Russian Federation: Executive Branch

By Susan Cavan

Putin stumps
President Putin launched his official campaign to retain the presidency with a classic "state of the nation" style address to his election agents at Moscow’s Lomonosov State University and broadcast live on national television. (1)

Putin began by recounting the woes that had befallen Russia by the time he came to prominence in 1999: "The destructive degeneration of statehood that accompanied the disintegration of the Soviet Union spread to the Russian Federation;" the demise of the USSR, in fact, was "a national tragedy on an enormous scale;" (2) "A third of the population was pushed below the poverty line;" the country became dependent on international fiscal organizations and all manner of international financial speculators, which was humiliating." (3) The debased state of the Russian Federation culminated in the audacity of international terrorists to attack Russian territory.

The internal state bureaucratic structures were equally degraded by the corruption, which ran rampant during the transition to a market economy. Putin did a remarkable job of shredding the achievements of the previous administration by laying the blame on large, systemic changes rather than individuals.

Listing his own accomplishments, Putin credited his regime with restoring "constitutional law and order;" strengthening "the vertical of federal executive power;" turning the parliament into a professional "working lawmaking body;" putting an end to "the degradation of state authority, of the army’s weakening and
the destruction of law enforcement bodies...." Changes to the judicial system and dramatic economic improvements round out Putin’s vaunted accomplishments. (4)

The goals of his next term, the duration of which was brought into doubt in the question and answer session that followed, include the curtailing of "administrative arbitrariness" in state and official structures, as well as in law enforcement agencies; the elimination of "the terrorist network;" and improvements to the social sphere, specifically in healthcare and education. (5)

As reported in the last N.I.S. Observed, Putin has a fairly straightforward campaign message, and he is sticking to it. Although he has, for now, eschewed debates, he is, otherwise at least, appearing to run a familiar form of electoral campaign. Perhaps observers and analysts can take comfort in the style of this presidential election, and not let their thoughts wander to the lack of effective competition in the field, the missing candidate, Moscow explosions, or the ever-expanding role of the security services in Putin’s administration.

A longer term? An heir?
In the question and answer session after his televised address at Moscow State University, President Putin once again cautioned against altering the Constitution to increase the length of presidential service, but simultaneously called his constitutional commitment into doubt when he suggested that an increase to a seven year term would be too much, but five years (instead of the constitutional four year term), sounded about right. Some analysts also expressed surprise that he went so far as to suggest that he would recommend his own successor at the end of his term. (6) Considering that Putin won the Presidency largely because former President Yel’tsin publicly chose Putin as his successor and named him to the post upon his resignation, Putin’s faith in this particular mechanism of succession should not be such a startling admission. Contrary to pundit prognostication however, it seems unlikely that Putin would saddle himself with a
clear successor early on in his next presidential term (assuming he wins: wink, wink). Fundamental changes in personnel throughout the government and possibly, though less likely, the Kremlin administration may occur in the aftermath of the election, but that is a typical response in many governments. Whether Kasianov stays or Sergei Ivanov moves may be the result of short-term considerations, not a four (or five) year plan to appoint a suitable successor. Putin may not be brilliant, but he certainly seems smart enough not to play the lame duck for four (or five) long years.

The Two Borodins
Pavel Borodin, an official of the presidential administration, was named to the Central Electoral Commission by Vladimir Putin last week. This is apparently not the same Pavel Borodin of Russian-Belarus Union, Swiss laundering trials and golden dacha bathroom fixture fame, but another Pavel Borodin. (7) Who knows? Perhaps there’s a relative and heir to the Kremlin butler’s secrets?

Source Notes:

1. President Vladimir Putin’s Address to his Authorised Representatives,” RIA-Novosti, 12 Feb 04 via JRL (JRL) #8064, 12 Feb 04 (RIA-Novosti).
3. RIA-Novosti, op. cit.
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid.
6. ITAR-TASS, 12 Feb 04 via JRL#8064, 12 Feb 04.
7. ITAR-TASS, 6 Feb 04; BBC Monitoring via Lexis-Nexis

Russian Federation: Security Services
By Fabian Adami
Moscow Metro Blast.
At 8:30 a.m. on February 6 an explosion occurred on a commuter train just outside the Autozavadsai station on Moscow’s Metro. 39 persons died instantly, while 150 individuals were wounded. In response to the attack, the surrounding Metro system was largely closed down, as security forces attempted to gather evidence for their investigation. According to initial reports by crime scene experts, the blast was equivalent to 5 kilograms of TNT. (1)

President Putin, who had been meeting with Azerbaijan's President Ilham Aliev at the Kremlin, immediately singled out Chechen terrorists, stating that "we know for certain that Maskhadov and his bandits are linked with this terror." (2)

Several days after the explosion, on February 10, FSB investigators announced what they claimed to be a major breakthrough: In their stated opinion, the Metro attack was carried out by the same group that perpetrated last December’s Stavropol train bombing. Crime scene investigators reportedly discovered residue of the same explosive mixture—saltpeter, hexogen and TNT, as well as a triggering switch similar to those used in Stavropol. (3) The question of whether Maskhadov, a rival Chechen faction, or another group altogether carried out the attack pales into insignificance in comparison with the revelation that Moscow and the FSB may have had specific warning of this attack.

According to a report carried both in the St. Petersburg and Moscow Times, Nazir Aidabolov, a Russian citizen from the Republic of Kabardino-Balkaria, walked into the Russian embassy in Tblisi on February 10, and demanded to speak to an FSB officer. According to Georgian Security Minister Valeri Khabudzania, he warned that Chechen terrorists planned to carry out a "huge" attack in Moscow the next day. (4) While it is unclear what, if any, details Aidabolov passed along, it seems unusual that the FSB did not institute emergency security measures. It is clear however, that the FSB has been lobbying for greater resources and responsibilities.
Three days after the attack, on 9 February, Vyacheslav Ushakov, Nikolai Patrushev’s deputy at the FSB, addressed the Duma. He stated that the FSB should be permitted to "do preventative work" in order to "stop terrorist acts early on and detain both their possible perpetrators and executors." (5) Ushakov stated that the FSB wanted a new anti-terrorist bill, similar in its scope to that of the U.S. Patriot Act, passed in the wake of the September 11, 2001 attacks. The Security Services, said Ushakov, needed the same "unprecedentedly harsh rights in the fight against terrorism." (6) Is such legislation truly necessary, and why does the FSB want it?

As recent events, such as those surrounding the arrest of Mikhail Khodorkovsky, Mikhail Trepashkin and others have shown, the FSB is already able to act with impunity. Moreover, the security service by now has unprecedented levels of power and resources far above those allotted to counterintelligence agencies elsewhere. Is it possible there is concern at the highest levels of the FSB that they could, one day, be called to account for their actions, and that therefore they will need an excess of authority, officially enshrined in law? For now, the FSB draws its support and authority directly from the President himself and may rise and fall with his personal stature. The offices of the security services may feel more secure themselves if the police state is enshrined in law.

