with Russia and that it is in the interest of all friends of Ukraine to settle the situation through political and legal means. (7) Javier Solana, Secretary-General of the Council of the E.U., also stated that he does not see any threat to E.U.-Russian relations regarding Ukraine. (8) If the election is held, the OSCE may double the number of poll monitors to 1,000. Bulgarian Foreign Minister Solomon Passy, chair of the OSCE, stated, ³In particular, we expect to see a fair campaign and unbiased reporting in state-controlled media.² (9) Russia’s ambassador to the OSCE countered the agency’s monitoring efforts: ³Sometimes they are not objective in their assessment of the electoral processŠthey should be helping not criticizing unfairly.² (10)

The strains in Ukraine are testing the post-Cold War relationship between Russia and the West, and threatening to reopen wounds within the former Soviet Union as well.

A new power center
Recently, President Putin made official visits to both India and Turkey. Although Russia historically has had different relations with each country, these recent visits had the same goal: to create a new political power center in response to the influence of the United States. Putin’s statements in New Delhi about the United States³ ³dictatorship in global affairs, even if presented in pseudo-democratic words² and how dangerous it is to attempt to ³overhaul the God-created multifaceted and diverse civilization according to the barrack-like principles of a unipolar world² reflected this desire to counter the U.S. (11)
Russia’s appeal to Turkey as a potential ally is certainly unprecedented and could be successful, especially given the dismal outlook for Turkey’s accession to the E.U. and growing anti-American sentiments within the country. A Russian-Indian declaration called for tripartite cooperation between Russia, India and China and a three-party summit will be held next year. (12)

Source Notes:

(2) Ibid.
(4) Ibid.
(5) Ibid.
(6) Ibid.
(9) BBC News, 6 Dec 04 via (news.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/fr/-/1/hi/world/Europe/4071095.stm).
(10) Ibid.
(11) RIA Novosti, 6 Dec 04 via (en.rian.index.cfm?prd_id=160&msg_id=5175553).
(12) Ibid.

Russian Federation: Domestic Issues and Legislative Branch
POLITICS AND SOCIETY

Someone finally said it

"And here is the main answer to the main question: Of course, the state is guilty, and apparently law enforcement agencies hadn't done everything possible [to ensure appropriate action] if this happened," said Alexander Torshin on November 5. (1) Torshin is the head of the parliamentary commission into the Beslan hostage takings. The commission has continued its work, discovering that a senior criminal investigation officer with the Ingush interior ministry, Captain Bashir Pliyev, was one of the Beslan hostage-takers. (2)

Torshin recently announced that the commission has indirect evidence that a foreign special service was involved in the attacks. (3) He gave no indication as to whose service it was, but said that the commission was investigating all possibilities.

Torshin also recommended barring the use of juries to try suspects involved in bandit groups or terrorist activities. A bill significantly altering the use of juries in courts has been submitted to the State Duma. "I am urging the deputies to consider this bill immediately. I recently spoke with a prosecutor from a North Caucasus republic, and he told me openly that any man who has been caught with weapons in his hands, or is suspected of being a member of an armed group, or aiding and abetting terrorists demands from the very start, that his case be considered by a jury. And it happens sometimes that the jury acquits the suspect," Torshin said. He also believes the inadequacy of the police and court systems has lead to the resurgence of blood feuds in the North Caucasus. (4)

The media are playing a starring role in the commission's work, serving as a valued source of information. The commission has accepted approximately 20 cassettes of the events from Russian and foreign media sources. Torshin said
that a section of the report is likely to state which information published in various media sources was verified and which information was not. (5)

**Appointment of regional leaders**
The Duma recently passed the bill eliminating the direct election of governors. The bill as altered from its original proposal, allowing the state legislature to reject candidates three times before the president can dissolve it, rather than the original two.

Opposition to the law has come out of the ethnic republics of Tatarstan, Bashkortostan and Chuvashia, with Tatarstan's President Mintimer Shaymiyev characteristically leading the way. "We have a federation, Tatarstan is a republic, and it has a parliament elected by the people," said Rafael Khakimov, state counselor to Shaymiyev. "I concede that they may revise the constitution, but we may disagree with this constitution because this would be the constitution of a unitary state, and Tatarstan is upholding real federalism, and there have been perfectly real conquests on this path. What is left for us to do in this situation? To resist." (6)

Proposed amendments springing from Tatarstan’s State Council included a time limit on the law and forbidding the dissolution of the regional parliaments. (7) The amendments were not included in the Duma’s recently passed version of the bill.

The objections of Tatarstan and the other Volga republics stand in contrast to the sounds of approval coming from other regional leaders. The drive to join the pro-Kremlin United Russia party immediately following the announcement of the reforms signals an interest in towing the line by most regional leaders.

**Perhaps an opposition?**
On December 12, a civic congress uniting non-governmental organizations, journalists, politicians, and medium and small-sized businesses will meet in
Moscow. The purpose of the conference is to "mobilize civil society," it is hoped toward the goal of observing elections, addressing corruption, and speaking up about the direction Russia's political system is taking, according to Georgi Satarov, president of the InDem Foundation and co-chair of the conference. (8) Perhaps the meeting of the various segments of society who are opposed to the changes happening in Russia will coalesce in a united opposition.

**Changes with Ukraine**

Sergei Mironov, head of the Federation Council, announced on November 10 the ratification of a protocol changing the requirements for Russians visiting Ukraine and Ukrainians visiting Russia. The protocol allows Ukrainians to visit Russia for up to 90 days without being required to register. (9) Given the events of the last few weeks in Ukraine, one cannot help but wonder if small changes such as these were meant to inch the pro-Russian side of Ukraine a bit closer to its powerful neighbor.

Source Notes:

(2) ³A finding for the guerillas,² Gazeta, 5 Nov 04 via Lexis-Nexis.
(3) ³Foreign special service involved in Beslan hostage-taking, part 1,² Interfax, 27 Nov 04 via Lexis-Nexis.
(4) ³Foreign special service involved in Beslan hostage-taking, part 2,² Interfax, 27 Nov 04via Lexis-Nexis.
(7) Ibid.
(8) Government is as bad as society allows it to be, Novaya gazeta, 2 Dec 04 via Johnson's Russia List #8481.
INTERNAL
Making something out of nothing

President Putin’s speech at the annual conference of Russia’s top military leaders was at least partially successful. Although he spoke for only 6 minutes, he generated a stir in the international media with his assertion that Russia will soon have unique nuclear systems that have no counterparts in other nuclear powers. (1) Having nothing more encouraging to tell the nation’s highest ranking military personnel, President Putin focused on the one solid piece of evidence proving Russia’s claim to great power status – its nuclear arsenal. While underscoring that Russia still views terrorism as the greatest threat to its national security, we understand that the moment we turn our attention from such elements of our defenses as a nuclear missile shield, then we will be facing new threats. (2) Putin’s pep talk was aimed primarily at the large number in the crowd who, stuck in the Soviet era mindset, have tried to convince themselves that the West, and in particular the U.S. missile defense system, presents a threat to Russia’s national security. This new nuclear missile capability, Putin’s argument goes, will secure its great power status. According to Pavel Felgenhauer, the Moscow-based military analyst, Putin is now using the Soviet-designed ABM penetration gadgets as a propaganda ploy – to keep his disgruntled military happy and remind the Russian public that our nation is still great and can deploy nukes that no one else has. (3)

