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Russian Federation: Executive Branch

By Michael Comstock and Scott Dullea

Putin meets with RUIE

In late February, President Vladimir Putin gave increased priority to fighting corruption. At the sixth meeting of the Russian Union of Industrialists and Entrepreneurs (RUIE), Putin said that he sought to halt corruption by making adherence to the rules more profitable than breaking them. Putin and the RUIE agreed that such a system could be created through administrative and tax reform. (VREMYA NOVOSTEI, 20 Feb 03; via ISI Emerging Markets Database)

It is ironic that such considerations would arise at a meeting with the nation's largest corporations, since they are believed generally to be one of the principal causes of large-scale corruption. It is unlikely that Putin intends the government to infringe upon their influence. Governmental, administrative and tax reforms are intended only to make the system less complicated, perhaps solving the most glaring examples of low-level corruption, but leaving those represented in the RUIE with their hands untied.

Presidential reelection

Alexander Veshnyakov, head of the Central Election Commission, announced recently that the presidential reelection campaign will begin on 10 December. There are virtually no contenders in Russia's political arena to challenge the incumbent president. The election itself is expected to be a lackluster event without the spectacles of jet airplane rides, speeches on tanks and other memorable strategies from the recent past. In order for Putin to face a serious challenge in this election, his popularity (real and engineered) would need to be

shaken by an event of major magnitude. (ROSSIISKAYA GAZETA, 22 Feb 03; via ISI Emerging Markets Database)

Voloshin's worth

Recently dispatched to America, the head of the presidential administration and Kremlin heavyweight Alexander Voloshin has seen his stock within Putin's circle remain high. Voloshin is not viewed as one of Putin's many St. Petersburgers; rather his connections are to the ousted Yel'tsin "family" that populated the former administration. This makes his continued importance a rarity in Putin's circle. His current assignment -- negotiations with the United States, most likely centered around the confrontation with Iraq — indicates that Voloshin is firmly entrenched within the Russian political arena. Indeed, it is likely that he has gained a great deal of influence on foreign policy matters at the expense of the foreign ministry. (NEZAVISIMAYA GAZETA, 26 Feb 03; via ISI Emerging Markets Database)

The battle against centralization

A conflict brewing in the Republic of Bashkortostan represents the resistance of the provinces to Kremlin centralization attempts. This key element of President Putin's strategy for the Russian Federation has included the creation of super-regions and mechanisms that allow him to remove governors and dismiss regional parliaments. Budget allocations also have changed fundamentally in favor of the center and at the expense of the regions. Additionally these activities augment federal control of regional court and police systems. (THE CARNEGIE ENDOWMENT Meeting Report, 25 Oct 00) Other evidence of centralization includes the Kremlin's attempt to merge individual regions, such as the Perm Region and the Komi-Permyak Autonomous Area, which may be decided in a referendum in December 2003. (WWW.GAZETA.RU, 18 Feb 03; via Johnson's Russia List)

Meanwhile, Putin is urging legislators to change Russian laws in order to divide and clarify responsibilities between the state, the regions and the municipalities. (See Domestic Issues & Legislative Branch for further discussion.)

Bashkortostan frequently has been at the forefront of the current struggle between the federal center and the periphery; the republic's president, Murtaza Rakhimov, regularly challenges Putin for power in the region. (MOSKOVSKIYE NOVOSTI, 4 Feb 03; FBIS-SOV-2003-0205, via World News Connection)

According to the treaty with the Russian Federation, the Republic of Bashkortostan, with a population of four million, is an independent participant in international economic relations. Attaining some level of autonomy is critical to its attempts to retain control over the region's annual output potential of 30 million tons of oil. When he became the republic's president, Rakhimov pledged prosperity for his people, claiming that only Bashkortostan's independence from Moscow would make the republic wealthy. (MOSKOVSKIYE NOVOSTI, 4 Feb 03; FBIS-SOV-2003-0205, via World News Connection) However, oil output dwindled along with Russia's economy in the 1990s, and now Bashkortostan ranks seventh in industrial potential and only 28th in Russian living standards. Rakhimov, who has maintained his popularity with nationalist calls for independence from the Kremlin, is facing further threats to his continued hold on power. (THE NEW TIMES, Feb 03; via www.newtimes.ru)

On 6 December 2002, the Russian Constitutional Court gave the Republic of Bashkortostan six months to bring its local legislation into accord with federal laws. The decision followed a similar decree from the chairman of Bashkortostan's Supreme Court, Marat Vakilov, in March of 2002 after the republic's deputy chief prosecutor-general, Aleksandr Zvyaginstev, pointed out that, in more than 40 instances, the region's constitution did not correspond to federal law. The republic's judges passed a vote of no confidence against Vakilov, calling him unfit for office. However, Vakilov was appointed by the

Kremlin and cannot be removed by the regional authorities. Frustrated by his inability to free the republic's court system from Kremlin influences, Rakhimov apparently has been trying to force Vakilov out of office. The republic's president first asked Vakilov to step down voluntarily; after the latter refused, he and his family reportedly were subjected to a harassment campaign. He has been accused of corruption, his son has been drafted into the army and his brother has been brought to court. (RFE/RL NEWSLINE, 28 Feb 03)

Meanwhile, President Putin met with Rakhimov to discuss fixing legal discrepancies. (INTERFAX, 30 Apr 02; via RFE/RL Newsline) Reportedly many of the noncompliant elements of the legislation have been brought into line, although the presidential envoy to the Volga Federal District, Sergei Kirienko, appealed to Putin in January to pressure Rakhimov for payment of money owed to the federal treasury. (RFE/RL RUSSIAN POLITICAL WEEKLY, 13 Feb 03)

Currently Vakilov remains in his job, although public demonstrations and boycotts against him continue. Some believe this is a battle against strengthening the "power vertical" and against surrendering more authority to the center. (REN TV, 27 Feb 03; BBC Monitoring, via Lexis-Nexis) Other observers assert that the real reason Rakhimov wants Vakilov gone is that the presence of the Kremlin's judicial watchdog in the republic prevents the president from changing the laws so he can run for a third term. (THE NEW TIMES, Feb 03; via www.newtimes.ru) Regardless of Rakhimov's real motives, Bashkortostan remains a threat to the Kremlin's centralization plans: If Putin fails to influence the elections there later this year and pull the republic closer to the center, he also likely will fail in other regions, thus allowing them to evade Moscow's grip. However, Bashkortostan is weaker than several other "national republics," since the titular nationality, Bashkirs, numbered fewer than 22% of the population in the 1989 census and may not have gained significantly since.

