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Russian Federation: Executive Branch

By Susan Cavan

PRESIDENT

The buck stops, doesn't it?

President Putin's Kremlin website has a fabulous photograph from February 9, featuring a bemedalled Ivan Yakovlevich Novikov holding red carnations as he is awarded the Order of the Patriotic War, 2nd class, by President Putin. (1) Putin smiles warmly at the veteran, whose expression seems so joyous, you just know that Putin must have slipped a free bus pass in with the new medal.

Granted, there never was going to be a good time to kick pensioners and veterans off the dole, but does the presidential press service really believe that photo ops with veterans and oily praise of their service and bravery dripped over a policy speech will staunch the flow of protests?

The pensioners' revolt (mixed in with the general discontent of all the other previous beneficiaries of government subsidies, such as military personnel) does seem to have had an impact, albeit not a particularly effective result. Despite the Kremlin's clear authoritarian bent, a sliver of responsiveness to citizens' concerns, certainly a hallmark of democratic governance, remains: the Duma felt compelled to take a vote of no confidence in the Fradkov government. Granted, it failed, but it does suggest a vestige of constituent service (perhaps even more hopeful is the interpretation of the vote as political haymaking, which suggests the opposition, such as it is in the Duma, isn't totally cowed).

Likewise, certain government members have accepted personal responsibility for the implementation of the monetization reforms. At least, I think that's what they

did: Finance Minister Aleksei Kudrin spoke unequivocally of his failings to the Duma, "If we made mistakes in some respects, I can say that in this sense, we, of course, to an extent, left the president and the Duma exposed, in so far as there was a need for timely and rapid adjustment whilst these decisions were being implemented." (2)

Putin's response to the crisis, such as it was, seems to consist of public curtness toward his ministers. Hence, reports of a recent government meeting play up the "public roasting" of ministers, as Putin scolds Kudrin over the slow implementation of payment increases for the military and his attempt to excuse his efforts: "Leave out the commentary. Just do it, and then report." (3) The next stage of presidential response is predicted to take the form of a reorganization of the government.

While dismissals certainly are likely, the President's personnel decisions will have little to do with actual policy or competency issues. The monetization of benefits, as difficult as it most certainly is, will stand as a reform, perhaps watered down for some sensitive groups (more likely for the military than the pensioners, despite the protests). The expansion of government benefits during the Yel'tsin administration, which Putin correctly highlighted in his January government meeting (and noted in the last NIS Observed), may have taken some of the sting out of the monetary reforms – such as the revaluation of the ruble and its eventual devaluation – but could not be supported by an unsteady Russian economy. Putin may yet "sacrifice" some ministers to soothe the popular outrage – the government, after all, is composed primarily of holdovers from the Yel'tsin era, and economists whose ties are closer to Anatoli Chubais than to the current president. (4)

The criticism and possibility of dismissal of certain government ministers (namely, Gref, Zurabov and Kudrin) brings a familiar division within Putin's circle into high relief. Once again, the "liberals" (economic reformers) and the siloviki

are portrayed as locked in a zero sum contest for the president's ear. As was the case when Putin first took office, the President's own political beliefs are not at issue, nor are they known. The relative closeness of one faction over the other to the Kremlin center of power occupies political, economic and security forecasters as they attempt to gauge the relative stability of Russian leaders, markets, nukes and a myriad of other issues. It is a strategy that worked well in the Soviet era and continued throughout the Yel'tsin presidency. When it comes to Putin's Kremlin however, it seems more productive to distinguish among the various realms that each faction is allowed to dominate: despite rampant rumors in Putin's first term, Sergei Ivanov was not going to be appointed as Prime Minister to oversee economic reform; his place is with the military, security services or some eventual hybrid. (Conversely, in Yel'tsin's administration bodyguards, tennis players, and immediate family were placed in positions of astonishing authority based on a loyalty test, rather than an assessment of competence.)

While there are still important economic reforms to tackle, Putin is likely to leave the economists (Chubais' cadres) in charge. At the same meeting in which Putin spoke sharply to Kudrin, he later heard a report from German Gref, the Economic Development and Trade Minister, that the government was pressing ahead with the ever controversial land reform. Gref informed the president of the need to establish a "delimitation of land ownership rights between the state, constituent entities, and municipalities." (5)

If that isn't going to be controversial enough, Gref also referred to an issue sure to prove nightmarish, "the buy-out of plots of land under privatized buildings." (6) Putin acknowledged the importance of Gref's undertaking, as a "very acute issue." (7) When the tough economic decisions have been made and the fallout for their social consequences exacted however, the composition of the next government Putin forms could prove most interesting.