The most successful aspect of Putin’s speech was that it created a media stir, by creating something out of nothing. In being vague and elusive, Putin kept his...
wider audience guessing as to exactly what technology he was talking about. Speculation in the media following the speech was varied, but the general consensus is that the President was referring to a new maneuverable warhead for Russia’s operational Topol-M land-based ICBMs, or perhaps to the recently tested Bulava SLBM. (4) In either case, Putin presented no new information to anyone in the West. The requirements of the so-called Moscow treaty signed by Russia and the U.S. in 2002 requires both sides to notify each other in due time about research on nuclear missiles. (5) Typical of the reaction from the U.S. to Putin’s pronouncement, White House spokesman Scott McClellan said: “We are very well aware of their (Russia’s) long-standing modernization efforts for their military.” (6)

**Satisfactory in 2004**

Besides the proclamations regarding the new nuclear weapons, Putin told his generals that the work of the Defense Ministry in 2004 was satisfactory and that the state would continue to support the army and the navy. But he also laid down a reform agenda for his military leaders, telling them that significant improvements needed to be made on several fronts simultaneously: 1) the size, structure and composition of the force must be commensurate with the threat; 2) combat readiness needs to be increased, especially in the permanent readiness forces; 3) the state is spending increased amounts of resources to reequip the army. On this point, Putin added emphasis on the need to spend the resources sensibly. (7) His words hinted at his frustration with the ineffectiveness of countless efforts to reform the Russian military.

Defense Minister Sergei Ivanov spoke for about an hour after President Putin’s opening. Ivanov briefly highlighted the success achieved by the Defense Ministry over the past 12 months, but spent a significant amount of time on a more detailed assessment of the many problems that still face the military. He admitted that Russian Armed Forces are not combat ready (except for the strategic nuclear forces) and that general purpose forces can only be deployed
after modification.² (8) The readiness problems, according to Ivanov, stem from poor quality of the force, low pay, and obsolete hardware. (9) Ivanov appears to be very concerned with money matters. The system of acquisition within the Defense Ministry remains elusive. Money goes into the acquisition process and very little hardware or capability comes out. What does emerge typically represents a considerable amount of waste, redundancy, and lack of relevance to the Army’s needs. (10) The inability of Russia’s leadership effectively to direct military reform caused one editorial writer to claim that “policy does not dictate changes in the army, rather processes in the army itself dictate declared policy. More than R420bn has been farmed out to the military for them to spend, while authorities merely adjust themselves to the result and increase the military budget.”² (11)

**Reform of the Defense Ministry**

Ivanov was made Defense Minister in 2001 to reform the Russian military – to professionalize, reorganize and reequip it to make it once again the backbone of Russia’s great power claim. Despite a considerable amount of rhetoric, very little effective reform has taken place. During the first three years of his tenure, Ivanov may have been unable to control events within the Ministry. Recently, however, Ivanov has garnered significantly more authority and freedom of action by using legislation, presidential decrees and bureaucratic infighting to eliminate political opponents from within the armed forces, emasculate the services and the General Staff, and stack the Defense Ministry staff with his former protégés from the FSB. With the recent round of personnel moves announced in the middle of last month, this process is nearly complete. The result is a Defense Ministry structure that, according to an article in Kommersant, makes Ivanov the most powerful of all Russia’s siloviki. (12) Gone are the political challenges from powerful generals in the general staff and services (namely, General Kvashnin, former chief of the General Staff, and General Kormiltsev, former Commander of the Ground Forces). Their replacements have been mainly more junior officers who have significantly less political clout and who have demonstrated fewer
political aspirations. Additionally, Ivanov has brought to the Defense Ministry a significant number of former colleagues from the FSB, the most noteworthy of whom are: Lt General Andrei Chobotov who was recently appointed Chief of the newly-formed Defense Ministry Staff; General Nikolai Pankov, who followed Ivanov to the Defense Ministry in 2001, lost his deputy minister titles but not the status, when he was put in charge of Personnel and Education (significantly labeled "ideology" in other sources); and Colonel Sergei Rybakov who has been placed in charge of a newly developed, centralized information and public relations department and is a deputy to Chobotov. (13) Chobotov is now considered to occupy the number two position within the Defense Ministry and strikes fear into the hearts of even commanders-in-chief. (14) With an iron FSB grip on the Defense Ministry's information and personnel systems, Ivanov can command obedience from all ranks within the armed forces thanks to the power he now wields over defense personnel. Insubordination or disloyalty can be punished by "reorganization," refusal to be "certified" by the personnel system for a position, or even dismissal from the army. (15)

To what end this new found power?

With the centralization of power within the Defense Ministry, Ivanov may now be expected to produce real reform. The obstacles presented by powerful generals within the armed forces seem to have been neutralized and the Defense Minister has gained considerable control over pertinent functions like finance, acquisitions, and personnel. Ivanov's efforts to reform the military to meet the security needs of a 21st century Russia have, to this point, been foiled by a military that, according to Pavel Felgenhauer, "was designed for waging war against the West." Our military forces can do nothing else and do not want to learn something new. (16) Ivanov will apparently be successful in fulfilling his promise that no conscripts will serve in Defense Ministry forces in Chechnya after 1 Jan 05. He has established his two "mountain" brigades and continues to work to professionalize and equip other permanent readiness forces. But the one thing he hasn't done, although it appears he could have, was to help improve
conditions for the soldiers by raising their pay. Ivanov blames the poor readiness levels of the armed forces and low morale on poor pay and living conditions. He knows that 34% of the servicemen live below the poverty level. Yet he supported the government’s decision to cancel several benefits and, while his generals and central staff will see pay raises, Ivanov has failed to secure any increase for the soldier in the field. (17) In fact, the president has raised the pay for all federal ministries and security structures except servicemen. (18) Understanding that there is not nearly enough money in the defense budget to fix everything, this seems to be one area that would serve Ivanov and Putin by more than incrementally improving readiness. It could reduce their exposure to political attack. Already the civilian workers within the Defense Ministry have begun organized protests over their poor pay and those in uniform are supporting them. (19) It could be just a matter of time before someone with power aspirations tries to convert the disgruntled masses in the Russian Armed Forces into a significant challenge to the power vertical² being built within the Defense Ministry. History, however, would not be on their side.

Source Notes:

(1)³Modernization of Russian Army Does Not Threaten the West,² Ria Novosti, 18 Nov 04 via CDI Russia Weekly 19 Nov 04.
(2)³Russia to Acquire New Nuclear Weapons Systems: Putin,² AFP, 17 Nov 04 via Johnson’s Russia List (JRL).
(3)³Tilting at ABM Windmills,² by Pavel Felgenhauer, Moscow Times, 23 Nov 04 via JRL.
(4)³Modernization of Russian Army Does Not Threaten the West,² Ria Novosti, 18 Nov 04, via CDI Russia Weekly 19 Nov 04.
(5) Ibid.
(6)³Russia Ups the Nuclear Ante,² by Sergei Blagov, Asia Times, 24 Nov 04 via JRL.
(7) ³Putin Outlines Tasks in Army Reforms,² Radio Mayak, Moscow, 17 Nov 04; BBC Monitoring via JRL.
(8) ³Russia Without an Army,² by Alexei Nikolskii, Vedomosti, 18 Nov 04 via CDI Russia Weekly 19 Nov 04.
(9) Ibid.
(10) Ibid.
(11) Vedomosti, 18 Nov 04; BBC Monitoring via ISI Emerging Markets.
(13) ³FSB Officers Are Taking Key Positions within the Defense Ministry,² Russky kurier, 28 Oct 04; WPS – Defense and Security via Lexis-Nexis
(15) Ibid and ³Reforms Cause Conflict Within the Defense Ministry,² Nezavisimoye voyennoye obozreniye, No. 42, 5 Nov 04; WPS – Russian Political Monitor via ISI Emerging Markets.
(16) ³Russia Is Losing Its Battle Against Shadows,² by Pavel Felgenhauer, Novaya gazeta, No. 85, 18 Nov 04 via ISI Emerging Markets.
(17) ³The Army and Navy as the Main Outcasts in Russia,² WPS – Defense and Security, 29 Nov 04 via ISI Emerging Markets.
(18) ³Russia Without an Army,² by Alexei Nikolskii, Vedomosti, 18 Nov 04 via CDI Russia Weekly 19 Nov 04.
(19) ³The Army and Navy as The Main Outcasts in Russia,² WPS – Defense and Security, 29 Nov 04 via ISI Emerging Markets.