Russian Federation: Security Services

By Scott Fleeher

The versatile OMON: 'liquidators,' rent-a-cops, or both?

Notwithstanding the relative success of the FSB in maintaining its coveted center stage position at the Security Services Circus, recent activities by the OMON (special troops of the Ministry of Interior, MVD) have surfaced with increasing frequency in Russian and international media. The so-called "crack troops" of the MVD became notorious for their role in the Tbilisi massacre of 9 April 1989 (as well as other bloody suppressions of national independence movements at that time) and, of late, have found their way into the headlines for activities ranging from "liquidation" of Chechen rebels, to providing routine stadium security for soccer matches in Moscow. (ITAR-TASS, 1154 GMT, 15 Feb 03; FBIS-SOV-2003-0215, via World News Connection)

The recent string of "liquidations" in Chechnya merits scrutiny. One instance of the latter was the killing of 38-year-old Daud Masaipov in the village of Mesker-Yurt. An unidentified source from the Chechen republic's local security service headquarters explained to the media that "an active member of an illegal armed formation" had been killed by security service officers. (ITAR-TASS, 1432 GMT, 15 Feb 03; FBIS-SOV-2003-0215, via World News Connection) Local residents reportedly had provided information useful in Masaipov's apprehension, the source said, adding that the suspect had "put up armed resistance," which had resulted in his death.

A second "extremist" was killed by OMON troops during a raid in Grozny during the same period. Information provided by participants in the raid indicates that the man had failed to show his identification after being ordered to do so by a policeman, and that he had subsequently "opened fire with a pistol." (ITAR-TASS, 1432 GMT, 15 Feb 03; FBIS-SOV-2003-0215, via World News Connection) Following his "liquidation," an identification card found on the body

revealed the deceased to be Rustam Arsanukaev. A further search exposed a pistol, spyglass and notebook containing unspecified names and addresses. During further special operations in Grozny, four rebels were detained in connection with unspecified "grave crimes." (ITAR-TASS, 1432 GMT, 15 Feb 03; FBIS-SOV-2003-0215, via World News Connection) Other reported successes of this particular commando sweep included the seizure (and liquidation) of several caches of small arms ammunition, grenades, assault rifles, artillery shells and explosives.

Only 10 days later, elements of the OMON commandos found themselves employed in quite a different fashion. A spokesman for the Moscow police said that approximately 200 OMON troops and 50 mounted policeman would augment a force of well over 2,000 regular Moscow police during a soccer match to be played between Russian and Italian teams the following week. (ITAR-TASS, 0839 GMT, 25 Feb 03; FBIS-SOV-2003-0225, via World News Connection)

Although it is not clear precisely where actions ranging from "liquidation" to low-level guarding at soccer matches fit into Putin's overall concept of security, it is apparent that representatives from the OMON either were not present, or possibly napping, during recent pep talks by the boss regarding respect for human rights. (THE NIS OBSERVED, 5 Feb 03)

Russian Federation: Foreign Relations

By Ansel Stein

Apparatchik to the rescue

The Putin administration's latest move in its pro-Iraqi campaign was a (recently revealed) secret trip by former Prime Minister Yevgeny Primakov to Baghdad. Currently a Duma deputy, Primakov's selection as presidential envoy is somewhat surprising, given the fact that he was considered Putin's main rival not

so very long ago. However, Primakov, who was a KGB operative (before Putin's time) and previously headed Russian foreign intelligence, is the ideal candidate since he had close ties to Iraq's dictator, displayed prominently on the eve of "Operation Desert Storm."

Analysts have offered various motivations for Primakov's trip. The Times suggested that it was designed to secure last-minute business concessions from Iraq, to take advantage of Baghdad's need for Russian support in the face of impending military action by the US, Britain and others. [THE TIMES (London), 24 Feb 03; via Lexis-Nexis] As evidence, several analysts cited Primakov's position as head of the Russian Chamber of Commerce and Industry and identified Russian fears that regime change in Iraq would lead to a collapse in world oil prices as the primary motive.

According to The Times, such a situation could cost the Russian economy more than \$20 billion annually, a loss that would be felt just as the presidential election campaign began. Moreover, Times analysts noted, Russia, like France, is acutely concerned that long-standing contracts with Baghdad would be lost if Saddam Hussein were ousted. However, LUKoil apparently lost a contract recently despite Hussein's continued hold and Russian diplomatic support for Iraq at the UN.

Neither the trip itself nor the choice of Primakov was based on economic interests, however. His choice to undertake this mission is based on his long-standing personal relationship with Saddam Hussein which dates back several decades, when he "passed" as special Middle East correspondent for Pravda. Primakov is a professional Arabist, and has maintained close ties with the region ever since, formally spending nearly next two decades as an academic, including leadership of the prestigious Institute of World Economy and International Relations (IMEiMO) and of the Oriental Institute (which, in Russian parlance, means the Middle East). According to Alexander Pikaev, an analyst at the

Carnegie Endowment's Moscow office, "Primakov is the person Saddam knows better than anyone else from the outside world. So this is a unique contact that it would be stupid not to take advantage of." (ASSOCIATED PRESS WORLDSTREAM, 27 Feb 03; via Lexis-Nexis) "It's only natural to use Primakov (in Iraq)," a former Russian secret service colleague told The Financial Times. "He is well placed and knows the territory. But when I heard the news about this new mission, I realized that war is now inevitable. We have to do everything in our capacity to stop it, but the US will attack anyway." (THE FINANCIAL TIMES, 27 Feb 03; via Lexis-Nexis)

Primakov made two trips to Iraq as an adviser to Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev in the fall of 1990, but did not make a serious effort to evacuate Russian "technicians" there on the eve of "Desert Storm." In 1997 Primakov attempted a deal between Iraq and UN weapons inspectors, but the arrangement collapsed the next year, leading inspectors to leave Iraq ahead of new US and British air strikes.