Poppies! Poppies!

A quick check in on Putin's drug tsar reveals that Viktor Cherkosov has been keeping busy with that fight against drug traffickers. In a meeting at the end of last month with the president, Cherkosov noted that "international law" calls for much more stringent penalties against narcotics traders and for those dealing, not just with the drugs themselves, but "drug precursors." (8) In Russia, as in other countries, the issue centers on the trade in heroin emanating from Afghanistan.

While Cherkosov did not propose legislative reform to deal with the sentencing problems involved with adjudicating drug offenses in Russia (he instead emphasized the need for a maturation of the judicial system), he did offer to submit proposals to Putin that would bring Russian law into line with international norms, and would deal with the thorny issue of drug raw material and precursors. Poppy lovers take heed.

Source Notes:

- 1) www.kremlin.ru
- 2) NTV Mir, 1900 GMT, 21 Jan 05; BBC Monitoring via Lexis-Nexis Academic database.
- 3) "President gives Kudrin a public roasting," by Oksana Yablokova in Moscow Times, 8 Feb 05 via Lexis-Nexis Academic database.
- 4) See previous issues of the NIS Observed, Executive Branch for details of the Fradkov Government's pedigree.
- 5) ITAR-TASS, 7 Feb 05 via Lexis-Nexis Academic database.
- 6) Ibid.
- 7) Ibid.
- 8) RIA Novosti, 28 Jan 05 via Lexis-Nexis Academic database.

Russian Federation: Security Services

By Eric Beene

In a period in which the Russian government has such control of the media, it is interesting that we hear and read a good deal of disaffection towards and even within the government in the press. Notably, in recent weeks we have seen numerous stories about the impact of benefits reform on the security services. While benefit reductions made news earlier in the year with demonstrations from old age pensioners who demanded that lost benefits be restored, only recently have we been made aware of the impact of monetization on the security services. Like the pensioners, security service personnel lost access to free transportation to and from the workplace, among other benefits. While this may seem trivial, apparently this had been a significant element of compensation, long considered an entitlement for public workers. The transportation loss has prompted many in the Federal Security Service (FSB) and the Interior Ministry (MVD) to work on developing creative alternatives: Some personnel have requested to leave work early because they have been forced to walk home; others have claimed they can only work certain days of the week in an attempt to limit costs; some have even brought bedding into work to avoid the commute; and others have submitted resignations, claiming that the new costs for transportation amounted to "41 per cent of my monthly wage." (1)

Although it does not appear that members of the security services actually will resign en masse or even take to the streets protesting the loss of transportation, their dismay illustrates just how the government-supported barter economy has been such a critical element in the lives of so many workers, the real cost of such actions, and the deleterious impact it has had. Various responses have been outlined by the government: the Interior Ministry announced it will raise salaries for employees by 50% to compensate for the loss of benefits (the loss of transportation plus property taxes, another benefit cut). (2) The Finance Ministry announced a proposal to subsidize long-distance train transportation, providing

50 rubles per person transported, a subsidy expected to total 8.5 billion rubles in 2005. (3) Prime Minister Mikhail Fradkov, in an unrelated meeting, announced that the FSB's budget will increase by 25%, although it is not clear whether this was a previously announced increase for 2005. Interestingly, according to the report, "Fradkov said that some parts of the FSB budget have grown so much that the agency is already having trouble spending all the money." (4) Among the benefits not yet cut, but closely monitored, is a free prescription benefit. While collecting payment information for government benefit recipients, Health and Social Development Minister Mikhail Zurabov "asked the heads of regions and health institutions to continue strict control over the dispensation of medicines to benefit recipients." (5) It seems the minister is concerned with the exploitation of the system of black market diversion of medicine.

The minister points out a major effect of monetizing the economy by cutting benefits—reducing the trade in subsidized goods and services that has for years provided the opportunity for government workers to enjoy a better quality of life than pure financial compensation would indicate. Granted, giving free rides on public buses or even trading in prescription medications, is not the type of corruption to which President Putin referred when he blasted federal forces for enabling terrorists in Russia, but it is not a stretch to say that such actions are steps along a spectrum of conduct not so far removed from more familiar, and more detrimental, forms of corruption. To wit: "Arkadi Yedelev, chief of the regional operational staff for controlling the anti-terrorist operation in the North Caucasus, said that everyone [including federal soldiers in addition to Chechen separatists] abducts people. Chechen Prosecutor Vladimir Kravchenko said that a tenth of all abductions are committed by the security and law enforcement agencies." (6) These "abductions," in many cases simply detainments made possible by the role security services personnel play in the region, are conducted for ransom. Additionally, nameless FSB officers were alleged not only to abduct people for money, but FSB commanders also are said to condone such acts in order to create a climate of fear in order to keep outsiders away from the