EXTERNAL
The military future of the CIS and CSTO
The Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) Defense Ministers Council meetings, at the Staff for Coordinating Military Cooperation (ShKVS) in Moscow on November 25, indicated the Kremlin’s strong desire to strengthen further both
the CIS and the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) security mechanisms. These desires echoed the counterterrorism focused discussions of the 16 September CIS Astana summit. It appears that in the post-Beslan environment, Russia wants to demonstrate that military cooperation in former Soviet republics is increasing not only with its CSTO allies, but also throughout the CIS.

Since the breakup of the Soviet Union, politicians have accomplished little with regard to unifying the CIS into a useful economic or social bloc. Leaders have struggled to define CIS interests, or even to identify common national interests. Additionally, no effective treaty implementation or monitoring mechanisms have been established. Even during the 16 September summit, CIS leaders, with counterterrorism clearly a common interest, failed to forge any useful agreements.

Uzbek President Islam Karimov expressed a widely shared frustration with the CIS before the Astana summit. Speaking to Uzbek TV on 15 September, Karimov said, "CIS summits are held regularly, as if they are actually doing something. But do they have any impact? I think this is a natural question. We pinned great hopes on the CIS. Unfortunately, its activity over the past 13 years has not met our expectations." (1) Moldovan Prime Minister Vasile Tarlev, who did not attend the Astana summit because of ongoing conflict in the Transdniestr region, concurred with President Karimov. He stated, "It is an obvious fact that our Commonwealth has not become an efficacious mechanism for mutually beneficial partnership and rapprochement among our nations." (2) Kazakhstan's President Nursultan Nazarbayev, host of the Astana Summit, took the next step by proposing radical reform of the CIS in the hope of promoting real progress in countering terrorism. He suggested abolishing a wide range of political structures, which were originally designed to maintain cooperation in post-Soviet republics. He proposed liquidating the CIS Defense Ministers Council and the
Staff for Coordinating Military Cooperation. Additionally, he called on CIS leaders to act instead of just producing endless paper agreements.

Most post-Soviet countries will not support Kazakhstan's initiative. Military cooperation and integration has been the one marginally successful undertaking of the CIS. The majority of CIS countries do not want to abolish these structures, but they do want to increase collective military cooperation to ensure security. As new common concerns, specifically international terrorism, become more dangerous and frustration with the CIS lingers, it is viewed as increasingly important that the Russian military continues to unify security efforts before CIS and CSTO member states look elsewhere for solutions. With this in mind, Russia has tried to create new incentives for military integration.

**New incentives and Central Asia**

The Duma recently ratified a protocol allowing major increases in the military and technical cooperation among CSTO member states. "The protocol's ratification creates grounds for increasing supplies of military products to the CSTO member states," stressed Russian First Foreign Deputy Minister Valeri Loshchinin. (3) This document encourages admission of new countries to the CSTO and furthers military integration. It also creates the legal basis for increasing supplies of military hardware transferred to CSTO countries at preferential financial rates.

In addition to more equipment at better prices, Nikolai Bordyuzha, CSTO Secretary-General, confirmed that CSTO member states have examined a concept of forming a much larger combined force than currently exists in the Central Asian region. (4) The suggested military unit would include a joint group of troops including units from all the CSTO states¹ Armed Forces and would number almost 10,000. This group, once formed, would be almost four times the size of the current Collective Rapid Deployment Forces (CRDF), which currently operate in Central Asia. Just like all CSTO military groups, the majority of the
forces that comprise this group will be from the Russian combined-arms military base in Tajikistan and the Russian air force base in Kyrgyzstan.

Russia's attempts to increase its security influence within Central Asia are not just to counterbalance the continuing presence of U.S. and Western military forces in the region in support of Operation Enduring Freedom. Central Asia constitutes Russia's best chance to establish a useful cooperative security environment. Other regions of the CIS are full of frozen conflicts and NATO aspirations. Relations between Russia and Georgia have been tense for the last decade and Georgia is pursuing a NATO membership action plan. (5) Moldova's relationship with Russia has also turned cold due to Moscow's ongoing support for the separatist Transdniestr region. Armenia and Azerbaijan have been at war for more than 10 years and both countries have participated in numerous NATO Partnership for Peace exercises. Ukraine, despite its current political turmoil, signed its NATO working plan for 2005 in November. (6) Regardless of political instability, Ukraine still seems to be working toward NATO membership.

The ongoing political situation in Ukraine may further strengthen Russia's influence in Central Asia. Central Asian leaders have shown little capacity or desire to improve human rights or make progress toward democratizing their countries. These *NATO*² values are usually a requirement for increasing military cooperation with the West. Regardless of the election's outcome in Ukraine, some Central Asian leaders may view supporting *NATO*² values as too risky. By developing security ties with Moscow, Central Asian leaders are able to avoid such risks. Central Asian states appear more comfortable in dealing with Russia, perhaps because Russia does not require political accountability from host governments in return for military or security assistance. This turn away from pro-Western policies may assist Moscow's efforts to slow the westward drift of the former Soviet republics, at least in this region.

**CSTO/CIS military readiness and exercises**
Aside from the political maneuvering and differing national interests, the CIS and CSTO have a more relevant military problem. There is a distinct lack of complex, integrated joint training within the CIS/CSTO. Russia, as architect for the majority of training programs, appears preoccupied with putting on a good show instead of useful training. Joint CIS/CSTO training is usually a highly orchestrated, centrally controlled event to ensure success and avoid national embarrassment.

Colonel General Alexander Skorodumov, head of the Russian Armed Forces Combat Training Directorate, said "The results of the combat training year in the Land Forces and the Navy prove that, unfortunately, troops combat training does not meet requirements of the modern battlefield, and that in fact troops are not ready to face existing and future threats."(7) While this comment was about Russian troops specifically, it applies to the CIS military as well, since Russia is the CSTO/CIS main security provider and military trainer. General Skorodumov additionally claims that troop training is affected by excessive centralization of all exercises, as well as by the repeated conduct of demonstration exercises. These types of exercises are often conducted at the expense of practical training. (8)

Tajikistan will host a command post exercise of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) in April 2005. (9) "The main goal of the Rubezh 2005 joint command post exercise (CPX) is to rehearse coordinated activity of the CSTO Unified HQ, staff bodies of the Collective Rapid Deployment Forces, and other staff bodies while preparing joint stabilization efforts in Central Asia," Lieutenant General Vasili Zavgorodni, first deputy chief of the CSTO Unified HQ, said. (10) The exercise will involve operations teams of general staffs from all CSTO member nations and units of the Collective Rapid Deployment Forces stationed in Central Asia. The effectiveness of this exercise will be limited, like most CSTO exercises, by high levels of simulation and centralized control.
Conclusion
In the aftermath of Beslan, the Russian military is working hard to coordinate more effectively counterterrorism responses in Russia and the CIS as a whole. Russian President Vladimir Putin is driving this priority, desperate to show real progress in the Russian and CIS security environment. Additionally, the uncertain political situation in Ukraine has raised fears in some former Soviet Republics about pursuing close relations with the West. Because several former Soviet states do not share NATO values, Moscow may appear a more palatable security option. Increased Russian incentives and fear of a backlash from democratic reforms likely will ensure future military cooperation between Russia and the former Soviet republics at least in Central Asia.