**Was Ivan Rybkin kidnapped?**

Ivan Rybkin disappeared on February 5. He was last seen that Thursday, when his bodyguards dropped him off at his apartment. An official search for the missing Presidential candidate was started after his wife, Albina, stated that she believed her husband might have been kidnapped or even killed in order to remove him from the Presidential race. (7) Six days later, on Tuesday 11 February, Rybkin reappeared in Kiev, Ukraine. Speaking to Radio Ekho Moskvy, Rybkin stated that he had been stunned when he had read about his disappearance in a newspaper. He added that he had simply decided to take a
few days off to recover from the stress of the Presidential race, insisting that "I have the right to a few days privacy." (8)

Over the next few days, however, Rybkin's story changed dramatically. At first, Rybkin claimed that he had not, as previously claimed, traveled to Kiev on vacation. Rather, he left Russia in order to escape FSB surveillance teams, by whom he claims to be "always closely watched," and in order to meet with "political consultants" advising him on his election campaign. (9) Rybkin added that it is a fallacy to claim that the FSB did not know of his whereabouts: "The secret services knew where I was all the time. My papers were checked by border guards. Push a button and computers will display all the relevant information." (10)

Several days later, Rybkin reappeared in London, where his story changed yet again. Rybkin claimed that he had been lured to Kiev under false pretences by the FSB, under the auspices of holding "peace talks" with Chechen rebel leader Alan Maskhadov. (11) While in Kiev, he claims to have been drugged and kidnapped. Although he did not make any direct accusations, Rybkin stated that he now believed that "this election is a game without rules, and it can end for me without ever beginning." (12) He added that for the sake of his family's safety, he intends to continue his campaign from abroad. At this point in time, his wife remains in Moscow.

Over the weekend, more details in Rybkin's story have emerged. According to interviews given to Russika Izvestia, and the St. Petersburg Times, Rybkin claims that on arrival in Kiev, he was met by security service officers, assigned to transport him to the apartment where the 'meeting' with Maskhadov was to take place. Upon arrival, the officers served tea. Several minutes later, Rybkin felt drowsy, and then passed out. Rybkin stated that he awoke in a different apartment four days later, feeling "smashed and very tired." (13) At this point, Rybkin claims that the FSB officers informed him that he had been subject to a
"special operation," and showed him a "disgusting" video-tape (Rybkin refused to elaborate on the contents), designed to compromise his election chances. (14) Finally, Rybkin claims that the FSB forced him to call his family to tell them he was safe, and that they then placed him on a flight to Moscow. (14) Rybkin has stated that he did not give the full story in Moscow, because he feared for his life. (15)

The possibility that Rybkin was indeed drugged has been aired from two quarters: first, Oleg Kalugin, a former senior KGB officer published an article in Novaya Gazeta on 11 February, in which he claimed that Rybkin had been given a substance called SP-117. This drug, claimed Kalugin, was used on a regular basis by the KGB’s First and Second Directorates during the last ten years of the Cold War. (16) The substance apparently induces a state similar to that of severe alcoholic intoxication. Secondly, an independent Russian psychiatrist, Emmanuil Gushansky of the Versia Independent Psychiatric Clinic stated in an interview with Radio Ekho Moskvy that Rybkin’s behaviour was consistent with the side-effects caused by psychotropic drugs. (16) Is Rybkin telling the truth, or is his story, as Gennady Gudkov of the Duma Security Committee has suggested, merely a huge election publicity stunt? (17)

First, it is important to note that Rybkin, has, as a result of his time in the Security Council during the Yel’tsin Presidency, the contacts with which to make a meeting with Maskhadov possible. Secondly, there are clear inconsistencies in the story Rybkin gave in Moscow: why did he need to travel out of Russia to meet "political consultants"? Is it truly likely that a candidate in Russia’s Presidential election would leave Moscow without warning, and upon arrival in Kiev remain incommunicado, without access to television, newspapers, or telephone for five days, unless in the sincere belief that he was meeting Maskhadov at a secret, secure location?
On the other hand, the question must be asked as to why the FSB would need to remove Rybkin from the campaign: he poses no legitimate threat to Putin’s chances for re-election in March. It is unlikely that the truth of this matter will be known for some time. But based on the balance of evidence currently available, and the FSB’s past record, the possibility of an operation to discredit Rybkin cannot be discounted.

Source Notes:

1. ITAR-TASS, 0437 GMT, 7 Feb 04; FBIS-SOV-2004-0207 via World News Connection.
2. BBC Monitoring, 12 Feb 04; Chechen Web Press via ISI Emerging Markets Database.
3. WPS Russian Political Monitor, 11 Feb 04 via ISI Emerging Markets Database.
4. The Moscow Times, "Tbilisi: Russia was warned of attack," 10 Feb 04 via ISI Emerging Markets Database.
5. BBC Monitoring, 9 Feb 04; Channel One TV Moscow via ISI Emerging Markets Database.
6. Ibid.
8. BBC Monitoring, 10 Feb 04; Ekho Moskvy Radio via ISI Emerging Markets Database.
9. Ibid.
10. WPS, 12 Feb 04 via ISI Emerging Markets Database.
11. The St. Petersburg Times, "Rybkin: I am a ‘Special Operation Victim,’” 17 Feb 04 via ISI Emerging Markets Database.
12. www.bbc.co.uk/news, 13 Feb 04; "Candidate fears return to Russia."
14. Ibid.
15. Novaya Gazeta, "Was Rybkin given a dose of SP-117?" 11 Feb 04; WPS via ISI Emerging Markets Database.
17. WPS, 11 Feb 04 via ISI Emerging Markets Database.

Russian Federation: Foreign Relations
By Scott Dullea

Not yet time to panic over Russia's CIS integration plans
In recent weeks Moscow has taken several steps tied to its plan of "reintegrating" the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). (This may be viewed in the context of President Putin's expressed regret over the demise of the USSR.) One of those steps was a bilateral meeting between Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs Igor Ivanov and his Belarussian counterpart in Minsk to reinvigorate cooperation between the two states and plans for the Russia-Belarus Union. While the success of efforts for such a union have ebbed and flowed over the past several years, this month's talks showed a united front vis-à-vis enlargement of the European Union (E.U.) and the expansion of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO).

At the meeting, the foreign ministers signed an agreement on a program for a coordinated foreign policy in 2004 and 2005. The program, which was described by the Belarusian Foreign Minister Syarhey Martynaw as "embrac[ing] (...) all aspects of the two countries' foreign policy," (1) will focus on overcoming what the two countries perceive as the negative consequences of E.U. enlargement. Moreover, the foreign ministers stated that they will work jointly in their cooperation with other international organizations, such as the UN, NATO and the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council (EAPC). At the meeting, Ivanov and
Martynaw jointly reminded NATO of its pledge not to deploy nuclear weapons or substantial combat forces on the territory of the newest NATO members.

Additional plans for CIS integration were expressed by Nikolai Bordyuzha, Secretary-General of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) - the military arm of the CIS — when he told journalists on 5 February that the CSTO aims to establish close contacts with NATO in the near future. Bordyuzha supported this plan for unified contact with the Western military alliance based on the proximity of NATO’s operations in Afghanistan to the territory of the CIS, namely Tajikistan. He also expressed the CSTO’s joint concern about the possibility of NATO deploying threatening forces or weaponry in places close to the CIS, such as in the Baltic States. This plan, according to Bordyuzha, has already been discussed by CSTO defense and foreign ministers and now only awaits action at the presidential level. (2)

Finally, a draft document from the CIS has been drawn up which proposes regulations for a uniform system to register citizens of other countries that enter the territory of the CIS. This system, which was reportedly Russia’s idea (3), includes a databank that would be shared by CIS countries in an effort to hamper terrorism, drug trafficking, illegal migration and organized crime.