Primakov — no friend of the United States -- is a long-standing proponent of a "multi-polar world," a phrase that has been appearing in Putin's and Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov's recent statements as well. Primakov's appointment as foreign minister by Boris Yel'tsin heralded the low point of Russian-American relations in the 1990s. His tenure was a conciliatory gesture to the anti-Western "red-brown" communist-nationalist voices in parliament. It appeared to pay off, when politicians supported his role as a compromise prime minister in the wake of the 1998 crisis. Primakov did not disappoint his hardline backers, criticizing Western policy towards the former Yugoslavia and, most strikingly, canceling his trip to the US mid-flight after then-Vice President Al Gore informed him at the last minute about the NATO decision to bomb Serbia. His actions earned him a reputation in Washington. "He was a pain in the neck in 1990-91," a senior US administration official told AP last week, referring to his leading role in the Soviet

effort to save Saddam Hussein. (ASSOCIATED PRESS WORLDSTREAM, 27 Feb 03; via Lexis-Nexis)

Putin, who enjoys popular support Yel'tsin could only dream of in his most drunken state, did not appoint Primakov from a position of domestic weakness. Bringing back this Cold Warrior to do his bidding demonstrates once again that Putin continues to feed anti-American regimes that once were Soviet clients.

Primakov's mission to Baghdad bought Russia and Iraq a little breathing space, since he apparently convinced Iraq to destroy some Al-Samoud 2 missiles in accordance with UN demands. This was undertaken, not for the sake of peace, but on behalf of the "multi-polar" world.

Russian Federation: Domestic Issues and Legislative Branch

By Kate Martin

REGIONS

Your rights have left the building

Last year's election reform proposals resulted in a raise in the minimum percentage of votes needed to obtain seats through party lists. This move, designed to cut the number of parties in the State Duma to a manageable half dozen or so, is intended to silence less powerful and less popular groups. Recent discussions have demonstrated that additional reforms are sought which would, in effect, spread that silence to the regional level, and many governors are displeased with the notion. It is increasingly evident who will be "managing" party activity.

The presidium of the Council of Lawmakers (an advisory body of regional parliamentary speakers that was established last May) met in mid-February in the Federation Council to discuss the government's proposed delimitation of powers among federal, regional and local authorities. Included in the proposal was the idea that regional Dumas be filled in the same manner as the federal body — half by single-member constituencies and half by party lists. (ITAR-TASS, 2148 GMT, 16 Feb 03; FBIS-SOV-2003-0216, via World News Connection) The draft laws, submitted by the president, earned the support of the State Duma's Budget and Tax Committee, which recommended Duma approval. Dmitry Kozak, the presidential deputy chief of staff, noted that these laws are "key" to the government's reform and that, although subject to alteration as they pass through the Duma, "[e]verything that will improve the life of people, make the government more transparent, and increase its responsibility to citizens will be accepted." (ITAR-TASS, 1416 GMT, 17 Feb 03; FBIS-SOV-2003-0217, via World News Connection)

Putin himself subsequently appeared before the council to reiterate his support for the formation of federal party blocs in regional parliaments. Creating regional parliamentary elections along federal election lines would make the system more comprehensible to the population, he explained. (ITAR-TASS, 1508 GMT, 18 Feb 03; FBIS-SOV-2003-0218, via World News Connection) He did not mention another likely byproduct — federal parties should be easier to manage from the center.

The proposal begs the question of how confused the existing system is for voters who, as noted in an earlier NIS Observed, do not look to the federal government for relief in their daily lives. (THE NIS OBSERVED, 5 Feb 03) One could question how interested an individual from a federal party bloc would be in regional issues. Not too surprisingly, some of the regional leaders were less than thrilled with the plan that could drastically change the tenor of the regional parliaments. While one cannot ignore the governors' self-interest in maintaining regional power

structures, at the heart of discussions in the council was the matter of responsibility to the voters. Moscow City Duma speaker Vladimir Platonov argued that representatives who obtain seats through party lists would be less answerable to the public, and there is no system for removing deputies who do not represent the electorate adequately. Platonov was not alone in his dissent, although, interestingly, others appeared unwilling to rely totally on federal parliamentary discussion. The chairman of the Murmansk Oblast' Duma, Pavel Sazhinov, reported that deputies from the Astrakhan Duma had prepared amendments to the federal law that would permit regions to decide independently whether elections were held through party lists; meanwhile, his colleagues from Orlov have requested a ruling from the Constitutional Court as to the legality of the federal proposal. (VREMYA MN, 19 Feb 03; FBIS-SOV-2003-0219, via World News Connection)

This appears to be a further indication that the Putin administration continues to seek an increased centralization of powers. However, it is not the only recent indication. The much-anticipated reform measures included amendments to the law "On the Common Organizational Principles of Legislative (Representative) and Executive Governing Bodies in the RF Regions" and the new law "On the Common Organizational Principles of Local Self-Government in the Russian Federation." Clearly designed to obviate regional moves toward quasi-independence, the proposals mandate that federal laws supersede regional legislation, in the event that they contradict each other. As Kozak explained, "We must build a hierarchy of laws, a legislative vertical."

And, just in case the deputies did not comprehend the magnitude of the reform measures being proposed, Putin put the case before the Council of Legislators, which is expected to play a pivotal role in the debate. "The specific powers of governing bodies are being defined.... This should establish a legal basis, free of internal contradictions and meeting current needs, for the exercise of these powers," he said. "We are entering an extremely important stage in the legislative

renewal of Russia's state structure." (VREMYA MN, 21 Feb 03; FBIS-SOV-2003-0221, via World News Connection) Indeed, regional powers are being stripped away at a dizzying rate. The package of laws reportedly limits the powers of federation "subjects" (regions) to 10 areas of joint jurisdiction (30 areas fewer than the constitution provides), reassigning the other prerogatives to the federal government. Included in the areas to be moved to total federal control, moreover, are the management and disposition of such money-making resources as minerals, water, forests and, presumably, oil.

Russian Federation: Armed Forces

By Steve Kwast and Dan Rozelle

Is Russia a peace broker or just opportunistic with Pakistan and India?