The CIS/CSTO militaries, under Russia's direction, will continue to face an increasing threat from international terrorism, unless the alliance implements exact standards for training and readiness. The Russian military, despite its advanced technology, continues to lag behind the Western powers, because it does not make the appropriate investment in training. While it appears that Russia has had its first success in attempting to increase security integration, it has imparted its training problems to the CIS/CSTO militaries.

Source Notes:
(2) The Same Old Song in Astana,² by Vladimir Kravchenko; Zerkalo nedeli via (www.mirror-weekly.com/nn/show/521/47827).
(3) Moscow Nezavisimaya gazeta, 29 Nov 04; FBIS-SOV-2004-1129 via World News Connection.
(4) Ibid.
UKRAINE

The Supreme Court orders run-off of the second tour

Last Friday, the Ukrainian Supreme Court announced its decision to conduct a repeat run-off of the presidential elections. The decision of the Supreme Court is final and is not subject to appeal. The reactions of each political camp were, of course, dramatically different. Yanukovich’s supporters left the court room in anticipation of the announced decision. Yushchenko’s lawyers and thousands of his supporters at Independence Square, on the other hand, exploded in joy making yet another circuit on the emotional rollercoaster of this political crisis.

The Supreme Court set a precedent by allowing a repeat vote, as such a decision goes beyond the legal framework determined by the Constitution. (The Constitution allows a recount of votes, a run off in several regions, holding new elections, but not a complete re-run.) Overwhelming evidence of fraud was the reason cited by the Supreme Court for holding a repeat vote. The Supreme Court did not directly accuse either candidate of organizing fraud, but rather spoke
against the falsifications per se and against the unlawful actions of the elections' organizers, i.e. the Central Election Commission (CEC). While it is obvious that an overwhelming number of violations was orchestrated by the CEC on behalf of the government, it seems difficult to believe that Yushchenko’s supporters in Western parts of Ukraine acted above reproach. The CEC, therefore, is accused of both devising the electoral fraud and of not being able to prevent it. Yushchenko’s supporters were quick to point to the possibility of bringing criminal charges against the CEC members. Appointing new member of the CEC is one of the opposition’s demands.

The decision of the Supreme Court is an indication of its relative independence from Kuchma’s centralized power. The parliament elects judges for life, which is at least a step towards basic Supreme Court independence. (1) That is not to say however, that there were no attempts to manipulate and intimidate some of the 85 Supreme Court judges during this political crisis. Enormous pressure has been asserted on almost every one of them – they were either offered money or threatened. (2)

The run-off is set to take place by 26 December 2004. As of now, both candidates are planning to take part in the elections. Many opposition candidates are calling for Yanukovich resignation. One of the opposition leaders said that ³if Yanukovich decides to participate in the run-off, his defeat will be tremendous. His political future will be doomed.³ (3) Leonid Kuchma also seems to think that Yanukovich should give up his presidential ambitions: "Though Yanukovich said he would run, Šif I were he, I would not, from any point of view. I do not exclude that we shall have a plebiscite instead of elections, with one candidate. I do not want to say it is final but this is how the situation is developing." (4) If Yanukovich, in the end, should reconsider his current decision to participate in the run off and announce his decision at least ten days before the elections, then according to Ukrainian law, the candidate who came in third in the first round, in this case Alexander Moroz, would become Yushchenko’s contender. If
Yanukovich should announce his decision not to participate in the elections less than ten days before the date set, Yushchenko would remain the only candidate and would have to obtain fifty percent plus one vote in order to win. (5) In any case, should this scenario unfold, Yushchenko is guaranteed a victory, since Moroz is one of his political supporters. Yanukovich, however, seems unlikely to give way to pressure: "I have a choice: to withdraw or continue the struggle. I am also under pressure, but my decision is a straightforward one. I continue the struggle because there are millions of people of Ukraine behind me." (6)

Therefore, it appears that both candidates are still in the game and have already started the "second round" of pre-election campaigning. Most believe that elections conducted in a transparent and honest way would mean a definite victory for Yushchenko. Such conditions, of course, are not guaranteed. Even though he is rapidly losing power and no longer controls the Verkhovna Rada, Kuchma is still in charge of the country and of the army. By refusing to dissolve Yanukovich's government, Kuchma is attempting to demonstrate that he is still in the game. (7)

This Wednesday, however, Verkhovna Rada unexpectedly adopted electoral and constitutional changes – a compromise decision aimed at stabilizing political situation in the country. The compromise consisted of voting for electoral (favored by Yushchenko) and constitutional (favored by Kuchma) changes together. This package will limit the powers of the president and will give more power to the parliament starting 1 September, 2005. Changes in the "Elections Law" are intended to limit potential falsifications during the December vote and make elections more transparent. Even though Yushchenko was opposed to the constitutional changes justifying his resistance by alleged government's desire to limit his powers once he becomes the president, this decision is argued to be a positive one for the country, as it immunizes Ukraine from emergence of future authoritarian governments – a helpful aspect given Yushchenko’s health condition and uncertainty about Yushchenko’s successor. Nevertheless, one
might wonder about the reasons behind Yushchenko’s support for this compromise, as the political reform bill could have been passed a year ago without going through the ordeal of current political and economic crisis and without exhausting hundreds of thousands of Ukrainians, who spent days at the Independence square, supporting the opposition. Is this what they were fighting for?

The People
The Supreme Court’s Friday announcement constituted a definite victory for the Ukrainian people, who showed incredible endurance, stamina and dedication in order to obtain freedom from intimidation, manipulation and lies, which have bedevilled Ukrainian society for the past decade. Their willingness to demonstrate peacefully at Independence Square and across Ukraine, despite the freezing cold and in spite of Yushchenko’s indecisive leadership, until they receive what they rightfully deserve, is truly amazing. Ukrainians proved to the world and to many political analysts, who predicted that the weather and Yushchenko’s leadership style would gradually dissolve the crowds, that they would not leave Independence Square until their rights were acknowledged by their highest political institutions.

A former team member from the Institute for the Study of Conflict, Ideology and Policy, Ms. Tammy Lynch, who is in Ukraine now, shared with us her experience of being in Kiev during these remarkable days. A colleague of Ms. Lynch, an ENEMO administrative assistant, said to her: It doesn’t matter what Yushchenko does or does not do. It doesn’t matter what Tymoshenko says. My friends will stay until we achieve the truth. Tammy’s landlord said to her, I am for Yushchenko. I am for freedom. We will keep demonstrating until we get freedom. And finally, a dapper older gentleman on the street offered with a slight bow to help Tammy carry her bags one morning. He had a Yushchenko flag in his pocket and had a bright orange ribbon tied to his coat. He said he was on his way to the square, because now is not the time to work. She asked, How long
will you stay on the square?² Until we have victory,² he replied. ³Until we find the truth. Until Victor Yushchenko is our president.²

Young and old came together in this political crisis. It was touching to see elderly men and women bringing soup and blankets to the students, as well as sharing food and warm clothes even with Yanukovich supporters, who primarily came from the East of the country. The maturity of these peaceful demonstrators cannot help but evoke the respect and admiration of the whole world and give a sparkle of hope to other post-Soviet nations, many of which still find themselves under the iron fist of authoritarian leaders.

