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Newly Independent States: Caucasus

By Robyn Angley

Nevsky Express bombing raises fears of terrorism beyond the North Caucasus

At 6:30 p.m. on the night of 27 November, the Nevsky Express train left Moscow on its regularly scheduled journey between the capital and Saint Petersburg. Roughly three hours later, the train derailed, due to an explosion. Of the 653 passengers and 29 train crew on the train that night, 27 were killed and approximately 100 persons injured. (1) Among the deceased were Federal Road Agency chief Sergei Tarasov and Agency for State Reserves leader Boris Yevstratikov. (2)

According to official reports, the train was near the border of the Novgorod and Tver provinces—a remote, rural location—when a homemade bomb containing the equivalent of fifteen pounds of TNT exploded, knocking three of the train's rear cars from the rails. (3) The blast from the explosion left a one-meter wide crater beside the railroad line. (4)

The location of the crash site was in the forest and unreachable by major highways. Inhabitants of a nearby village were the first responders on the scene; professional rescue crews were delayed by nearly two hours and were confronted with muddy, pitted country roads as their major access point to the crash. (5)

A second bomb went off the following day, though it failed to detonate completely. Official reports initially announced that no one had been hurt and that the bomb was detonated via mobile phone. (6) In fact, the second blast injured

Aleksandr Bastrykin, the head of the Investigative Committee in the Prosecutor General's office. (7)

The 27 November incident represents the second time the Nevsky Express has been targeted by a bomber. In 2007, an explosive device derailed the train, but did not produce any casualties. At the time, an ethnic Russian convert to Islam named Pavel Kosolapov was believed to have organized the attack. Kosolapov received training at a terrorist school in Chechnya and was rumored to have had close ties to Shamil Basayev. (8) Although two suspects eventually were arrested, Kosolapov eluded capture by the Russian security services. The Russian terrorist was alleged to have been responsible for a wide range of other atrocities, including a series of explosions in the North Caucasus in 2003 and the Moscow metro bombings in 2004. (9)

The Nevsky Express bombing marked the first such attack outside the North Caucasus in at least two years. Initially there were reports that the bombing had been claimed by a Neo-Nazi group called Combat 18, (10) however Kosolapov has emerged as a prime suspect in the latest Nevsky bombing. The Interior Ministry distributed a composite sketch of a man answering roughly to Kosolapov's description within days, claiming that he had been seen in the vicinity prior to the explosion. (11) The implied link to Chechen separatists was confirmed indirectly by Aleksandr Bastrykin, who noted, "The blast resembled the tactics of terrorists in the North Caucasus." (12)

The Chechen terrorist theory was bolstered further by a letter received and published by the Kavkaz Center website that purported to be from "the headquarters of the armed forces of the Caucasus emirate." The letter described the train as "basically used by Russia's leading officials," ostensibly as a defense for its selection as a target, and claimed that the bombing had been carried out on the orders of Doku Umarov, head of a radical faction of Chechen separatists. The overarching aim of this movement, according to the letter, is "to further

expand the jihad on the Russian territory with an aim to undermine its economy.” With that in mind, “These subversive acts will continue until the occupiers in the Caucasus stop their policy of murdering Muslims on purely religious grounds.”

(13)

Ramzan Kadyrov, president of the pro-Russian government in Grozny, has named Umarov as “enemy number one for us, for the whole Russian people and for me personally.” (14) He dismissed the separatists’ claims, reasoning that Umarov in the past has taken credit for events for which he bore no responsibility. (15)

It is unclear what links connect Pavel Kosolapov and Doku Umarov. Although Kosolapov had close ties with Shamil Basayev, he may not have transferred his loyalties to Umarov following Basayev’s death in 2006.

A tangle of motives, intentions, and opportunism complicates any analysis or assignment of responsibility for the Nevsky bombing. The legitimacy of the letter to Kavkaz Center from Umarov is suspect, as are the Chechen separatist leader’s intentions, if the letter is genuine. Kadyrov’s security services have been hunting Umarov doggedly, (16) and so his claims of responsibility for the Nevsky bombing could have been an attempt to signal that his separatist faction is still viable and his leadership potent, regardless of his actual role in the catastrophe.