Taken as a whole, these steps and other recent bilateral and regional cooperative arrangements among CIS countries might give the appearance of an all-out rush towards tighter integration of the CIS with Russia at the helm. This would seem, moreover, to match Moscow’s stated foreign policy goals. However, fruitful cooperation between Minsk and Moscow is never a safe bet; there is also scarce precedent for significantly effective collaboration, beyond words, within the framework of the CIS or CSTO. So while the signs are visible that integration efforts are being made, it is still too early to measure accurately the actual progress of Russia’s CIS integration campaign.
MFA lobbies for acceptance into OIC

The Indonesian press has reported that Russian Ambassador-at-Large for Islamic Affairs, Veniamin Popov, was in Jakarta recently to lobby the Indonesian government for support for Moscow’s bid to join the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC). (4) The President of the Russian Federation, Vladimir Putin, attended and addressed an October 2003 OIC summit in Malaysia, where he asserted that Russia is qualified to be a member of the Muslim organization given the size of its Muslim population. Putin has also stated that Russia is "prepared to take on obligations of a financial nature that are necessary to join the [OIC]." (5) Popov appears quietly to be continuing that campaign.

Popov is head of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) so-called Islamic Factor, an office established in August 2003 to address the Islamic issues within the ministry. While in Jakarta, he met with Indonesian Vice President Hamzah, other government officials and leaders from two large Muslim organizations, Nahdatul Ulama and the Muhammadiyah. Popov explained that Russia desires first to gain observer status in the OIC and then, eventually, full membership.

While in Jakarta this month, Popov rejected suggestions that Moscow’s OIC membership plans represented an attempt to "exploit the growing anti-American sentiment among Muslims." (6) Nevertheless, OIC membership would strengthen Russia’s ties and influence in the Muslim world, particularly in the Muslim states that partially comprise Russia’s near-abroad — where Washington’s presence and activities have been a source of irritation to Moscow of late. Indonesian press reports gave no indication as to the results of Mr. Popov’s efforts.

Is Moscow wavering on troop withdrawal from Georgia?

Recent statements by Russian senior military officials might be an indication that Moscow is willing to compromise on how long its military forces will remain in Georgia. Another possibly conciliatory sign was the agreement by Russia to allow an inspection of its base at Gudauta in Abkhazia. The inspection, which
would most likely be led by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), would aim at confirming that the base is "inactive," as Russia declared it to be in 2002. Disbanding the base was part of Russia’s obligations under the Istanbul summit agreement of 1999.

On 2 February 2004, Moscow welcomed the passage of United Nations Security Council (UNSC) Resolution 1594, which extended the peacekeeping mission in Georgia until 31 July 2004. Not only does this resolution give the Russian "peacekeepers" renewed UN backing, it also gives added legitimacy to the military role of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), which has the mandate for that peacekeeping mission—although the forces there are wholly Russian.

With this fresh international support for its peacekeeping presence in Georgia now a reality, Russian military officials began to suggest flexibility in their plans for the other Russian forces there. On 2 February, the first deputy head of the Russian General Staff, Colonel-General Yuri Baluyevsky, told the Interfax news agency that, although withdrawing troops within three years as insisted on by Tblisi is "ridiculous," it may be possible to speed the withdrawal of Russian forces out of Georgia to within seven to nine years. (7) Two days later, a senior Russian military official stated, on the condition of anonymity, that such a pull-out might be possible within four to five years. (8)

While not denying the possibility of a speedier withdrawal, Russian Minister of Defense Sergei Ivanov, told a news conference in Munich that military bases and soldiers will be removed from Georgia only after the housing and other infrastructure was in place in Russia to receive them. Although statements from senior Russian military officials do not necessarily equate to official foreign policy, the comments might have been a means of setting a non-hostile tone for Georgian President Mikhail Saakashvili’s visit to Moscow. Indeed the Putin-Saakshvili talks were full of gestures of friendship and cooperation. Saakshvili,
however, was not fooled by generals' proposed timeline changes, stating in a Moscow radio interview, "Russia's policy should come from the Kremlin. That is why I am visiting the Kremlin." (9)

Source Notes:

1. ITAR-TASS, 2 Feb 04; FBIS-SOV-2004-0202 via World News Connection.
2. RIA, 5 Feb 04; BBC Monitoring via ISI Emerging Markets Database.
4. The Jakarta Post, 2 Feb 04; PT Bina Media Sejahtera Tenggara via ISI Emerging Markets Database.
6. DPA, 2 Feb 04 via Johnson's Russia List (JRL) #8045, 3 Feb 04.
7. REUTERS, 2 Feb 04 via JRL #8044.
8. AFP, 4 Feb 04 via JRL #8051, 6 Feb 04.
9. Ekho Moskvy, 10 Feb 04; BBC Monitoring via ISI Emerging Markets Database.

Russian Federation: Domestic Issues and Legislative Branch

By Kate Martin

REGIONS
Halt! Who goes where?

Russian demographics have experienced a severe shakeup in the past decade, not only in terms of the number of Russians, but also in terms of where those Russians live. The final processing of the 2002 census data recently was completed, and the results show that Russia's population totals 145.2 million
individuals, a decrease of 1.8 million persons since the 1989 census (1). [Between the 1979 and 1989 censuses the populations of the RSFSR increased by 10.7%; extrapolated to 1999, the population then should have amounted to 162.7 million and, by 2002 to approximately 167.6 million — a hypothetical population loss of 22.4 million — Ed.] While the numbers are not shocking, since preliminary results were released months ago, the confirmation of the de-population trends continues to shake demographic analysts.

The trends indicated by the 2002 census include a decrease in sheer numbers, coupled with a move away from the more isolated regions, into the cities. Almost 20 percent of the country’s population lives in 13 cities of 1 million or more; the two most-populated urban centers, Moscow and St. Petersburg, shoulder nearly half of the urban burden, with 10.4 million and 4.7 million residents, respectively. Still, even urban areas have experienced a loss in residents — down 1.6 million, compared with a 0.2 million decrease in rural areas. (2)

That loss in (registered) population apparently hasn’t equated to a loss in (actual) population, at least in Moscow. The capital’s representative on the Russian Federation Government Migration Policy Commission, Sergei Smidovich, expressed his concern over what he depicts as government inaction while the city struggles to maintain its overburdened infrastructure. "[W]e do need to begin taking measures. Metaphorically speaking, Moscow is Russia's heart. And if there is an excessively large infusion of new blood (that is, migrants), it may suffer a heart attack," Smidovich said. One possible solution, he added, is the return of satellite cities, with the relocation of individuals and enterprises... whether they like it or not. And what about persons who don’t want to go to the satellite cities? "The State Duma needs to demonstrate political will -- registration needs to be made compulsory. We need to introduce criminal penalties for illegal residence and working (I mean those same immigrant workers) including jail sentences, huge fines, and so on," Smidovich explained. (3)
Yet, while some areas have proven inhospitable to immigrants (4), immigration has helped to compensate for three-quarters of the natural population loss recorded over the past 10 years. Russians retain the overwhelming majority with 116 million persons, constituting 80 percent of the population. (5) The flow of immigration has been strongest from many former Soviet republics; however, there has been a steady stream away from Russia as well -- indeed, the country’s nominal Jewish population has decreased by more than 50 percent (from 540,000 in 1989 to 230,000 in 2002). (6)