In early February, Pakistani President General Pervez Musharraf visited Moscow for three days and met with Russian President Putin. This first visit by a Pakistani president in 33 years represents a significant policy shift and demonstrates Moscow's interest in closer military ties with Pakistan, whose main military suppliers at present are China and Ukraine. (RFE/RL NEWSLINE, 13 Feb 03) Before this change, Russia had seen Pakistan as just another unruly and unreliable Muslim state that was close to the US and China, and that defined itself by its enmity toward Russia's ally, India. From the Pakistani viewpoint, Russia was a diminished power committed wholly to friendship with India. Islamabad has always considered Moscow to be completely biased on the India-Pakistan issue and, therefore, not worth courting seriously. All that seems to have changed now, and the important question is why.

If President Putin is to be believed, Russia is an honest broker friendly to both countries. He declared his willingness to "help resolve the regional conflicts plaguing the two countries." (ASIA TIMES ONLINE, 22 Feb 03; WPS Defense and Security, via ISI Emerging Markets Database) A more likely reason is

Moscow's realization that Pakistan must be brought into the circle of countries with which a dialogue is maintained in order to ensure that Russia has a hand vis-à-vis all the parties, especially in light of the war against terrorism and Pakistan's close ties with China and the US. A second and equally compelling reason for Russia to engage with Pakistan is the money that can be gained through the sale of military equipment.

It seems that Islamabad also is eager to develop a lasting relationship with Moscow. It recently offered Russia access to warm waters through the Gwadar deep-sea port. According to Pakistani Commerce Minister Humayun Akhtar, the invitation was made during President Musharraf's visit to Moscow. "Access to the warm waters is undoubtedly Moscow's age-old desire. Pakistan's decision to offer Russia access to the Arabian Sea is a pragmatic decision, as it will undoubtedly make a positive impact on the promotion of ties between the two countries," he said. (PAKISTAN OBSERVER, 12 Feb 03; FBIS-NES-2003-0213, via World News Connection)

As to why this shift has taken place, it is doubtful that President Putin is seriously interested in resolving the conflict between India and Pakistan. On 12 February, one week after meeting with President Musharraf, Russia and India jointly developed and tested a supersonic cruise missile capable of hitting any Pakistani city with nuclear weapons. The Brahmos missile, which has a range of about 300 kilometers and can be launched from land, air or sea, was fired from an Indian navy ship in the Bay of Bengal off the Indian eastern state of Orissa. (ASSOCIATED PRESS, 12 Feb 02; via Lexis-Nexis) Even more disturbing, according to Indian Defense Minister George Fernandes, "the nuclear-capable missile will enter the two countries' arsenals in 2004 and will be sold to other countries." (RFE/RL NEWSLINE, 13 Feb 03) This missile test angered Pakistan and has had a destabilizing effect. It also comes in the shadow of the United Nations demand that Iraq destroy the recently discovered set of missiles that have a range of only 150 kilometers. Pakistan officially called the testing "a sign

of extremism, deliberately timed as the world is preoccupied with the Iraqi crisis, thus attracting minimal world attention." (CHANNEL NEWS ASIA, 13 Feb 03; via Lexis-Nexis)

It seems more likely that Moscow's overtures toward Pakistan are meant to counterbalance the US presence in that country while simultaneously making some money selling military weapons to these two age-old enemies. Russia currently supplies 70 percent of India's military hardware. That number will go up, according to President Putin. During a recent visit to Russia by Indian Foreign Minister Jashvant Singh, Putin said, "we [will] work to intensify our cooperation in the sphere of the military-technical ties with India." (AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE, 19 Feb 03; via Lexis-Nexis) This was reemphasized during a meeting with Russian Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov. (AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE, 20 Feb 03; WPS Defense and Security, via ISI Emerging Markets Database) These remarks indicate that Russia plans to increase India's arsenal of weapons even as it begins building military ties with Pakistan and starts profiting from this ongoing arms race.

Indeed, New Delhi has not turned to Moscow in search of a peace broker. As Minister Singh explained, "Russia understands the problems of the Indian-Pakistani relations, however, I do not think [it] can improve the situation." (IZVESTIA, 24 Feb 03; WPS Defense and Security, via ISI Emerging Markets Database)

A recent discovery that Russia is selling Afghanistan \$40 million worth of combat helicopters and military transports provides further evidence that Moscow is more interested in selling military goods than in stabilizing regional conflicts. (INTERFAX, 1731 GMT, 13 Feb 03; FBIS-SOV-2003-0213, via World News Connection)

These latest military developments between Russia, Pakistan and India seem to be nothing more than business as usual for Moscow. There is less care for regional stability or peace than there is for making money through military sales and countering the US presence in Pakistan. Putin's actions speak louder than his proclamation that he wants to help resolve the tensions between Pakistan and India.

Planned naval deployment 'just a reminder'

Russia will not be taking part in any military operation against Iraq, according to Russian Defense Minister Sergei Ivanov. His statement was echoed by Yury Baluevsky, first deputy chief of the General Staff, who added that the General Staff does not plan to put the army on a war footing if a war on Iraq does begin. (EKHO MOSKVY, 19 Feb 03; What the Papers Say, via ISI Defense and Security Database) But what about the forthcoming deployment of Russian Pacific and Black Sea Fleet warships to the Indian Ocean? Defense Minister Sergei Ivanov claims the deployment has nothing to do with the events in Iraq: "The ships' voyage is absolutely unrelated to what is happening or will happen in the future around Iraq. We have no intention to enter the Persian Gulf." Ivanov added that "the squadron...is going to be quite large. There has been no such expedition in the whole of the post-Soviet period. Regrettably, many countries are beginning to forget what the St. Andrew's flag of the Russian navy looks like, and we are going to rectify this." (ITAR-TASS, 1302 GMT, 21 Feb 03; BBC Monitoring, via Lexis-Nexis)

In fact, the deployment would be the largest since the 1991 disintegration of the Soviet Union. (XINHUA NEWS AGENCY, 21 Feb 03; via Lexis-Nexis) A similar sized deployment of Russian warships occurred in 1996 when the aircraft carrier Admiral Kuznetsov departed the Black Sea and conducted maneuvers in the Mediterranean Sea with several escort ships. However, that exercise was much more moderate in scope and designed only to mark the 300th anniversary of the Russian navy.