Russian authorities have commissioned a task force to investigate the bombing that includes representatives of the FSB, Interior Ministry and Prosecutor General’s office. (17) In the meantime, considering the two groups of suspects identified thus far, radio station Ekho Moskvyy’s Yuliya Latynina expressed the fear no doubt felt by many at the first terrorist incident outside the North Caucasus in several years: “It is either the Wahhabi [a reference to radical Muslim Chechen separatists] or fascists. The most frightening thing is the feeling that this is just the beginning. God forbid, I hope I am wrong.” (18)

Source Notes:

- (1) "Death toll in Russia's St Petersburg train bombing rises to 27," Interfax, 1 Dec 09; BBC Monitoring via Lexis-Nexis.
- (2) "One more bomb goes off at train crash site – official," ITAR-TASS, 28 Nov 09 via Lexis-Nexis.
- (3) Ibid.
- (4) "Terrorist act may have caused train derailment – Moscow law-enforcement source," Interfax, 28 Nov 09: BBC Monitoring via Lexis-Nexis.
- (5) Clifford J. Levy and Ellen Barry, "25 killed in bombing of a train in Russia," New York Times, 29 Nov 09 via Lexis-Nexis.
- (6) "One more bomb goes off at train crash site – official," ibid.
- (7) "Russia's top detective hurt in weekend train attack: officials," Agence France Presse, 1 Dec 09 via Lexis-Nexis.
- (8) "TV profiles 'Russia's Bin Ladin,'" Channel One, 1936 gmt, 3 Dec 09; BBC Monitoring via Lexis-Nexis.
- (9) Ibid.
- (10) "26 killed in train blast between Moscow and St. Petersburg," Trud, 30 Nov 09; RusData Dialine via Lexis-Nexis.
- (11) David Nowak, "Russian train toll hits 26; police release sketch," Associated Press, 30 Nov 09 via Lexis-Nexis.
- (12) "Second blast on Nevsky Express crash scene aimed to harm detectives – Bastrykin," ITAR-TASS, 1 Dec 09 via Lexis-Nexis.
- (13) "Chechen rebels claim responsibility for Russia train blast," Kavkaz Center, 2 Dec 09; BBC Monitoring via Lexis-Nexis.
- (14) "Kadyrov doubtful of Umarov's involvement in train bombing," RIA Novosti, 2 Dec 09 via Lexis-Nexis.
- (15) "Umarov to be neutralized regardless – Chechen leader," ITAR TASS, 2 Dec 09 via Lexis-Nexis.
- (16) "Chechen president says militant leader most likely still alive," Interfax, 24 Nov 09; BBC Monitoring via Lexis-Nexis.

(17) "19 out of 26 Nevsky Express victims identified, 26 passengers missing," ITAR-TASS, 29 Nov 09 via Lexis-Nexis.

(18) "Train crash result of 'disintegration of the state' - Russian radio commentator," Ekho Moskv, 28 Nov 09; BBC Monitoring via Lexis-Nexis.

Newly Independent States: Central Asia

By Monika Shepherd

Uzbek-Tajik energy/water crisis continues

True to its previous threats, on December 1 the Uzbek government officially suspended its participation in the Central Asian Unified Power System (CA-UPS, sometimes also referred to as the Unified Energy System of Central Asia), thereby leaving both the Tajik and Kyrgyz governments to find alternate energy supplies before the worst of the winter cold sets in. (1) Although both Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan are able to generate much of their own electricity, mainly through the use of hydropower, both countries also have had to rely on Uzbekistan's participation in the Central Asian power grid in order to transmit electricity to certain regions.

Insufficient water levels in both the Toktogul (Kyrgyz) and Norak (Tajik) reservoirs coupled with an unusually harsh winter caused widespread blackouts in Central Asia during the winter of 2007-2008. Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan were the hardest hit by the blackouts, forcing both governments to draw so heavily on their water reserves that Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan suffered shortages in irrigation water in the spring and summer of 2008. In order to prevent a repeat of the situation the following year, the various Central Asian governments signed agreements in October 2008 intended to regulate the supply of both water and electricity. In order to reduce both Tajikistan's and Kyrgyzstan's reliance on hydropower temporarily and allow both countries' main reservoirs to be replenished, the Turkmen government (which withdrew from the CA-UPS in the

1990s) pledged to sell them additional electrical power, while Uzbekistan's deputy prime minister guaranteed the uninterrupted transmission of the Turkmen-generated electricity through that portion of the CA-UPS which crosses Uzbekistan. (2)

Uzbekistan's recent withdrawal from this Soviet-era power grid means that Turkmen electrical power can no longer reach Tajik or Kyrgyz territory. The CA-UPS links energy installations in all five Central Asian states, integrating 80 power plants and connecting them to a common power transmission system, with the coordination center located in Tashkent. (3) The Uzbek government's decision to cease participating in this system places Tajikistan, which can face power shortages of 3-4 billion kilo watts per hour during the coldest winter months, in a very precarious position. (4)

Tajik officials allege that Tashkent's decision to withdraw from the CA-UPS is politically motivated, while Uzbek authorities insist that they were forced to disconnect from the grid or risk electricity cutbacks to domestic industries and residences. In an attempt to counteract the negative publicity generated by its government's recent actions, the Uzbek foreign ministry released a public statement that claims participation in the CA-UPS had become untenable: "With the collapse of the U.S.S.R., the so called Central Asian unified energy system became unmanageable and has been run on good faith," due to the fact that: "Certain countries have constantly breached the established norms on transmission and withdrawal of electricity supplies from the network, which has led to disastrous consequences." The latter statement undoubtedly refers to Tajikistan's repeated and illegal siphoning of electrical power, (5) an action that has angered not only authorities in Tashkent, but also their counterparts in Astana. In fact, Kazakh officials also have threatened repeatedly to leave the CA-UPS, but have not done so as of yet.