Chronology of events:

31 October 2004 – First round of the presidential elections. According to official results, in the first round, Yushchenko gains 39.87 percent of the vote, Yanukovich – 39.32 percent.

21 November – Second round of the presidential elections.

22 November – According to the official numbers of the Central Election Commission (CEC), in the second round of the elections, Yanukovich wins 49.42 percent and Yushchenko 46.69 percent of the vote.

23 November – More than 100,000 Yushchenko supporters gather in Kiev, demonstrations start in other Ukrainian cities, as well. Yushchenko takes a symbolic oath as President in the Verkhovna Rada.

24 November – More protestors pour into Kiev from all corners of Ukraine, barricading the Cabinet of Ministers and paralyzing the work of the government.

25 November – Official suspension of elections results by the Ukrainian Supreme Court.

26 November – Leonid Kuchma organizes round table talks between Yushchenko and Yanukovich with high-level foreign mediators present: Javier Solana, Jan Kubis, and Aleksander Kwasniewski, among others.
27 November – The Verkhovna Rada declares the poll results invalid and passes a vote of no confidence in Central Election’s Commission.

28 November – A demand for autonomy of the Russian-speaking parts of Ukraine is raised at the meeting of pro-government supporters in Severodonetsk.

29, 30 November – Negotiations between the government and the opposition end without agreement. Leonid Kuchma announces that he would support holding an entirely new presidential election, not just a rerun of the disputed second round.

1 December - The Ukrainian parliament passes a motion of no confidence in the Yanukovich government with 229 votes in favor and votes to create a "government of national trust."

2 December – President Kuchma and Russian President Vladimir Putin meet in Moscow to discuss the ongoing crisis. The two presidents issue a statement calling for an entirely new election.

3 December – The Ukrainian Supreme Court orders a repeat vote of the second round of the election throughout Ukraine no later than 26 December, 2004.

4 December – Protests in Kiev calm down. The Ukrainian parliament fails to adopt election law changes that were requested by Yushchenko’s supporters.

5 December - In an interview with BBC television, Yushchenko asks that the international community does not interfere in the new election.

6 December - Yushchenko continues to campaign for amendments to the election laws that would ban voting by absentee ballots and in people’s homes, both of which were seen as being among the most abused election provisions in the first two ballots. (8) Were seen as being among the most abused election provisions in the first two votes. (8)

8 December - Verkhovna Rada adopts electoral (aimed at assuring transparent and fair elections) and constitutional changes (which will limit the powers of the president and extend the authority of the parliament) – a compromise decision aimed at stabilizing political situation in the country.
BELARUS

Ural Latypov's dismissal

Last week, Aleksandr Lukashenko made several staff changes. They started with the dismissal of Lukashenko’s Chief of Staff, Ural Latypov, with a decree announcing the former KGB officer’s retirement. Viktor Sheiman was appointed as the new chief of staff. The choice of Latypov’s successor is rather curious, since Sheiman is the President’s most trusted associate, who (along with other members of the government) was accused of being behind the disappearances of several opponents of Lukashenko’s regime. This September, the E.U. and the U.S. prohibited Sheiman (along with other Belarusian high standing government officials) from entering E.U. countries and the United States. (9)

For many, the dismissal of Latypov did not come as a surprise. According to the leader of the Belarusian Communist Party, Sergei Kalyakin, such a dismissal fits into an already common Lukashenko's practice to let go of people who worked on assuring his next elegant victory.² (10) Following this logic, this dismissal is not the last one in the government.

Several possible reasons for Latypov’s dismissal were named by the observers. The first one is Lukashenko’s cleansing of his administration in preparation for the upcoming presidential elections. (11) The second plausible explanation concerns Latypov’s close relations with the Kremlin, which Lukashenko does not favor. Some other likely motives might have to do with Latypov taking another post (KGB Chief) or simply retiring from service in the government. Having secure connections in the administration, as well as its protection, Latypov has an open door into big business. (12)

Latypov has headed Lukashenko’s presidential administration since 2001. Earlier, he worked as Foreign Minister and as the Secretary of the Belarusian Security Council. A week before his dismissal, Lukashenko awarded Latypov the Order of Friendship of the Peoples in recognition of his fruitful work in the bodies
of the state administration (13) – presumably, a sign of mutual understanding and agreement on Latypov’s dismissal.

MOLDOVA

Moldovan Foreign Minister Andrei Stratan has declared that Moldova wishes to change the five-party format of Dniestr settlement negotiations because Russia, Ukraine and the OSCE were not able to define a common position on the final desired outcome of the negotiations and because, with Transdniestr and (Kuchma’s) Ukraine, Russia was controlling the format. (14) The settlement negotiations were stopped after Dniestr authorities closed several schools that use the Latin script.

Meanwhile, Moscow declared that it was interested in a fast pullout of Russian weapons from the Dniestr region.³ There are no Russian troops in Dniestr, and there are only depots and about 1,500 people who are guarding them,² said Sergei Yastrzhembsky to Ekho Moskvy radio station. (15)

Source Notes:

(2) Gazeta.ru,³ We’re Talking About a Criminal Gang² by Ilya Zhegulev, 1 Dec 04 via (www.gazeta.ru).
(3) Ekho Moskvy, 05 Dec 04 via (http://www.echo.msk.ru/news/219941.html).
(4) New York Times, 6 Dec 04 via UKL, The Ukraine List (UKL) #301, 5 Dec 04.
(6) New York Times,³ No Deal Yet in Ukraine After Talks on Political Changes,² 7 Dec 04 via UKL #303, 6 Dec 04.
(7) Ukrainskaya pravda website, 5 Dec 04 via (http://www2.pravda.com.ua/ru/).
ARmenia

Risking a potentially irreversible split in the governing coalition, the three parties comprising Armenian President Robert Kocharian’s government have failed to reach an agreement on electoral reforms. Prime Minister Andranik Markarian’s Republican Party (HHK) and its junior coalition partners, the Armenian Revolutionary Federation-Dashnaktsutiun and the Orinats Yerkir (Country of Law) Party, remain divided over the composition of the parliament and specifically how MPs are elected. (1)

In the existing system, 75 of the 131 members of the national assembly are elected under a proportional system, with voters choosing a list of candidates fielded by a party or a bloc. The remaining 56 seats are distributed in single mandate constituencies under the plurality system, which is prevalent in the U.S. and Britain. (2) The vast majority of Armenian lawmakers elected under the plurality system are affluent, well-connected government officials. In most instances, these MPs wield great financial influence within their respective
constituencies and secure electoral victory through thinly veiled bribery and political manipulation. Many are affiliated to and supported by the Republican Party, a key reason why Markarian’s Party constitutes the largest parliamentary faction and continually opposes any change in the current electoral system. (3) The Armenian Revolutionary Federation, or ARF, and the Orinats Yerkir Party fare poorly in the single-mandate constituencies and want more parliament seats to be contested under the proportional system, with a subsequent reduction in the number of plurality seats in the legislature. The ARF maintains that the expansion of the proportional system is a key part of the coalition’s power-sharing accord, and threatens to break with the coalition unless the HHK modifies its position to endorse electoral reform. (4) The Republican Party has not heeded the ARF’s warnings, as indicated by senior Republican deputy Gagik Melikian’s statement on 23 November that the HHK will retain the current seat proportions for the next elections. (5)

The coalition leaders are expected to meet again in another attempt to break the political impasse. (6) Their failure to reach common ground could require Kocharian’s intervention in this electoral dispute, which has severely disrupted the governing coalition’s hold on power.