**ELECTIONS**

**Where in the world was Ivan Rybkin? And does anybody really care?**

The mysterious disappearance of presidential candidate Ivan Rybkin created few ripples in the political environment. Worse was the general absence of uproar concerning a missing politician as the presidential campaign got underway. It is difficult to determine whether that lack of concern was due to a growing cynicism about the political climate in Russia, or to the candidate’s noteworthy lack of support among the masses (current polling indicates he would be hard-pressed to get 1 percent of the vote). (7) Still, after making no contact with his family or campaign team for five days, Rybkin emerged, and reported that he had taken some personal time in Kiev and hadn’t known he was considered missing. Given that he had left no note for his wife, and missed picking up his candidate registration certificate, rumors and allegations surrounding his disappearance were plentiful, ranging from kidnapping, to intraparty wrangling, to security services action, to public relations ploy. (8) The explanation most difficult to swallow was Rybkin’s own.

The second unlikeliest explanation is a public relations maneuver, unless Rybkin can take credit for being the least-savvy PR person on the planet. While he has returned home safe and sound, he has lost his campaign manager, Ksenya Ponomareva, who resigned. (9) And his wife has stated that he is not the type of
person who should be running the country. (10) [For updates on this story, please see the "Security Services" section of this NIS Observed.]

DUMA
Deputies annoyed that Latvia chooses to support Latvian language in schools
In the Duma, rhetoric is flying in response to Latvia’s recent decision to cut back Russian-language instruction in schools, limiting it to courses intended to preserve national identity and leaving all other classes in Latvia to be held in ... Latvian. The return of the rhetoric, in which the Riga government is characterized as "fascist" (11) is noteworthy for filling a silence that has existed for the last couple of years. (That absence of anti-Latvian rhetoric had followed the failure of an earlier policy attempting to portray Latvia's encouragement of its state language as contradicting international norms.) Apparently, the nearly-omnipresent United Russia faction has found a way to rally the other parties: by waving the nationalist banner. There is, of course, no shortage of support for such an attitude among other deputies. MP Nikolai Kharitonov, representing the Communist Party, warned that the Riga-passed bill signified apartheid in Latvia. "This is a serious violation of generally-recognized norms of the international law and a challenge to Russia and the State Duma," Kharitonov declared. (12)

Source Notes:

1. ITAR-TASS, 11 Feb 04 via JRL #8062, 12 Feb 04.
2. Rossiyskaya gazeta, 4 Nov 03 via The Current Digest of the Soviet Press, vol. 55, no. 45, 10 Dec 03.
4. The NIS Observed, 8 Oct 03.
5. Rossiyskaya gazeta, 4 Nov 03 via the Current Digest of the Post-Soviet Press, vol. 55, no. 45, 10 Dec 03.
6. RIA Novosti, 11 Feb 04 via JRL #8062, 12 Feb 04.
Russian Federation: Armed Forces

By Lt. Col. Kris Beasly and Paul Lyons

Half a billion votes of confidence in the ubiquitous Soyuz

In a major coup for the Russian space industry, on 5 February the Russian Space Agency (Rosaviakosmos) signed an agreement with the European Space Agency (ESA) for the launch of Russian Soyuz rockets from the ESA space port at Kourou, French Guiana, starting in 2006. According to both ESA and Rosaviakosmos officials, there are two main elements to the arrangement: construction of a new launch pad for the Soyuz at Malmanoury (about six kilometers from the current Ariane-5 launch pad at Kourou) and development of an improved Soyuz rocket, dubbed the Soyuz-ST. The ESA will spend a little less than half a billion euros on these two projects. (1)

Russia has been marketing Soyuz launchers for many years, but always based on launches from the main Russian Cosmodrome at Baikonur (2), while facing competition from the U.S. (Atlas, Delta and Titan), the ESA (Ariane-4), and the Chinese (Long March) launchers. Russia has won a number of deals over the years, including some (at the moment, the only) "man-rated" (able to carry a
crew) launches to the International Space Station, but this deal constitutes an achievement for the Russian space industry because it’s the first time Russian launchers will lift off outside Russia or a part of the former USSR. Launching from Kourou instead of Baikonaur will increase the payload capacity to 4 tons from 1.5 tons since launching almost directly along the equator requires significantly less fuel (taking advantage of the earth’s rotation), leaving more weight for payload, without any costly changes to the rocket motors. (3)

The key change in the launcher market occurred a few years back, when the ESA decided to rely on the Ariane-5 and phase-out the Ariane-4. The Ariane-5 has had major development problems, including losing the first launcher on lift-off. Additionally, although it can be used as a medium lift launcher, the Ariane-5 is mostly intended to be a upper-medium or heavy lift launcher. Consequently, ESA officials, seeking to fill the medium lift void in their line, decided it was more cost effective to upgrade and purchase the reliable Soyuz than to try to restart their own Ariane-4 line or to create a new launcher from scratch. (4)

While the first tentative discussions of this deal began a few years ago, it gained momentum late in 2002 and early 2003 when the ESA launched the last of its Ariane-4 lifters and Russia became willing to launch its boosters from a "European" country (French Guiana is an overseas department of France). Both sides worked on the details behind closed doors, but the first glimmerings came to light when the ESA Ministerial Council in May 2003 tentatively approved a plan to pay for building the new pad required for the Soyuz. (5) The plan gained even more traction in Paris on 7 November 03 during a state visit by Russian President Vladimir Putin; Russian Vice Premier Boris Alyoshin and French Prime Minister Jean-Pierre Raffarin signed an agreement, which both protected Russian rocket technology and allowed Russia to transport its rockets through France and French territory (i.e. French Guiana) for launching at the ESA-owned spaceport. This agreement was important not only because without French permission, the rockets couldn’t launch from Kourou, but also because
Rosaviakosmos can now use existing French ocean-going barges to transport the Soyuz to South America rather than devote resources to create a fleet of their own. (6)

The final, and hardest, details, those involving money, were ironed out and culminated in the 5 February 04 ESA-Rosaviakosmos agreement. The key features of the entire deal are that the ESA will pay 314 million euros to construct the new launch pad (with France paying half) and, in addition, will provide funding to Rosaviakosmos in order to upgrade the Soyuz to a new "ST" configuration. The upgrade will include a first-for-the-Soyuz digital control system and improvements to the first stage. (7) The Soyuz rocket, based upon Russia’s R-7 ICBM, has racked up the best record of any space launch vehicle in the world, since it first launched the Sputnik in 1957. The ESA will now be able to sell a vehicle that has more than 1700 successful launches to its credit, which include putting the first man in space (1961) and sending the latest supply capsule to the International Space Station (Jan 04). (8)