Despite official denials, there should be no doubt this deployment is wholly related to the potential US military action against Iraq. The deployment, which includes two anti-submarine ships home-ported in Vladivostok and an assault landing ship from Sevastopol, along with several other ships, is rare considering the almost-complete absence of prior planning and preparation. If indeed the ships' mission were simply to "show the flag," the Russian navy certainly would have announced the exercise well in advance and made arrangements for various port visits, including those necessary for en-route refueling and replenishment. The more likely scenario is that the Russians understand, as does most of the world, that the United States is going to put on an unprecedented show of military capability and they'd like a front row seat. Stations in the Arabian Sea or especially in the Gulf of Oman allow for superb intelligence gathering and radar tracking of aircraft conducting missions from bases on Diego Garcia in the Indian Ocean. Despite the pronouncements to the contrary, it also would not be a surprise if at least one of the Russian ships did enter the Persian Gulf. With four or five US aircraft carriers operating there, the desire for intelligence intercepts will be too great to ignore (as it was in the NATO bombing campaign during the conflict with Yugoslavia).

What is undetermined is the actual departure date of the ships. According to a representative from Russia's Pacific Fleet headquarters, the political decision has yet to be made. However, Defense Minister Ivanov described the departure timeframe more diplomatically, saying, it "depends exclusively on the technical readiness." (TRUD, 13 Feb 03; What the Papers Say, via ISI Defense and Security Database) While this may be true, considering the condition of the Russian fleet, a more accurate interpretation of the minister's words would likely refer to the readiness of the coalition forces already in the Persian Gulf to take action against Iraq.

Russia's preemptive diplomacy: Call it a violation of the CFE Treaty!

As soon as General James Jones, the new commander of US and NATO forces in Europe, finished describing his plans for potentially relocating some US forces to Poland, Moscow began warning Warsaw that any such moves would be a violation of agreements between Russia and NATO. Much like its failed attempt last year to block the accession of the three Baltic states to NATO, Russia is relying once again on its own interpretation of the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe (CFE).

The CFE treaty, originally negotiated in 1990 and signed by the Soviet Union, imposes ceilings on the deployment of conventional arms within Europe. In 1999 the treaty was adapted to reflect the current geopolitical face of Europe after the breakup of the Soviet Union, including changes requested by Moscow. But Russia, along with several other European countries, has not ratified the adapted treaty. The lack of ratification, however, has not stopped the Russians from deeming any shift in NATO forces a violation of the treaty. Russian Foreign Ministry Spokesman Alexander Yakovenko said that "the pledge for restraint in the military area is part and parcel of the adapted CFE treaty... . Redeployment of bases and heavy armaments...is out of the question as running counter to a number of important arrangements in the area of military security and stability." (ITAR-TASS, 1745 GMT, 13 Feb 03; FBIS-SOV-2003-0213, via World News Connection)

Surprisingly, the Russians are protesting even though the US plan could result in a net decrease of its troops. General Jones recently spelled out a proposal to reduce the overall number of American forces in Europe as part of the US defense transformation strategy and as a cost-savings measure as well. Key to this plan is the use of military training areas and bases in Poland and, to a lesser extent, those in the Czech Republic and Romania. (THE GUARDIAN, 11 Feb 03; via Lexis-Nexis) The idea is to deploy US forces (from bases in the US) to the training areas and airfields only for exercises. In the event of a conflict, pre-positioned US weapons and equipment at these locations would be available for

further deployment. A small contingent of forces most likely would remain in Europe to administer the training and pre-positioned stocks.

The issue of the bases has garnered significant attention because of Germany's (and France's) opposition to US plans for disarming Iraq. Both Polish and German defense ministers have denied any plans to transfer the bases. (POLISH RADIO 1, 1800 GMT, 18 Feb 03; BBC Monitoring, via Lexis-Nexis) However, the bases generate significant economic benefits for the host nation that the Poles or any other East European country would no doubt welcome. Yet the Russians are casting the plan in an ominous light. "[T]he Polish nation should reply to the question about the presence of American forces on the territory of your country; reply for yourselves what are the bases for; what are the needs for this....," Russian Prime Minister Mikhail Kasyanov said. (PAP NEWS AGENCY, 1915 GMT, 21 Feb 03; BBC Monitoring, via Lexis-Nexis)

By standing with Germany to oppose US plans for Iraq while subtly warning Poland on the issue of US bases, the Russians stand to gain considerably. First, they have the opportunity to ingratiate themselves with Germany and garner greater influence in West European affairs. Secondly, if they are indeed able to block any further talk on the movement of the bases, they will have demonstrated that they can penalize Poland for supporting the US — a demonstration that other East European countries surely will notice. Lastly, they may actually witness a sharp reduction in US forces stationed in Europe without any overt action on their part. Achieving any one of the three scenarios above allows Russia to have its cake. All three lets them eat it too.

Newly Independent States: Western Region

By Nadezda Kinsky and Scott Fleeher

UKRAINE

Back in the news

It is hardly surprising that the six months in which Prosecutor-General Svyatoslav Piskun vowed to solve the Georgiy Gongadze case have come and gone with no progress on the matter. The case is now back in the news — unfortunately, still amid reports of other threats to journalists, unsolved or abandoned investigations and general complaints on media censorship.

Deputy Grygoriy Omelchenko from the Yuliya Tymoshenko Bloc initiated a request to the prosecutor-general and the chief of the Security Council to begin further examination of an anonymous letter that accuses former Interior Minister Yury Kravchenko (who was appointed leader of the Tax Administration in December 2002) and the Eagles unit of the interior ministry of killing Gongadze; 121 MPs endorsed the request on 18 February. (INTERFAX, 18 Feb 03; FBIS-SOV-2003-0218, via World News Connection)

The belief that the Eagles unit comprises particularly brutal death squads responsible for several political murders, including Gongadze's, was sparked in part by sections of the Melnychenko tapes, then reignited by the newspaper Segondya in August 2002, and by Omelchenko himself, who made the allegation in December 2002. The involvement of such a death squad in Gongadze's murder continues to be one of the main theories pursued in the investigation. The letter apparently came from an interior ministry officer. A 1999 interview of masked persons claiming to be interior ministry officers also implied that such death squads have been involved in the mysterious car accidents that, in several instances, took the lives of inconvenient politicians. The authenticity of the 1999 interview has never been determined, however, and how far the investigation of the anonymous letter will be taken remains to be seen. Although Piskun has said that the Eagles theory is one of the most prevalent in the investigation, there is little sign as to the level of followup.