The Uzbek government also has cited Tajikistan's unpaid transit fees for the use of its transmission lines as a reason not only for withdrawing from the common power grid, but also for cutting off the supply of Turkmen gas. These power cuts usually have occurred during the winter months, when the loss of electricity is felt most keenly.

Further adding to Tajikistan's energy woes is the fact that the management of the Sangtuda-1 hydroelectric power plant (HPP) decided to switch its operations to "restriction mode," shutting down all but one of the plant's four power generation units. The plant's managers originally had threatened to suspend operations entirely on December 1 if Barq-i Tojik (the state electric company) did not pay the back debts it owes. (6) Barq-i Tojik's chairman has promised to begin paying part of the \$14.5 million debt by the end of this month, but Sangtuda-1's management seems skeptical. (7)

Unless the Uzbek government can be persuaded to negotiate some sort of compromise over the use of its power transmission lines, Tajikistan soon may experience the worst energy shortages it has seen to date. On December 6, REGNUM-Novosti reported that according to anonymous sources in the Uzbek government, Tashkent would be willing to discuss the issue with the Tajik government and consider setting conditions for the continued supply of electricity to Tajikistan across its territory. (8) Thus far, however, no such negotiations seem to be underway.

Instead, President Emomali Rahmon has renewed the push to complete the construction of the Roghun dam and hydropower stations as quickly as possible. Faced with the fact that no wealthy foreign investors seem willing to jump into the breach and offer to underwrite the project, the Tajik president is calling on his own citizens to finance it. Every family is to donate 3,000 somoni (\$689.18) for the project and will receive an unspecified number of shares in return. A total investment of \$600 million is believed to be sufficient to get the first of six

planned hydropower stations up and running at Roghun. The president stated that poor families would be exempt from this investment requirement, but did not define what income levels he considers eligible for the exemption. The State Statistics Committee defines 53% of the country's population as poor and 17% as critically poor (living on less than \$2 per day), (9) but if these criteria are used to grant the exemptions, then it is unlikely that the president will be able to collect the full \$600 million. Nonetheless, collection of the funds already has begun. On December 8 the head the National Bank of Tajikistan's branch in Kulob reported that employees at all seven banks in the region had given up one day's wages, totaling 15,000 somoni (approximately\$3,445), to invest in the Roghun project. (10)

Once the Roghun project's six power generating stations are all on-line, Tajikistan could be in a position to export electrical power, a fact that President Rahmon touts at every opportunity. And perhaps, if he can scrape the funds together to get one station functioning, other, corporate investors will be enticed to provide financing for the additional stations. Another obstacle to foreign investment is Tajikistan's miserable rating on international indexes measuring corruption and transparency, two vital criteria in the world of finance and investment. Thus far, the Tajik government has done little to address these problems.

Two of the most significant impediments to the completion of the Roghun project are within Central Asia itself: Uzbek opposition not only to the Roghun plan, but to the construction of any new hydropower installations; and the water supply itself, which in recent years simply does not seem adequate to meet both the region's energy and irrigation needs. It remains to be seen whether the latest episode in the water/energy crisis brings results toward a real, permanent resolution, or just one more temporary fix.

Source Notes:

- (1) "Uzbekistan withdraws from Unified Energy System of Central Asia," 1 Dec 09, ITAR-TASS via Lexis-Nexis Academic.
- (2) "Five Central Asian States say yes to coordinated water management," 20 Oct 08, Kazakhstan General Newswire; Interfax via Lexis-Nexis Academic.
- (3) "Uzbekistan withdraws from Unified Energy System of Central Asia," *ibid.*
- (4) "Uzbekistan withdraws from Central Asian power grid," 2 Dec 09, Xinhua via Lexis-Nexis Academic.
- (5) Peter Leonard, "Uzbeks rebut critics of pullout from power grid," 3 Dec 09, Associated Press via Lexis-Nexis Academic.
- (6) "Russian-controlled power plant switches to "restriction mode" over Tajik debt," 1 Dec 09, Asia-Plus; BBC Worldwide Monitoring via Lexis-Nexis Academic.
- (7) "Tajik company to pay off debt to Russia-built power plant by 31 Mar 2010," 18 Nov 09, Asia-Plus; BBC Worldwide Monitoring via Lexis-Nexis Academic.
- (8) "Uzbekistan Set To Talk With Tajikistan On Parallel Work Of Power System," 8 Dec 09, Asia Pulse via Lexis-Nexis Academic.
- (9) "President Rakhmon urges Tajik families to buy Roguna HPP shares," 2 Dec 09, Central Asia General Newswire; Interfax via Lexis-Nexis Academic.
- (10) "Banks in Kulob transfer 15,000 somoni to Roghun HPP bank account," 8 Dec 09, The Times of Central Asia via Lexis-Nexis Academic.