The bottom line to this agreement is that Europe will pay approximately half a billion euros to gain access to a highly reliable medium lift launcher for many years, while Russia gains another market for its best space product, in a desirable location near the equator, and should get contracts for 4-5 launches a year for the next 10 years, giving it 40-45 percent of the medium lift market, all without spending a dime. (9) As a spokesman for the Russian Space Agency said, "It is good for the Europeans and Russians. For Russia it means new orders and the chance to get into orbit from the equator, and for the Europeans it means a carrier." (10)

A global shield is a global shield is a global shield…
As expected, Russia launched a major strategic command and control exercise last week, involving a large number of uniformed troops of every service and type. The last NIS Observed (4 Feb 04), discussed the upcoming exercise,
comparing it to the annual exercise held by the U.S. dubbed "Global Shield." Oddly enough, the Russians called their own exercise "Global Shield" as well! (11)

Interestingly, the Russian military seemed concerned about the amount of press the exercise was getting in Moscow and sent the Deputy Chief of the General Staff to address the issue. On 10 February, Colonel-General Yuri Baluyevsky had a special press conference to set the record straight, saying that the exercise was "a routine, annual, planned exercise, by no means the largest of its kind, and it will last until the military control bodies and troops accomplish their training missions." (12) According to Baluyevsky, the scenario poses an "imaginary" enemy attacking Russia from all four directions (as well as space), triggering the events needed to train the troops. The objectives and premise of the exercise, according to General Baluyevsky, came from chapter three of the so-called "Ivanov Doctrine" (more properly, "Pressing Tasks of the Development of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation") that was published in Moscow in October of 2003. He cites the section "The Character of Possible Armed Conflicts" and comments dryly "if one reads between the lines, it says that the principal enemy is America and the whole of NATO," adding, however, that the exercise's adversary is assumed. "There is not even a hint that it is the USA... some other state in Europe or Asia...." (13)

However much the General Staff downplays the exercise, it will be pretty much as previously described, with the exception of not launching AS-15 cruise missiles from bombers, with Chief of the General Staff Kvashnin directing the troops and Minister of Defense Sergei Ivanov in overall command. RIA Novosti analyst Viktor Litovkin even mentioned that President Putin is likely to show up for the ICBM or SLBM test launches that will occur. In other words, it is still a major event, involving a large number of troops and weapons. It is interesting to note that Russia somehow seems to have "accounted" for slightly less than 9,000 troops in the effort, since General Baluyevsky denied that Russia had
crossed the limit of notification set by the Vienna Treaty on Confidence-building Measures.(14) He also put to rest many of the wilder rumors circulating in the press, such as that 30% of all reservists would be called up, or that 75% of all airborne and 40% of all ground forces were involved. But he did add that one of the objectives was to check on the ability of some of the new "permanent readiness" units to be deployed long distances and immediately conduct operations. (15)

No matter how it is spun, there can be no doubt that this exercise is a major strategic conventional and nuclear exercise, the likes of which Russia has seldom conducted in recent years. Of course, as long as Russia has strategic nuclear weapons, it must continue to exercise command and control of them, if only to ensure the security and safety mechanisms still work.

Source Notes:

2. See NIS Observed, 4 Feb 04, for more details on Russian space launch facilities.
3. Interfax, 30 May 03 via www.rosbaltnews.com/2003/05/30/62789.html
5. Ibid.
8. EU-Russia Cooperation Web page, 16 Oct 03
9. Interfax, 30 May 03 via www.rosbaltnews.com/2003/05/30/62789.html
10. www.cnn.com/2004/TECH/space/02/05/space.iss.reut/index.html
11. NIS Observed, 4 Feb 04, Armed Forces section; RIA Novosti, 12 Feb 04, via the CDI Russia Weekly #293, 13 Feb 04.
12. Ibid.
14. Ibid.
15. Ibid; Rossiyskaya Gazeta, 11 Feb 04 via CDI Russia Weekly #293, 13 Feb 04.

The thoughts and opinions expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the official position of the Dept. of Defense or the United States government.

NAVY

The hammer and pen: Desperate diplomacy or economic road show?

Cold War politico-military diplomacy may be a vestige of a bygone era, although there are growing assertions that Russian "imperialism" is gaining traction and endangering relations with NATO and the United States due to a renaissance of Cold War-esque diplomacy being played out across the European and Asian landscapes. Central to this effort is Russia's interest in countering the United States' influence in Eastern Europe and Asia. As succinctly put by Russian sources, "when evaluating the U.S. military presence in Central Asia in the past two and a bit years, many experts believe that the situation has changed so much that Russia will no longer be able to ensure the region's security without the United States." (1)

Despite assurances by Secretary of State Colin Powell that the United States "has no intention of surrounding Russia...we do not intend to move military
bases, the kind of bases that we had during the Cold War, closer to Russia just for the sake of moving them closer to Russia," (2) Russia clearly harbors increasing concern about the expanding U.S. influence eastward. After nearly a decade of forging inequitable relations with its former satellites and the newly-independent states proximate to its borders, Russia has employed drastic diplomatic efforts to hold the American initiatives at bay. Years of Soviet aggression left Russia's neighbors anxious to exercise sovereign will. Their independent actions are treated frequently by Russia as threats. Colin Powell expounded further on the sovereignty question by stating to Izvestiya that "we recognize Russia's territorial integrity and its natural interest in lands that abut it...but, we recognize no less the sovereign integrity of Russia's neighbors and their rights to peaceful and respectful relations across their borders as well." (3) Despite the areas of competition and the occasional discord, nonetheless there are cooperative diplomatic efforts underway. Russian Defense Minister Ivanov has recently attempted to push for greater cooperation with NATO by giving "particular attention to the issue of renewing the dialogue between Russia and NATO on an agreement on the status of forces. We consider that opting for such an agreement will give an extra boost to the development of cooperation in the sphere of joint training exercises, command headquarters and troop exercises based at training centers located in various countries." (4) Ivanov is boldly maneuvering for more transparency from NATO by requesting NATO grant "permanent access to any new alliance base in Poland or the Baltic states [and that Russia should have] facilities of permanent monitoring at NATO bases to verify the fact that the ways of use of those facilities, as we are told, pose no threat to Russia."(5) It is highly unlikely that such a desperate request will be honored, or for that matter, entertained.