In a bid to prevail in the standoff and gain further clout, the rival parties are engineering new political realignments, both within the government and the parliament. The Republicans are courting the People’s Deputy Group of non-partisan lawyers, while the Orinats Yerkir Party has enlisted the support of the united Labor Party, a small pro-Kocharian group represented in the current legislature. (7)

The existing balance of forces in the parliament favors the HHK, together with the People’s Deputy Group; they hold about 60 parliament seats compared to less than 40 seats controlled by their opponents within the coalition. (8) However, the junior coalition members could win the current electoral reform debate if they
gained the support of the 23 representatives comprising Armenia’s two main opposition groups, the Artarutiu (Justice) Party and the National Unity Party (AMK). (9) These two leading opposition groups also stand for a greater share of party-list seats, maintaining that the proportional system makes electoral fraud more difficult; whether they will join forces with the ARF and the Orinats Yerkir Party is uncertain at this point. The Artarutiu and AMK have avoided any involvement in electoral reform discussions due to their ongoing boycott of parliament sessions. (10)

AZERBAIJAN

On 18 November, the Azeri government took the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict outside the auspices of the OSCE Minsk Group by appealing to the U.N. to pass a resolution on the ongoing conflict. Azeri Foreign Minister Elmar Mammadyarov’s resolution addressed the ongoing stalemate in negotiations with Armenia, the illegal occupation of Azeri territory by armed Armenian troops, as well as recent efforts to settle Armenians in seven, of the Azeri regions occupied by Armenia, aside from Nagorno-Karabakh. (11) The Azeri government had three objectives in bypassing the OSCE Minsk Group: 1) to promote international interest in the conflict; 2) to inject life into the stalled peace talks between Armenia and Azerbaijan; 3) to demonstrate the Minsk Group’s inefficacy in resolving the conflict.

The Armenian government refused to accept a new framework for peace-talks with Azerbaijan and on 16 November Armenian Foreign Minister Vardan Oskanian threatened to leave the negotiations in the event of U.N. involvement. Oskanian warned against bringing new mediators to the settlement process and suggested, somewhat rhetorically, that if Azerbaijan desired a change in the format of the peace-talks, Aliyev should invite President Arkady Gukasian of the unrecognized republic of Nagorno-Karabakh to the negotiating table. (12)
The Azeri government has expressed its dissatisfaction with the Minsk Group repeatedly, since it considers the Russian and French co-chairs to have a pro-Armenian bias. The 12 July visit of the Minsk Group to the unrecognized republic of Nagorno-Karabakh, (13) as well as Russia’s expansive military and economic treaties with Armenia have convinced the Azeri government of the Group’s prejudice. The Azeri media, far from being independent, reflect the political voice of the Aliyev government, and make a hobby of lambasting the OSCE Minsk Group about once a week. Two particularly harsh media releases occurred during the political frenzy caused by President Ilham Aliyev’s decision to appeal to the U.N.. On 14 November, the presenter for ³Otan Hafta,² a popular Azeri news show, accused the Minsk Group mediators of a ³Christian² pro-Armenian bias. (14) In another instance, an editorial in the Azeri paper ²Zerkalo² criticized the American, Russian and French co-chairs for having ³their own geopolitical interests in the region² which prevented the co-chairs from expediting a resolution to the conflict. (15)

Upon learning of Azerbaijani Foreign Minister Elmar Mammadyarov’s intended U.N. presentation, the Minsk Group co-chairmen submitted an alternative resolution to Mammadyarov on 19 November. (16) The second resolution made no mention of the ongoing Armenian settlement activity but rather focused on much needed ³investigative² efforts and fact-finding missions to ³fairly² resolve the conflict. (17) Not surprisingly, Mammadyarov refused to submit this new, watered down resolution. On 25 November, Mammadyarov and the Minsk Group co-chairmen met in New York City in a last ditch attempt to prevent the Azeri government from appealing to the U.N.. During the meeting, the Minsk Group mediators, Stephen Mann, Yuri Merzlyakov and Henry Jacquelyn, proposed the establishment of an independent group of experts under the auspices of the Minsk Group, a committee within a committee if you will, to investigate alleged settlement building in the occupied Azeri territories. (18) The Russian co-chairman Merzlyakov also apparently told Mammadyarov that it was a ³mistake² to submit the original resolution to the U.N. (19) Mammadyarov did
not heed Merzlyakov’s warning. After hearing the Azeri Foreign Minister’s presentation, the U.N. General Assembly decided to postpone voting on the resolution due to the U.S. representative’s intervention. Taking the cue from his Russian colleague, the American representative, while acknowledging Azerbaijan’s “pain,” stated that the concerns of the Azeri government should be addressed in the context of the OSCE. (20)

While the Azeri media publicly eviscerated the OSCE, as demonstrated by a report on Azad Azarbaycan TV claiming the “USA, France and Russia had thwarted” the Azeri proposal to the U.N., (21) the Azeri government swallowed the defeat without too much fuss. In a 26 November press release, Azeri Deputy Foreign Minister Araz Azimov claimed that the Azeri government knew the resolution would not be adopted immediately, but expected the U.N. to vote on the Azeri proposal during its 59th session which will last until September 2005. Then, Azimov stated that the Azeri goal was to “draw the attention of the international community to the artificial” settlement of Armenians in Azerbaijan’s occupied territories. (22) In effect, the Azeri government never expected the U.N. to vote on the resolution, as it knew that the OSCE co-mediator countries, the U.S., Russia, and France, would never abide genuine U.N. involvement in the Armenian-Azeri conflict. Rather, the Azeri government intended to create an international stir over the on-going situation, particularly the Armenian settlement build-up, and subsequently pressure the OSCE into actively and directly mediating the conflict.

GEORGIA
Abkhazia continues to prefer Russia over Georgia
A last minute deal between opposition leader Sergei Bagapsh and former Prime Minister Raul Khajimba appears to have ended a two-month stalemate over the outcome of Abkhazia’s presidential elections. Yet the pact’s consequences for Abkhazia’s relations with Georgia remain unknown. While mutual congratulations
have flowed from Sukhumi and Moscow, Tbilisi has maintained a tight-lipped silence about the compromise.

Under the terms of the December 5 agreement, brokered by Russian Deputy Prosecutor General Vladimir Kolesnikov and Abkhaz Prime Minister Nodar Khazhba (a former senior Russian government official), Bagapsh and Khajimba will be running mates in a second presidential election to be held at an as yet undecided date. Plans for Bagapsh’s inauguration, originally scheduled for December 6, were cancelled following announcement of the pact.