The prosecutor-general's office also agreed officially on 20 February to brief Robert Menard of Reporters without Borders on the progress of the investigation. (INTERFAX, 20 Feb 03; FBIS-SOV-2003-0220, via World News Connection) Menard represents Gongadze's mother Lesya and his wife Miroslava. He intends to gain access to information from four policemen who kept Gongadze under surveillance in the weeks before his murder. The materials will not be released to the public by the prosecutor-general's office, certainly not until after a meeting has taken place with Menard. However, Menard may disclose the information he receives to the public should he wish to do so.

BELARUS

Voting for what, exactly?

On 20 February, the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, meeting in Vienna, voted to reinstate the Belarus legislature's representation, which had been suspended after the (much-disputed) 2000 elections that allowed Alyaksandr Lukashenka to remain in the presidential office. The vote to recognize the Belarus National Assembly was a close call and elicited a mixed response from international and Belarusian lawmakers.

While Chamber of Representatives Chairman Anatol Malafeyeu found the decision to be "a victory for common sense," exiled Belarusian National Front Leader Zyanon Paznyak reportedly said that "recognition by the OSCE of the illegitimate chamber of the Lukashenka regime is, to put it graphically, a stab with a rusted knife in the back of independent Belarus." (RFE/RL NEWSLINE, 21 Feb 03) Taking a stance between these two extremes, most opposition spokesmen in Belarus did not see the vote as an actual recognition for the legislature, but a tool for closer Western integration and monitoring of the local situation.

As its new mission in Minsk opens, the OSCE continues to take a critical approach toward Belarus — its latest vote certainly does not change the OSCE's negative assessment of the country released in February. A team from the OSCE

Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) currently is in Belarus, to monitor -- apparently unofficially -- the 2 March local elections. Given the fact that the country's representation in the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly was suspended in connection with disagreements about election standards, the timing of the OSCE vote (coinciding so closely with the local elections) seems impeccable.

The omens for the election, however, are not good. One indication of the lack of democratization surrounding the local voting is that it has received practically no attention. Granted, they are only local elections, but nevertheless they could be taken as a good measure of democratic practices in Belarus — especially as Lukashenka once again has stated his unwillingness to rule out running for a third term in the upcoming presidential elections. Based on registration figures, 93% of the constituencies had only one candidate running for election: While only 2.87% of the applicants for registration were rejected, partly on specious grounds, these figures correspond to 42% of the non-presidential faction candidates in the election. (RFE/RL POLAND, BELARUS, AND UKRAINE REPORT, 25 Feb 03) The low level of participation in the elections by the opposition can be explained best not only by the election organizers' low standards of democratization, but also by the worrying lack of structure in opposition movements, particularly outside urban centers.

The actual significance of the bodies to be elected is minor, however. Even at the higher level of the National Assembly itself, harsh complaints were voiced about the lack of attention paid to its reinstatement at the OSCE. Members of the Chamber of Representatives saw the lack of media coverage as further evidence of the way the National Assembly is being swept under the carpet while the presidential body continues to increase and consolidate its political hold in the country.

MOLDOVA

Deliberation, cooperation, congratulations...but who is missing here?

In the wake of a recent initiative by Moldovan President Vladimir Voronin that would result in a constitutional referendum and hypothetical settlement of the Transdnistr question, all parties involved appeared responsive, if not cautiously optimistic. As of mid-February, representatives from a majority of opposition parties in Moldova expressed support for the referendum, which gained additional momentum with the approval of all mediating parties (OSCE, Russia, Ukraine) as well as the United States. (ITAR-TASS, 1313 GMT, 20 Feb 03; FBIS-SOV-2003-0220, via World News Connection)

The Voronin initiative would consist of the appointment of a bilateral commission that would author a new Moldovan constitution during the coming months, followed by a referendum in 2004. (INTERFAX, 0708 GMT, 15 Feb 03; FBIS-SOV-2003-0215, via World News Connection) Voronin asserts that within such a framework, joint Moldova-Transdnistr parliamentary elections could be held early in 2005. Commenting about the prospects of the proposal, William Hill, the head of the OSCE Mission to Moldova, pointed out that, "despite some accusations and debatable assertions (by Tiraspol), the overall reaction was positive."

A third and final dose of optimism was bestowed on Chisinau by way of the cautious, yet positive, comments of NATO Secretary-General George Robertson during his 18 February meeting in Brussels with Dudau, the Moldovan foreign minister. During their exchange, Dudau praised Moldova's experiences within the Partnership for Peace program, and went on to thank NATO for assistance provided in the destruction of rocket fuel under the Science for Peace Program. (INFOTAG, 1331 GMT, 19 Feb 03; FBIS-SOV-2003-0219, via World News Connection) Secretary-General Robertson said that he was "satisfied" with the level of cooperation demonstrated by Moldovan authorities regarding regional and general security.

The fly in the ointment for Voronin and friends appeared shortly thereafter in a press statement by Georgy Tabunshcik, head of the administration in the breakaway Gagauz region. Tabunshcik emphasized that his constituency would not take part in the proposed referendum, adding "Gaugazia does not aspire to be the third constituent of [a] future federative Moldova, because it is already such." (ITAR-TASS, 1649 GMT, 21 Feb 03; FBIS-SOV-2003-0221, via World News Connection) Moreover, Tabunshcik said, "the existence of Gagauz autonomy since 1995 must be mirrored in the new constitution of Moldova."

As previous signs of consensus thwarted by inaction have shown, final resolution of the divisions within Moldova is certainly within the realm of possibility, yet in reality, remains far from attainment.

Newly Independent States: Caucasus

By Miriam Lansky

CHECHNYA

Referendum invites violence

The referendum on the draft constitution that is scheduled for 23 March will trigger more violence in the republic, say 50 human rights groups which held a congress in Nazran, Ingushetia on 2 March. (AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE, 2 Mar 03; via ISI Emerging Markets Database) These groups argue that the referendum cannot be carried out in a fair manner while the republic is at war. For instance, Russian soldiers stationed in Chechnya will be allowed to vote, whereas Chechen refugees in Ingushetia will not have that opportunity.