In addition to engaging NATO, Russia is expanding military relations with France (and Germany). This became obvious in the wake of Russia's refusal to ally itself with the US-led coalition to liberate Iraq. In fact, this seems like a natural
response to U.S. pressure for Russia to define its relationship with the U.S. in the international community. Symbolic of the budding relationship with France, Chief of the Russian Armed Forces General Staff Anatoli Kvashnin received the French Order of the Legion of Honor during his recent visit to Paris. According to Chief of the French Armed Forces Staff General Henri Bentegeat, an additional outcome of the visit was that "2004 would witness many important events in bilateral military cooperation. The Russia-France Security Council will convene in Paris on March 5, the Jeanne D'Arc training ship will visit Russia in early May, and a Russian submarine will visit a French port in summer during a Russian-French naval drill." (6)

Russia and Azerbaijan have solidified their contract of military cooperation as well, by signing the Moscow Declaration between President Putin and President Aliyev. The core of the agreement holds that the "Russian Federation and the Azerbaijan Republic will consolidate bilateral military and military-technical cooperation, meeting the interests of security of the two countries, but not spearheaded against third countries and not running counter to international obligations of Russia and Azerbaijan [and that] none of the sides will participate in any actions or measures of military, economic or financial nature, including through third countries." (7) Armenia, which has perhaps the most harmonious relations with Russia, has called for increased military cooperation with Russia to serve the needs of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO). Clamoring for the sale of military equipment at domestic prices during a recent visit to Moscow, Armenian Defense Minister Serzh Sarkisyan believes that Russian-Armenian relations could be bolstered further by this "sweetheart deal," claiming that "the sale of military equipment within the framework of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) at Russia's internal prices would strengthen cooperation." (8)

Russia's heightened attention to politico-military and techno-military relations has also reached historically and ideologically-significant areas such as Vietnam and
Spain. Russian Deputy Defense Minister Mikhail Dmitriyev recently concluded a visit to Vietnam under the aegis of the Russian Committee for International Military-Technical Cooperation. Dmitriyev extols Vietnam as "a strategic partner for Russia, with whom it is convenient to deal...we have possibilities of interaction in the sphere of military-technical cooperation, and we put these possibilities in practice, in effective annual plans of interaction." (9) In Spain, Russian Defense Minister Ivanov and Spanish Defense Minister Trillo "mapped out a concrete program for stepping up Russian-Spanish cooperation in the military-technical spheres." (10)

Woven into the mosaic of the recent diplomatic ventures come designs by the Putin administration to renew the elite military stratum of general staff officers, to launch a large-scale exercise of the nuclear triad and calls for construction of aircraft carriers and multi-role ships as the core for a future blue water Navy. Lacking a clear signal from Moscow as to its relationship with the West, specifically the United States, and the historical similarities to the Cold War build up, make past (and present?) Russian imperialism seem ripe for debate.

Source Notes:

1. Izvestiya, 27 Jan 04; FBIS-SOV-2004-0127 via World News Connection.
4. Interfax, 07 Feb 04; BBC World Wide Monitoring via Lexis-Nexis.
Newly Independent States: Western Region
By Elena Selyuk

UKRAINE
The West reacted harshly to recent developments concerning political "reform" in the Ukrainian parliament. In particular, the Council of Europe rights and democracy body condemned the plan to strip the Ukrainian people of their right to elect the President and threatened to suspend Ukraine's membership in the 45-country group based in Strasbourg, France. The Ukrainian parliament then voted to amend a constitutional reform bill, removing the clause that would have abolished presidential elections by popular vote after 2006. (1)

The opposition wanted to retain its chance for validation by popular election. It has this opportunity now, albeit a slim chance. The votes on 24 December and the more recent one, on 3 February were almost identical. The only difference is the removal of the constitutional amendment on the mode of electing the president. In the end, it will matter little how the president is elected or even who is elected, since, if the rest of the reform goes through, the president will have considerably less power, and his or her role will be reduced to a largely ceremonial one.

The main powers of the president would be to veto laws, subject to an override by two-thirds of the parliament, and to nominate military, security and law-
enforcement chiefs, also subject to parliamentary approval. The president would also have the right to dissolve the parliament. The prime minister and his cabinet, appointed by the parliament, would hold most of the executive power. (2)

The idea of this fundamental change to the law in order to give more power to the parliament first came up after the elections of 1999 and was initiated, ironically enough, by the opposition factions. The whole concept of the reform is to give more power to the parliament - theoretically, a step towards a more democratic society. The Parliamentary system is, after all, present in most modern European democracies.

However, when tense changes are attempted in such a contradictory manner, nine months before the elections, talk of democracy is not that convincing. At a time when the parliamentary majority is pro-Kuchma and his term is coming to an end, such fundamental changes constitute nothing less than another attempt by the current pro-presidential majority (and possibly Kuchma himself) to hold on to power for as long as possible. Kuchma has repeated numerous times that he was not planning on running for president in 2004, but he never mentioned anything about the parliament electing him as prime-minister. Thus, even if the most popular pro-Western Ukrainian politician, i.e. Yushchenko, is elected president, his term will be limited to an ineffective period in office.

Yulia Timoshenko, who promised to fight the amendment bill in court, recently commented on the situation on a talk show on Radio Kontinent: "If these changes to the constitution become reality, then the 2004 society will be given the task of electing a president who will be empty-handed and without power… The president who will not be able to carry out promises made during the presidential election will be virtually discredited." (3) Thus, everything will remain in the hands of an oligarchic majority in parliament.
Ukrainian parliamentary speaker Volodymir Lytvyn claims that on the part of the opposition there is a lack of interest in carrying out political reform because reform initiators "decided first to win the elections, look around and then decide what powers they needed to implement their policy. But if we keep this system in place, whoever might come to power, whoever might become president, he will become another Kuchma tomorrow and, I admit, a more authoritarian one." (4)

Constitutional reform is needed in Ukraine. It will take the power away from just one person, which constitutes a step closer to democracy. However, the constitution is a document with which the people of Ukraine, hopefully, will have to live for a long time; therefore, a hasty and controversial way of amending it is less than ideal. Ukraine needs time to debate possible amendments and be given time to think about them, rather than simply being told by whom when, and how to elect their leaders and representatives.

BELARUS
Small vendors go on strike
In a country where 22 percent of the population lives below the poverty line, some individuals attempt to garner additional income by engaging in private business. Often, such "businesses" are mere street vendors' stalls, which sell various consumer goods.

Belarussian authorities do not make it easy for such businesses to survive. Seventeen owners of stalls at Vitebsk's Mishel shopping center went on a hunger strike on Monday, 2 February, to protest against the state policy toward private vendors. The strikers want the city government to put an end to unfounded seizure of merchandise, and to shorten the list of goods subject to mandatory certification and registration with sanitary authorities. In addition, recently the authorities decided to transform several markets into trading centers, which would oblige small vendors to buy new licenses, use cash registers and present documents confirming the origins of their stock, thus eliminating the "grey
market" advantages over the state system and threatening the livelihood of thousands of vendors. (5) Vitebsk strikers were supported by other market vendors in Vitebsk, as well as in other parts of Ukraine. The authorities attempted to cover up the hunger strike. "The local network aired an interview with a city official... who acknowledged that the markets were on strike, but denied the reports about the hunger strike," said Anatol Shumchanka, the leader of the Perspektiva small business association.(6)

This incident only confirms the fact that the level of economic freedom in Belarus is one of the lowest in the world. In a 2003 economic freedom ranking of 155 countries released by the Heritage Foundation and the Wall Street Journal, Belarus was ranked 154th now, 148th in 2001, and 151st in 2002. (7) The legal system in Belarus does not fully protect private property and, in 2000, Belarus passed a law enabling the government to nationalize the property of any individual or business deemed to be damaging the state. Natural resources, waters, forests and land are owned exclusively by the state. (8) Lukashenko also expanded the state's right to intervene in the management of private enterprise. In addition, businesses have been subject to arbitrary changes in regulations, numerous rigorous inspections, and arrests of "disruptive" businessmen and factory owners. (9)