Since the October 3 presidential elections in which Bagapsh claimed victory, Abkhazia has teetered on the brink of all-out civil conflict. Bagapsh’s and Khajimba’s armed supporters both hold government buildings throughout the Abkhaz capital, Sokhumi, while Bagapsh’s militias have taken control of broadcast facilities. Throughout the talks between Bagapsh and Khajimba, armed civilians sat vigil in front of Bagapsh and Khajimba HQs as well as near government buildings. (23)

Commenting on the compromise, Khajimba stated that the deal should bring the violence to an end.³ We have agreed that we will take all the necessary measures . . . in order to defuse the situation,² Khajimba said. (24) Following his contender’s lead, Bagapsh stated at a 5 December press conference that a³ cabinet of national unity² would be formed after the second round of elections and that additional legislation would be drafted to expand the powers of the Abkhazian vice-president. (25)

Unlike the disputed presidential election in Ukraine, Russia’s intervention in Abkhazia appears to have played a successful role in tipping the scales in favor of its preferred candidate, Khajimba. On December 1, with Bagapsh’s inauguration just five days away, an aide to the Russian Prime Minister, Gennady Bukayev, announced plans to suspend railway traffic with Abkhazia, terming the
move necessary to end "instability" in the breakaway region. (26) The Russian
government had already restricted border passage with Abkhazia and halted
agricultural imports from the sub-tropical region, claiming the blockade would
continue until Bagapsh’s "unconstitutional actions" ceased. (27) The Russian-
Abkhaz border (in reality the Georgian-Russian border) closure could prove
potentially fatal to the many Abkhaz farmers who depend on mandarin exports to
Russia for their livelihoods. In Tbilisi, Georgian Minister for Conflict Resolution
Giorgi Khaindrava condemned Bukayev’s threat and the Russian blockade as
"pure blackmail," (28) while adding that Georgian authorities are ready to ship
humanitarian aid to Sokhumi in the event of a crisis. (29)

Since de facto independence from Georgia in 1993, Abkhazia has been largely
dependent on Russia for its survival, economically and politically. While Bagapsh
had vowed to withstand pressure from Moscow, the pact shows that Russia still
has tremendous influence in Abkhazia and that even Bagapsh cannot stand up
against the reality Moscow represents in Abkhaz politics; nor has Moscow been
reticent in dictating terms. In a press conference in Sukhumi, Kolesnikov stated
that Abkhazia should pass new electoral legislation before fresh elections can be
held and that Abkhazia should "report" to Moscow about the "removal of
difficulties" that contributed to the suspension of railway traffic. (30)

Predictably, disagreements have begun to emerge already. While Bagapsh
reportedly has insisted that new elections be held on December 26, Khajimba
has dismissed the date as "unacceptable." (31)Meanwhile, Kolesnikov has
stated that the elections should be held in January 2005. (32) Adding to the
confusion was a declaration by Russian Duma Vice Speaker Sergei Baburin,
who flew to Sukhumi for talks, that both Bagapsh and Khajimba had agreed to
hold elections no earlier than January 13. (33) So far, no official date for the
elections has been set. It is also unclear what candidates, if any, will oppose
Bagapsh and Khajimba in the second round of elections.
Opposition to the deal is widely expected. Four explosions were heard in downtown Sukhumi on Monday near the parliament building, but no casualties were reported. Bagapsh described the attack as an attempt further to destabilize the region. (34)

Aside from domestic opposition to the pact, Georgia’s reaction to the deal could prove an equally important factor. In keeping with its strategy since the breakaway region’s October 3 presidential election, Tbilisi has – for now – eschewed all commentary on the Bagapsh-Khajimba pact. A spokesperson for the State Minister for Conflict Resolution stated that no plans had been made yet for a statement about the deal. Representatives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs did not respond to requests for comment. (35)

Tbilisi’s detachment, throughout November, from Abkhazian political chaos was intended to avoid painting Bagapsh to the Abkhaz general populace as “pro-Tbilisi.” Saakashvili’s government is aware that the Abkhaz public is unwilling to accept any indication that Tbilisi is involved in the electoral debate between Bagapsh and Khajimba. Contrary to its official rhetoric, Tbilisi may expect more from Bagapsh than from Khajimba, as Bagapsh represents the underdog opposition, a status familiar to Saakashvili.

However, as Russia’s relations with Abkhazia soured over the prospect of Bagapsh as president, Tbilisi began testing the waters for talks aimed at reuniting Abkhazia with Georgia, a principal goal of the Saakashvili administration. While Georgian President Mikhail Saakashvili has termed the October 3 presidential elections “illegitimate,” he also has expressed willingness for talks with Bagapsh, telling the Georgian-Abkhazian Relations Institute on December 3 that neither Georgians nor Abkhazians have any alternative to negotiations. Civil Georgia reported. (36) Saakashvili also expressed direct support for Bagapsh at the 3 December presentation, saying that it is absolutely clear that the opposition leader represented the absolute majority of Abkhazia’s current citizens. (37)
Prior to the Bagapsh-Khajimba deal, the Georgian Foreign Minister Salome Zourabichvili had emphasized that Tbilisi saw the December 13-14 talks of the United Nations group \textsuperscript{3}Friends of Georgia,\textsuperscript{2} made up of the United Kingdom, the United States, Russia, France, Germany and Georgia, as a \textsuperscript{3}very important\textsuperscript{2} meeting \textsuperscript{3}to avoid destabilization\textsuperscript{2} in Abkhazia. (16) However, Bagapsh stated that Saakashvili is \textsuperscript{3}the last person I would like to meet,\textsuperscript{2} indicating he has little interest in constructing a functional relationship with the Georgian government. (38)

Source Notes:

(1) Arminfo News Wire, 5 Nov 04 via ISI Emerging Markets.
(2) Eurasianet, 23 Nov 04 via Lexis-Nexis.
(3) Ibid.
(5) Armenian Public Television, 23 Nov 04; BBC via ISI Emerging Markets.
(6) Arminfo, 28 Nov 04 via Lexis-Nexis.
(7) Eurasianet, 23 Nov 04 via Lexis-Nexis.
(8) BBC Monitoring, 24 Nov 04 via ISI Emerging Markets Interfax.
(9) ARKA News Digest, 1 Dec 04 via ISI Emerging Markets.
(10) Arminfo, 3 Nov 04 via Lexis-Nexis.
(12) Interfax, 16 Nov 04 via Lexis-Nexis; Vremya novostei, 16 Nov 04; What the Papers Say via Lexis-Nexis.
(13) Itar-Tass, 12 July 04 via Lexis-Nexis.
(14) ANS TV, 14 Nov 04 via BBC Monitoring via Lexis-Nexis.
(15) Zerkalo; 26 Nov 04BBC Monitoring via Lexis-Nexis.
(16) ITAR-TASS, 28 Nov 04 via Lexis-Nexis.
(17) Ibid.
(18) Azer Press News, 26 Nov 04. via ISI Emerging Markets
(19) Azadiq, Baku, 2 Dec 04; BBC Monitoring via ISI Emerging Markets.
(22) AzerPress, 26 Nov 04; BBC Monitoring via Lexis-Nexis; ITAR-TASS, 5 Dec 04; BBC Monitoring via ISI Emerging Markets.
(23) ITAR-TASS, 5 Dec 04; BBC Monitoring via ISI Emerging Markets.
(24) RTR Russian TV, 5 Dec 04; BBC Monitoring via ISI Emerging Markets.
(26) RFERL online see (www.rferl.org/newsline/2004/12/2-TCA/tca-021204.asp), 3 Dec 04; Sarke News Agency, 4 Dec 04; BBC Monitoring via ISI Emerging Markets.
(27) Interfax, 2 Dec 04 via Lexis-Nexis.
(29) ³Russian Deputy Prosecutor Urges for Fresh Elections in Abkhazia² Civil Georgia Online News, 04 Dec 04, see
(30) Channel One TV, 6 Dec 04; BBC Monitoring via ISI Emerging Markets.
(31) ³Russian Deputy Prosecutor Urges for Fresh Elections in Abkhazia² Civil Georgia Online news, 05 Dec 04, see
(32) Interfax, 6 Dec 04 via ISI Emerging Markets.
(33) Radio Russia, 6 Dec 04; BBC Monitoring via ISI Emerging Markets.
(34) Rustavi-2 TV, 6 Dec 04; BBC Monitoring via ISI Emerging Markets.
(35) ³President Sides with Bagapsh, Calls on Moscow for Restraint² Civil Georgia Online News, 05 Dec 04, see,
(36) Ibid.
(37) Ekho Moskvy Radio, 2 Dec 04; BBC Monitoring via ISI Emerging Markets.
(38) NTV Mir Russia, 3 Dec 04; BBC Monitoring via ISI Emerging Markets.
Newly Independent States: Central Asia

By Fabian Adami

UZBEKISTAN

Election update

On 13 July this year, the US State Department made the decision to deny certification for $18 million in aid to Uzbekistan. According to a press release issued at the time, among the reasons for the decision was Uzbekistan’s clear lack of progress on democratic reform, and the country’s dismal human rights record. (1) Despite this decision, the State Department stated that US-Uzbek cooperation would continue. That has proven to be the case – due largely to Uzbekistan’s perceived value as an ally in the Global War on Terrorism.