At the same time the Chechen fighters are making it known that they are not resigned to the situation. In a 28 February interview, President Aslan Maskhadov said that the Chechen units "will soon show everyone that the war in Chechnya is not over, and will go on as long as Russian soldiers continue to step on our soil."

(AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE, 28 Feb 03; via ISI Emerging Markets Database)

Two days later there was an assassination attempt against the Moscow-installed head of the Chechen administration, Akhmad Kadyrov, in which seven guards were killed.

For its part the human rights society Memorial has pointed out that the number of acts of repression, particularly disappearances, is increasing as the referendum approaches. "A pro-Moscow Chechen administration task force charged with searching for the missing puts the number at 2,800," a Memorial expert, Alexander Cherkasov, said.

"With five out of every 1,000 people missing, the rate of terror in Chechnya is higher than during Stalin's great terror [in the late 1930s]," Cherkasov said. "You can imagine what kind of effect this is going to have on the Chechen people's psyche." (MOSCOW TIMES, 28 Feb 03)

US imposes sanctions

Some media outlets are reporting erroneously that three Chechen groups have been added to the State Department's list of Foreign Terrorist Organizations (FTO). This is not the case. Due to legal factors, the Chechen groups did not meet the criteria to be designated FTOs. Instead, in a move widely regarded as part of a hypothetical bargain with Russia concerning UN resolutions on Iraq, three groups were designated "as terrorist groups under the executive order regarding terrorist financing." (PRESS STATEMENT OF US DEPARTMENT OF STATE, 28 Feb 03; via www.state.gov) The order bars financial assistance from the US or from US nationals to the specified groups. The designation was molded to meet the political requirements of the moment and does little to address the problems of terrorism and ongoing atrocities in Chechnya.

Not only is there doubt among experts that the groups are being financed from the US, there is no certainty that all of the identified groups really exist. (See, for

instance, comments by Musa Muradov, the editor of the independent Chechen weekly Groznensky Rabochy and correspondent for Kommersant, in CHECHNYA WEEKLY, 27 Feb 03.) Hence the designation may not address the problem of terrorism in Chechnya. This symbolic gesture by the US will only enable Russia to continue its atrocities in Chechnya with perhaps even greater impunity.

The three groups designated by the US are: The Islamic International Brigade; the Special Purpose Islamic Regiment; and the Riyadus-Salikhin Reconnaissance and Sabotage Battalion of Chechen Martyrs. The Special Purpose Islamic Regiment (IPON) refers to Arbi Baraev's unit, which alone among the groups mentioned has an indisputable long-term history as an odious criminal organization. It was formed in 1997 and by July 1998 was engaged in assassination attempts against Chechen President Maskhadov. The group was widely regarded as one of the main hostage-taking operations in Chechnya and in December 1998 was responsible for the beheading of four foreign telecommunications workers. In October 2002, under the leadership of Arbi's nephew, Movsar, the IPON graduated from criminality to terrorism by taking over the Moscow theater on Dubrovka and seizing up to 800 hostages. However, all the kidnappers were eliminated. According to US State Department spokesman Richard Boucher, this group still exists under the leadership of a certain "Khamzat," not further identified.

"All three groups were directly involved in the seizure of over 800 hostages at Moscow's Dubrovka Theater last October," Boucher said. (PRESS CONFERENCE WITH STATE DEPARTMENT SPOKESMAN RICHARD BOUCHER, 28 Feb 03; via www.state.gov) Boucher also charged that the groups have training and financial ties to al Qaeda. Nothing is being said about the other terrorist attacks, most notably: the explosions in apartment buildings in Russia in September 1999, which started this war and killed nearly 300 persons; the mine laid at the May 2002 military parade in Kaspiisk, which killed over 100 individuals;

and the bombing of the Chechen administration building in December 2002, which killed 82 persons.

The Russian government also designated three groups as terrorist organizations: The Congress of Peoples of Ichkeria and Daghestan, the Battalion of Shaheed Suicide Bombers, and the Supreme Military Mejlis-ul-Shura-United Force of the Caucasian Mujahadeen. If one makes the assumption that the two suicide battalions refer to the same group under different names, it seems possible that the Russian list and the US list overlap with respect to this group.

GEORGIA

Still no agreement on Russian bases

At the OSCE summit in Istanbul in 1999, Russia had agreed to remove its four military bases from Georgian territory. To date only one, the airport at Vaziani, near Tbilisi, has been turned over to Georgia. The base at Gadauta, in Abkhazia, which was supposed to be closed last year, is still under Russian control and has 260 Russian servicemen. There has been no progress on developing a timetable and terms of closure for the bases at Akhalkalaki and Batumi. (ITAR-TASS, 19 Feb 03; via ISI Emerging Markets Database)

New stage of Pankisi operation launched

More troops of the Georgian interior, defense, and security ministries were deployed to the Pankisi Gorge on 3 March, ostensibly to protect the border against the possibility that Ruslan Gelaev's unit may cross the border there. Gelaev is now believed to be in Chechnya but apparently was in the Pankisi Gorge in the summer of 2002. According to current official Georgian estimates, there were 700 Chechens and 100 Arab fighters in the gorge from 1999 until the start of the operation in September 2002. (WWW.CIVIL.GE, 25 Feb 03) An incursion of Chechen fighters from Chechnya into Georgia in July 2002 brought Russia and Georgia to the brink of war. Hence, the unspoken reasons for the troop buildup probably have more to do with the possibility of Russia exploiting

such a situation to launch "preventive" strikes against Georgia, particularly if an unauthorized Chechen border crossing coincided with the start of the war in Iraq.

Newly Independent States: Central Asia

By David Montgomery

The possibility of war and the usual disputes of Central Asia

While a possible American attack on Iraq weighs heavily on the minds of Central Asian leaders, their positions on the potential conflict are driven by their local interests. Despite the possibility of war and the uncertain effects it may have on the region, many of the usual concerns — over borders, Islamic extremists, economics and political reform — remain the focus of the Central Asian states.