Newly Independent States: Western Region

By Tammy Lynch

MOLDOVA

In Moldova, bright shades of Ukraine

Ukrainians can stop feeling alone. Another country in the center of Europe has joined the "elections all year every year" club.

On 7 December, Moldova's parliament failed by seven votes to approve Marian Lupo as the next President of Moldova (53 out of a needed constitutional majority of 61). (1) While the entire governing coalition of "liberal" parties voted together, the coalition controls only a simple, not constitutional, majority. The Alliance for European Integration (AEI) had hoped for the support of seven members of the former ruling—now opposition—Communist Party. Those votes did not materialize. This failure automatically triggers new parliamentary elections in the former Soviet Union's only parliamentary-presidential republic. The election would be the third since April, with the continual sticking point being the choice of a head of state.

Neighboring Ukraine also faced three parliamentary elections in 2006 and 2007, when the members of various governing parties/coalitions either were not able to work together or were not able to work with President Viktor Yushchenko. In Ukraine's case, the biggest political battles came over the position of the prime minister—not the president. But, despite the battles being over different positions, the dynamics of disunity and political stagnation are similar in both countries.

Like Ukraine, the vague nature of Moldova's constitutional requirement to hold a new election allows for significant wiggle-room by politicians eager to use it for their own benefit. The biggest wiggle would be a change in the constitution itself, and there already is significant talk of such a move. (2)

Anticipating similar results to those achieved in the last election, members of Moldova's AEI suggest two scenarios for amending the constitution prior to the next election: 1) a national referendum to institute a simple majority vote for election of the president, or 2) a national referendum to reinstate the direct popular election of a president. The latter appears only to be supported by candidate Lupo and his Democratic Party, which is now thought to be the strongest in Moldova.

Regarding the timing for the special parliamentary election, there appears to be no constitutional limit placed on the time between the failed vote and the election. There is a stipulation, however, that repeat elections cannot be held within a 12-month period. Therefore, an election cannot be held in Moldova until late July 2010 – but, it is possible the AEI may attempt to put off the election even longer.

(3)

If a new election is held, there is no reason to believe that Moldova's historically fractured and self-destructive parties would be able to do what they have failed to do in the past – elect a president. Moreover, there is no reason to believe that the parties could do the one thing they did manage to do this year – unite in a governing coalition behind one candidate. This is particularly true given the apparent divergence of preferred next steps among the coalition members. Clearly, there is significant disagreement on how to proceed – if, when and how to hold the election and what coalition format to retain (if any).

Moldova's politicians would do well to learn from Ukraine's experience. In 2004, prior to the "Orange Revolution," many of Ukraine's political leaders appeared to understand that personal ambitions must be put aside for the good of the country. They united behind then-Presidential candidate Viktor Yushchenko. But, alas, this harmony was just an illusion. Temporary unity gave way to a series of elections that—instead of ending stagnation—actually froze it in place.

Although Ukraine's third election in 2007 produced a durable government and installed a prime minister who remains in power, the country's economy never recovered from the time wasted on elections, and its politicians never managed to figure out how to work together effectively again. Important legislation has remained stalled for years, while politicians have battled each other using unproven and often ridiculous so-called kompromat. With the possibility of elections around every corner, cooperation cannot be chanced.

In fact, it is possible that the government's opponents could have forced yet another parliamentary election in Ukraine were it not for the catastrophic economic crisis and corresponding inability to fund a new election. They may still attempt to do so in January, between the first and second rounds of the upcoming presidential election. Such a move would underscore the irrational, election-focused mentality that pervades Ukrainian political life, while proving that repeat elections only are successful if politicians will accept their outcomes and get to work – together.

Source Notes:

(1) Xinhau, 1839 GMT, 7 Dec 09 via http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2009-12/07/content_12605770.htm.

(2) M&C Europe News, 1108 GMT, 7 Dec 09 via http://www.monstersandcritics.com/news/europe/news/article_1517515.php/Moldovan-parliament-fails-to-elect-president-crisis-deepens.

(3) "AEI to amend constitution to break presidential election deadlock," Moldova.org, 11 Nov 09 (sic) via <http://politicom.moldova.org/news/aei-to-amend-constitution-to-break-presidential-election-deadlock-204391-eng.html>.

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