In mid-November, Assistant Secretaries of State Laura Kennedy and Michael Kozak traveled to Uzbekistan for high level discussions. Kozak and Kennedy met with various Uzbek officials, including members of the Justice Ministry and the Central Election Commission. (2) During his meeting with Central Election Commission Chairwoman Sayyora Khujaeva, Kozak, who is Assistant Secretary for Democracy, Human Rights and Labor, raised the issue of the difficulties being faced by opposition parties attempting to register for the December 26 Parliamentary elections. (3)

Only a day before Kozak’s meeting with Khujaeva, a coalition group called Darva Kengashi, which is made up of three parties; Erk, Birlik and Ozod Dehqonla, announced that it would boycott the forthcoming election. Explaining their decision at a press conference, representatives of the three parties stated that they were withdrawing in order to draw attention to government tactics: In attempting to register candidates through initiative groups, they claimed to have
been faced with documentation fraud, intimidation and open police harassment.²⁴

As a result, Uzbek elections will take place without a democratic façade² such as existed in neighboring Kazakhstan prior to September¹’s parliamentary elections there. All five parties which have registered: Adolat Social Democratic Party, Liberal Democratic Party, Milliy Tiklanish Democratic Party, Fidokorlar National Democratic Party and the People¹’s Democratic Party, are pro-presidential groups. (5)

Although they have withdrawn from the polls, Uzbek opposition groups have not been inactive. On December 1, a demonstration against President Islam Karimov and undemocratic elections² took place outside the US Embassy in Tashkent. Although no US officials met with the protestors, an embassy guard accepted an open letter to President Bush from the protestors. (6) Reports of the demonstration contain an interesting piece of information: While the demonstrators were hemmed in at all times by plainclothes² officers, apparently from the Interior Ministry, no arrests were made. (7) Moreover, no reports have emerged of arrests after the fact. When these events are viewed in conjunction with other recent occurrences, a picture emerges indicating that President Karimov is attempting to project a benign and democratic image in the run up to the election.

First, under the auspices of celebrating the 12th anniversary of Uzbekistan¹s Constitution, Karimov signed a broad criminal amnesty. According to the document, criminals convicted of minor or petty offenses will receive early release from prison. The total number of prisoners affected is 5,040 a number that constitutes some 11.05% of Uzbekistan¹s total prison population. (8) Significantly, the amnesty involves juveniles (those who were aged 18 or under when convicted), female first-offenders, men over 60 years of age and select others. (9)
Second, during his pre-election speech to Parliament, Karimov insisted that the polls must be free and fair, and that Uzbekistan should not scorn any criticisms made by observing nations or organizations. (10) Karimov informed the parliamentary deputies that the experience accumulated in advanced countries is applicable to us, and that it serves our purposes to accept all their views and recommendations that are critical and at the same time objective. (11) Karimov moreover, promised that international observers would receive the fullest cooperation from the highest levels, throughout the electoral process. (12)

Finally, in an interview given during an intermission from his speech, Karimov stated that he believed that Uzbekistan should abolish the death penalty as a criminal sentence in the near future. (13) The motivation behind these announcements seems relatively clear: Karimov wishes to address the country’s dismal international human rights and democratic record, in order to mollify the US State Department and to ensure the flow of aid to Tashkent resumes.

Kazakhstan bomb blasts
At 7 p.m. on November 28, two explosions occurred at the Agricultural Library building in Almaty. The structure, which also houses the regional offices of the Pro-Presidential Otan party sustained minor damage only on the ground floor and first floor. Otan’s offices, on the building’s second floor, survived the blasts with no damage whatsoever. (14) Only one person was injured, receiving minor head injuries. There were no other casualties, as the Otan offices and library had closed for the day. (15)

As yet, no indication has appeared, or at least been made public, as to who was responsible for the attack. It is important to note that the Almaty City Police, which is investigating the incident in conjunction with the Interior Ministry, has indicated that, at this point, the investigation’s focus is not on terrorism, since the
explosions were not large enough to cause serious property damage or loss of life, but on hooliganism and vandalism. (16) While the country’s law enforcement bodies have yet to draw conclusions from the blasts, Kazakhstan’s political parties have been quick to throw accusations at their opponents.

On the afternoon after the attack, Otan co-Chairman Alexandr Pavlov informed the press that Otan had “no comment” on the explosions. (17) A day later, however, Pavlov, and his co-Chairman, Amangeldi Yermegiyayev held a press conference during which they expressed Otan’s official viewpoint, namely that the bombing had been a politically-motivated provocation, designed to undermine the democratic stability of the country. (18) While they stopped short of naming Kazakhstan’s opposition parties as perpetrators, they claimed that the attacks were carried out by persons or groups who do not like the dynamic development of our state. (19)

The same day, Bolat Abilov, co-Chairman of Ak Zhol categorically denied that Kazakhstan’s opposition parties had any involvement in the incident. (20) But Abilov expressed the viewpoint that that the government would find a way to accuse certain forces [of] organizing these explosions. (21) Clearly, Abilov fears that the government will use the blasts as justification for shutting down or further suppressing Kazakhstan’s opposition, especially in the 12 months between now and the Presidential elections in January 2006. Abilov’s fear cannot be discounted. Action against the opposition has been a consistent feature in Kazakh politics during the last year. In that sense, the blasts may be viewed as a perfect opportunity by President Nazarbaev and his loyalists.

Source Notes:

(1) Uzbekistan Daily Digest, 15 Jul 04 via (www.eurasianet.org)
(2) RFE/RL Newsline-Transcaucasus & Central Asia, 19 Nov 04, via ISI Emerging Markets Database.
(3) Ibid.
(4) RFE/RL Newsline-Transcaucasia And Central Asia, Volume 8, Number 215, 15 Nov 04.
(5) RFE/RL Newsline-Transcaucasia And Central Asia, Volume 8, Number 221, 24 Nov 04.
(6) Centrasia Website, Moscow, 2 Dec 04; BBC Monitoring via ISI Emerging Markets Database.
(7) Ibid.
(8) Uzbek Radio Youth Channel, 2 Dec 04; BBC Monitoring via ISI Emerging Markets Database.
(9) UzA News, 2 Dec 04, via ISI Emerging Markets Database.
(10) Uzbek Radio First, 2 Dec 04; BBC Monitoring via ISI Emerging Markets Database.
(11) Ibid.
(12) Ibid.
(13) Moscow Interfax in English, 1147 GMT, 2 Dec 04; FBIS-SOV-2004-1202 via World News Connection.
(15) Ibid.
(16) Moscow Interfax in English, 0747 GMT, 29 Nov 04; FBIS-SOV-2004-1129 via World News Connection.
(19) Ibid.
(20) Almaty Interfax-Kazakhstan in Russian, 0837 GMT, 29 Nov 04; FBIS-SOV-2004-1129 via World News Connection.
(21) Ibid.

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