Comments on the Iraq Crisis

In general, Uzbekistan supports the US position on Iraq, whereas Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan seem more supportive of the French/German/Russian position of delaying military action in Iraq. (EURASIANET, 18 Feb 03; via www.eurasianet.org) The Kazakh and Kyrgyz hesitancy about military action has a lot to do with their fears that the US might lose interest in the region should American troops become engaged in Iraq.

In a recent interview, Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbaev encouraged Iraq to follow the Kazakh lead and destroy its weapons of mass destruction. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Kazakhstan inherited a number of Soviet weapons which it destroyed subsequently under international supervision. Nazarbaev noted that "many wanted to preserve [the weapons]" because, it was argued, possessing such an arsenal was a criterion for international respectability. However, he continued, "We've gained a lot by abandoning these weapons," implying that Iraq too would gain more by destroying its weapons of mass destruction than by holding onto them in the face of international opposition.

(ITAR-TASS, 1321 GMT, 26 Feb 03; FBIS-SOV-2003-0226, via World News Connection)

Kyrgyzstan has reported its plans to intensify security throughout the country in the event that the US attacks Iraq. While Kyrgyz National Security Service Chairman Kalyk Imankulov did not expect that a war in Iraq would lead to significant destabilization of the region, the fear is that Kyrgyzstan — given that it is hosting US military forces — could become an attractive target for terrorists wishing to retaliate against a US attack of Iraq. (RFE/RL NEWSLINE, 28 Feb 03)

Yet, despite these explicit concerns about the situation in Iraq, most of what has made the news over the past few weeks is in line with what has concerned the region since independence: the delimitation of borders, concerns about extremist movements, and struggles linked to the economy and political change.

Border tensions

While Tajikistan and Uzbekistan have had a relatively contentious relationship regarding their shared borders — largely due to the Soviet delimitation of boundaries that gave the cities of Samarqand and Bukhara to Uzbekistan, despite their large Tajik populations and historical links to Tajikistan — the post-September 11 debilitation of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) as well as the American presence in the region have helped repair Tajik-Uzbek relations. Uzbekistan's recent steps to tighten its borders and decrease inter-state trade, however, once again threaten the ethnic relations between Tajiks and Uzbeks. (EURASIANET, 14 Feb 03; via www.eurasianet.org)

Landmines demarcate much of the Tajik-Uzbek border as well as the Kyrgyz-Uzbek border. Many of the mines were planted in response to the 1999 incursion by the IMU, but they have been a point of contention between the countries concerned. On 23 February, another Kyrgyz citizen was killed by one of the Uzbek-planted mines. This led to a Kyrgyz appeal asking Uzbekistan to offer

maps of the minefields, as well as a request to clear the Kyrgyz-Uzbek border of landmines. (KABAR, 1149 GMT, 26 Feb 03; FBIS-SOV-2003-0226, via World News Connection) A few days later, on 25 February, Uzbekistan formerly rejected the Kyrgyz request. (RFE/RL NEWSLINE, 28 Feb 03)

Concerns about Islamists

While the land mines were planted in response to the IMU activities along the border, the allied military efforts in Afghanistan severely weakened that Islamic movement. Regularly, however, government officials in the region point to various groups as indicators of the Islamic extremist threat to stability. Atop the list is Hizb-ut-Tahrir (HT), a group that was not hobbled by the allied presence. Recently, the mufti and chairman of the Spiritual Department of Muslims of Kyrgyzstan, Haji Murataly Dzhumanov, said that groups such as the IMU and HT were not in accord with the true principles of Islam and furthermore presented a threat to the stability of Kyrgyzstan. (KABAR, 1439 GMT, 26 Feb 03; FBIS-SOV-2003-0226, via World News Connection)

Officials in Tajikistan echo the threat that such organizations pose to regional stability and suggest that membership in the HT is increasing, with between 3,000-4,000 members in the Ferghana Valley. On 15 February, Tajik officials arrested 10 HT activists and confiscated an illegal printing shop that reportedly was producing Wahhabist propaganda. (ITAR-TASS, 1052 GMT, 15 Feb 03; FBIS-SOV-2003-0215, via World News Connection)

Economic concerns

One reason HT has gained support is the difficult economic situation in the region. A recent survey in Kyrgyzstan indicated a prevailing sense of dissatisfaction with the country's economic situation: Countrywide, 52 percent had a negative view of the economy whereas over 62 percent of those living in and near the capital expressed discontent. Fifty-seven percent regarded the

conditions as "difficult but bearable," while around 16 percent view the conditions as unbearable. (RFE/RL NEWSLINE, 21 Feb 03)

Speaking at the recent Forum for Poverty Reduction, Kyrgyz President Askar Akaev spoke of implementing a national strategy to eliminate poverty: "The whole set of socioeconomic measures will be concentrated on the main task — the reduction of poverty by no less than five percent in the first year of implementing the strategy." (INTERFAX, 0841 GMT, 24 Feb 03; FBIS-SOV-2003-0224, via World News Connection) Akaev sees the means to these ends as development of the private sector and expansion of micro-financing opportunities. Likewise, the Kazakh government has pledged to approve a national anti-poverty program early in March. (INTERFAX, 1415 GMT, 20 Feb 03; FBIS-SOV-2003-0220, via World News Connection)

Political concerns

One of the hurdles to implementing economic reforms that could benefit the poor is the need to establish investor confidence and to overcome corruption. A recent World Bank Survey on the prevalence of corruption in Kyrgyzstan noted that the most corrupt institutions in the country were the courts and the law-enforcement departments. (One can only hope that the World Bank was aware of all this before it held the survey!) (INTERFAX, 1251 GMT, 20 Feb 03; FBIS-SOV-2003-0220, via World News Connection) As one step to increase confidence in the courts system, Akaev has called for a jury system to be implemented, thereby increasing participation in the judicial process. (RFE/RL NEWSLINE, 28 Feb 03)

But the question remains whether the necessary reforms are being implemented. A recent report by the International Crisis Group suggests that Uzbekistan has not put in place meaningful measures that might assure the country's long-term stability (INTERNATIONAL CRISIS GROUP, 18 Feb 03, via www.intl-crisis-group.org) and there is fear that the reforms of other countries are equally shallow. What happens with the situation in Iraq, however, could have long-term

implications regarding the pressure put on these countries to reform and their willingness to make them.

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