**MOLDOVA**

**Closure of media organizations.**

The Audio Visual Council (a media licensing agency) suspended licenses of the two pro-opposition media institutions, Antena C radio station and EuroTV Chisinau TV channel, on February 3, 2004, because the Chisinau city hall, the founder and the administrator of the two institutions, had not registered them as companies by the deadline set by the council in August 2003. The two media institutions stopped broadcasting early on Sunday, February 8. The same day, in Chisinau, about 200 people staged a protest on Sunday, shouting: "Down With Communists!" and "Down With Dictatorship!" (10)
Even though the decision of the council to suspend the licenses of the two media organizations appears to have sufficient legal ground, it may be only a pretext for pulling these institutions off the air. The Our Moldova Alliance described the decision of the Audio Visual Council as "Communist authorities' attempts to abolish pluralism of opinion and strangle citizens' freedoms and rights." (11) The council is completely subordinated to the Moldovan authorities; therefore, many believe that the closure of media organizations is the authorities' way of settling accounts with the opposition and pro-opposition media.

**Dniestr Settlement**

During a meeting in Sofia, Bulgaria, at the end of January 2004, the mediators of a Dniestr settlement, Russia, Ukraine, and the OSCE, agreed to submit to Moldova and the Dniestr region a draft document, which "somewhat differs" from the original Russian proposal, said William Hill, chief of the mission of the OSCE. (12) Russia is keen on keeping the so-called Kozak memorandum as the basis for future talks. The Russian Foreign Ministry has said repeatedly that President Voronin refused to sign the memorandum in November 2003, due to pressure by the E.U. and the U.S. Voronin claims he made the decision on his own.

Source Notes:

1. AFX EUROPEAN FOCUS, 3 Feb 04 via Lexis-Nexis.
2. FINANCIAL TIMES, 4 Feb 04 via Lexis-Nexis.
3. RADIO KONTINENT, 3 Feb 04; BBC Monitoring via Lexis-Nexis.
5. BELARUS REPORTING SERVICE #50, 12 Feb 04.
7. BELAPAN NEWS AGENCY, 18 Jan 04; BBC Monitoring via Lexis-Nexis.
8. THE HERITAGE FOUNDATION  
(http://cf.heritage.org/index/country.cfm?ID=13).
10. INFOTAG NEWS AGENCY, 9 Feb 04; BBC Monitoring via Lexis-Nexis.

Newly Independent States: Caucasus

By Ariela Shapiro

ARMENIA

On 3 February 04, in an obvious attempt to mimic the Georgian opposition movement’s success in overthrowing the former President Shevardnadze, Armenia’s leading opposition parties, the Justice (Artarutiun) and the National Unity blocs, announced a joint boycott of parliamentary proceedings to protest what they termed the majority's "illegal" refusal to debate proposed constitutional amendments. (1) These would pave the way for a referendum to show confidence in President Robert Kocharian. An 11 February meeting between the Armenian parliament leadership and heads of the Justice (Artarutiun) and National Unity opposition factions failed to end the opposition's boycott of parliamentary sessions. Meanwhile, leaders of the pro-Kocharian majority in the National Assembly, which refuses even to discuss the referendum issue, appeared untroubled by the latest opposition offensive. In a press conference, Armenian Prime Minister Andranik Markaryan negated a potential collapse of the ruling coalition, while also stressing his belief that none of the opposition parties had the ability to transform the Armenian political landscape by stating, “If there are people who want to see their wishes as reality, then that's their problem.” (2)
The sentiments of the Kocharian government are not unfounded since the Armenian opposition movement lacks the unity, organization and direction to stimulate a radical change of the political system. The disarray of the opposition, evidenced in its inability to select one candidate in the March 2003 presidential election, continues in the guise of an inconsistent policy vis à vis the authorities. The opposition understands that it cannot achieve the resignation of the current authorities by constitutional means, and few of its members are willing to risk the revolutionary measures to overthrow the Kocharian regime. At present, the Armenian Pan-National Movement APNM and the Anrapetutyun Republic Party are the only forces that have stated their readiness to take decisive steps to overthrow the authorities. (3) Additionally, violence against the government by the Republic Party or the APNM, would most likely be viewed as a personal vendetta against Robert Kocharian and not as a fight for democracy. Therefore, the recent political developments are partially due to the realization by the opposition of its own weakness in confronting the Kocharian government, and are unlikely to leave lasting consequences.

GEORGIA

On 11 February, Georgian deputies approved a bill on the revised structure and powers of the government proposed by Minister of State Zurab Zhvania, whom President Mikheil Saakashvili intends to name as prime minister. (4) The bill cuts the number of ministries from 18 to 15 and reinstates the post of prime minister, who can be appointed and dismissed by the president. Ministerial candidates are appointed after a proposal by the prime minister and final approval by the president; the president also has the power to dismiss the defense, interior, and state-security ministers. (5) In addition to these amendments, there are several stark contrasts between Saakashvili’s new government and Shevardnadze’s old one. These differences, among others, are that Georgia’s prime minister would not have to resign when the President dissolves the Parliament, and that the president is allowed to keep the same prime minister for six months. (6) Meanwhile, the only means Parliament has to remove a prime minister, without
the consent of the president, is by obtaining a three-fifths majority in the legislature. Amendments in budgetary and other legislation ensure that, if the Parliament rejects a submitted budget, which must first pass the president's purview, the president can dissolve the Parliament, while the prime minister has the final approval on any law concerning expenditures either in the current or future budget years. (7) Many of these changes are a backlash to the extreme fiscal corruption and mishandling that existed under Shevardnadze’s government and a reflection of the pervading zeal in Georgia to uproot any government fixture associated with government dishonesty and fraud. However, these amendments reallocate a good deal of legislative power to the president and his cabinet members, and thus allow the Georgian president to dominate debate and dictate policy.

In addition to the constitutional amendments, the Georgian government has undergone a facelift while Saakashvili seeks to cement support in his cabinet. Some of the new appointments are: Vano Merabishvili, the general secretary of Saakashvili’s United National Movement, to the post of National Security Council secretary- a post that has responsibility for the "power" ministries; (8) Zurab Zhvania, who since late November has been Minister of State, to the recreated post of Prime Minister; (9) Irakli Chubinishvili, who formerly conducted election campaigns for Zhvania’s currently defunct political opposition party, to head of the president's administration which deals with the economy, the regions, Chancellery staff and the implementation of presidential decrees; (10) and Irakli Okruashvili, a close ally of Saakashvili and his representative in the Shida Kartli region, to the post of Prosecutor-General. (11) The position of Prosecutor-General is key, given the tremendous social and political pressure to clean up and place blame for the massive corruption in the Georgian government. At present, Gia Baramidze remains Georgia's Interior Minister, (12) Petre Tsiskarishvili was appointed Deputy Interior Minister (13) on 2 Feb, while Nino Burjanadze remains speaker of the Parliament.
The reconstruction of the Georgian government is unfinished and any final statement on its nature would be hasty, but President Saakashvili’s initial maneuvers seek to create a cabinet and ministerial staff personally dependent on him, while also allotting a good deal of oversight and legislative power to the executive branch.

Source Notes:

3. Yerevan Mediamax, 10 Feb 04; BBC Monitoring via Lexis-Nexis.
5. Ibid.
6. Interfax Tbilisi, 3 Feb 04 via Lexis-Nexis.
10. Imedi TV, 4 Feb 04; BBC Monitoring via Lexis-Nexis.
11. Imedi TV, 15 Jan 04; BBC Monitoring via Lexis-Nexis.
12. Imedi TV, 12 Jan 04; BBC Monitoring via Lexis-Nexis.
13. Rustavi-2 TV Georgia, 2 Feb 04; BBC Monitoring via Lexis-Nexis.

Newly Independent States: Central Asia

By David Montgomery

Social and political concerns: Water, prison, and government restructuring
Of late, most international attention given to Central Asia has focused on the region’s energy reserves and the threat of terrorism. However, other social and political concerns making the headlines in the last fortnight include water regulation, the prison situation, and government restructuring.

### Water agreements

Soviet directives for cotton production in Uzbekistan and irrigation projects that increased arable land accelerated the devastation of the Aral Sea. While international efforts have confined optimism to saving the northern part of the Aral Sea, the sea’s destruction has made very clear the importance of water management. As populations increase, so does the demand for water. And for countries with a limited supply of water, it becomes as precious as oil and gas.

The mountainous countries of Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan have an abundance of water and their rivers feed the lands of Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan. But water becomes a point of contention as representatives try to negotiate its regulated release from reservoirs. Usually the concern is an insufficient supply to meet the demand, but recent tensions on the Chardara reservoir in southern Kazakhstan have just the opposite root.

The reservoir is dangerously near capacity, with the Syr-Darya River threatening the Kazakh city of Kyzyl-Orda, where 1300 people have already been evacuated. (1) A meeting to discuss regulation of water flow had been arranged for late January, but Uzbekistan failed to show up. (2) The capacity of the Chardara is 5.2 billion cubic meters of water. Every second, it receives 1200 cubic meters and it currently holds 4.9 billion cubic meters. (3) If the situation is not addressed by 1 March, extensive flooding is likely. (4) When the meetings finally took place in mid-February, Kazakh, Kyrgyz, Tajik and Uzbek deputy prime ministers and water-management officials blamed each other for disregarding earlier agreements and acting without consideration for
their neighbors. Kyrgyzstan was accused of not reducing outflow from the Toktogul reservoir and Kyrgyz representative responded with claims that energy production had to be reduced by 20 percent and that lost electricity sales should be compensated for such regulation. (5) In the summer, Kyrgyzstan hopes to exchange electricity for oil and coal with Kazakhstan. And though recent news coverage has praised the level of cooperation between the countries of Central Asia on issues of security and trade relations, the accusations and recriminations prevalent at the eventual mid-February meeting show the struggles and tensions these countries have in working together.

The agreement that was eventually reached on 12 February held that Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan would respectively reduce outflow from the Toktogul and Qayroqqum reservoirs while Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan would increase uptake and leaching along the Syr-Darya. (6) At the same time, Tajikistan has dispatched 500 soldiers to shore up the banks of the Panj River which is threatening to flood over 2000 farms. (7)

Prison reforms

Prisons, of course, are not viewed as a desirable place to be, but the reputation of prisons in Central Asia is frequently atop the agenda of human rights activists wanting reform. In early February, Kyrgyz ombudsman Tursunbay Bakir uulu visited prisons in Kyrgyzstan to assess the human rights situation. (8) Remarking on crowded prisons, Vladimir Nosov, head of the state penitentiary system, argued that additional prisons and staff are necessary to improve the conditions of inmates: "A new penal colony would permit better conditions for the inmates, would allow us to treat them differently, hold them and influence them and employ them." He went on to add that there were eight prisoners to one prison warden whereas the ratio in developed countries is generally two to one. (9)

Abuse in the prison systems is assumed, but recently Kyrgyz police officers in the Chui Oblast pretrial detention center were charged with abusing and torturing
detainees. (10) In Kazakhstan, national television aired footage of convicts at Arkalyk Prison being beaten by prison officials, which led the lower house of parliament to demand the end of such abuse and request the resignation of Justice Minister Onalsyn Zhumabekov. (11)

In Uzbekistan, on 1 December 03, over 700 religious extremists were released and granted amnesty by President Islam Karimov. Official reports claim that only three out of 400 have returned to their affiliation with militant religious groups for which they were initially arrested. (12) Though those numbers seem suspect, the Spiritual Directorate of Muslims of Uzbekistan, with the Committee of Religious Affairs, has worked to assist the amnestied in finding employment.

**Political restructuring**

As discussed in the 6 February issue of The NIS Observed, the end of January and early February was a time of significant political change in both Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. In Tajikistan, President Imomali Rakhmonov, continued to shuffle personnel in what appeared to be an attempt to secure his control prior to the 2005 parliamentary elections. (13) More significant structural changes, however, are seen in Kyrgyzstan with what President Askar Akaev is referring to as the "new edition of the constitution." (14)

At an extra session of the People’s Assembly (upper house of parliament), structural reforms were approved that redistribute the duties of the fourteen ministries, and merge some state commissions into the ministries. Perhaps the most significant change is the transformation of the Ministry of Foreign Trade and Industry into the Ministry for Economic Development, Industry and Trade thereby broadening its influence.

(15) Akaev articulated the reason for these changes as a step towards the reforms supported by international donor organizations such as the World Bank and the United Nations Development Program and said, "These proposals were
submitted in accordance with the new edition of the constitution, which was adopted in a referendum in February 2003, to upgrade the state administrative system, strengthen democratic principles, combat corruption and bureaucracy, remove duplication and increase the local branches of power." (16)

Source Notes:

1. ITAR-TASS, 1705 GMT, 9 Feb 04; FBIS-SOV-2004-0209 via World News Connection. Kyzyl-Orda has a population of around 150,000.

2. Ekspress-K (Almaty), 0001 GMT, 28 Jan 04; FBIS-SOV-2004-0128 via World News Connection. The Kazakhs had proposed a 26 January meeting in Tashkent, Uzbekistan to discuss the issue, but the Uzbeks did not attend.


5. RFE/RL, 12 Feb 04 (www.rferl.org).

6. For details on the volume of water retention and discharge, see: Kabar News (Bishkek), 1510 GMT, 11 Feb 04; FBIS-SOV-2004-0211 via World News Connection.

7. ITAR-TASS, 0548 GMT, 6 Feb 04; FBIS-SOV-2004-0206 via World News Connection.


10. RFE/RL, 12 Feb 04, via www.rferl.org

11. RFE/RL, 12 Feb 04, via www.rferl.org

13. See Eurasia Insight, 11 Feb 04, via www.eurasianet.org

14. For information on recent personnel changes in the Kyrgyz Cabinet of Ministers, see Kabar News (Bishkek), 0900 GMT, 9 Feb 04; FBIS-SOV-2004-0209 via World News Connection.

15. Kabar News (Bishkek), 1246 GMT, 6 Feb 04; FBIS-SOV-2004-0206 via World News Connection; RFE/RL, 10 Feb 04, via www.rferl.org


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