Caucasus region, which leaves the security services free from outside scrutiny.
(7)

This may help explain the recent announcement from an Interior Ministry spokesman that Russia "intends to [involve more actively] private security organizations operating on Russian territory in the protection of facilities from the threat of terrorism." (8) Acknowledging the spotty reputation private security firms have for excessive force, Leonid Vedenov, chief of the assessment and licensing directorate of the Department for the Protection of Public Order of the Russian Federation Interior Ministry, pointed out the Interior Ministry personnel also have been the subject of investigations into similar acts. He noted that the quality of such firms has improved recently, and the market for their services is on the rise. In fact, about half a million security personnel work for private security firms, with about 40% having prior experience in the police or federal forces. (9) This appears to be a method effectively to deputize such personnel as they continue to protect both public and private facilities. The challenge is to create an effective legal framework that allows such personnel to coordinate their activities and share information with government services, building a network of security through which, it must be hoped, terrorists will be less capable of penetrating. No mention was made of how their services would be compensated. Such a framework apparently will allow the administration to leverage security personnel who are privately employed—effectively getting free help without having to rely on the state budget for more money or benefits or compensation. And thus, the Russian government would receive a benefit of its own.

So it is with even greater curiosity that we see a separate announcement regarding the FSB—it has been tasked publicly with spying on industry to "help [the administration] provide an effective legal foundation, make decisions on equal competition conditions, develop business and create a favorable investment environment," said Prime Minister Fradkov. The administration

appears frustrated by what it perceives as the use of "state secrets" by other countries or corporations to gain an advantage in "international negotiations." In making the announcement, Fradkov acknowledged the possibility of corruption, either by having individuals share "state secrets" with corporations or looking the other way when faced with suspect corporate practices. He emphasized that the state will be on guard for such actions. It is understandable that the Russian government would want the best advantage, but it seems odd this sort of tasking would be discussed publicly. Fradkov, however, specifically stated, "The authorities and citizens have the right to expect returns from what the country is investing in the FSB." (10) Perhaps the public exposure is an attempt to ensure both the public and FSB agents themselves understand what is expected of them.

Finally, we also now see government agencies pitted against one another for resources. Defense Ministry announcements of changes in compulsory service, including reducing the number of draft deferment categories, have reduced the pool of candidates from which other agencies recruit. Previously, time spent serving in the Interior Ministry, for instance, precluded mandatory service in the military. In fact, the Defense Ministry has long been frustrated with the Interior Ministry: "Every year they siphon off up to 15,000 conscripts under oath." To avoid this in the future, the Defense Ministry is attempting to change the interpretation of the law that allows exemptions from military service. (11) In anticipation, perhaps, of losing conscripts back to the Defense Ministry, the Interior Ministry has essentially adopted a Moscow secondary school. This official relationship, expressed in a resolution from the ministry, will train students in some of the fundamental skills used by Interior Ministry personnel, and ensure these students remain physically fit for duty. The announcement stated that such students will be better prepared for further education at Interior Ministry-run schools. (12) This move, presumably will help create a pool of career Interior Ministry officers who will then be unavailable for military service.

The most interesting report, however, is that President Putin has expressed dissatisfaction with parts of the anti-terror bill that was passed recently through the first of three readings in the Duma. (13) The major provisions of this bill, as discussed previously, include giving the FSB on-scene commander authority over all other government personnel involved in a terrorist response operation; giving the local FSB commander the lead in developing procedures for responding to such events; granting authority, in general, to detain family members of terrorists and hostage-takers in attempts to bring such events to an end; and the introduction of Terrorist Threat Modes (TTMs), declared by the on-scene commander (even when, in some cases, there is not an actual terrorist event taking place). One of the implications of a TTM declaration is the ability to restrict media access to the scene. (13)

Reportedly, President Putin's concern is not with the enhanced role of the FSB (which has a speckled record of success in such events) or even with the detainment of terrorists' relatives; he is against the bill's planned media restrictions during terrorist events. According to Vedomosti, "Putin had told parliament he feared the section of the bill relating to journalists reporting of such attacks violated Russia's existing press law." While President Putin previously has favored press restrictions, he now either does not favor restricting the kind of press coverage we saw during the Beslan siege, or does not wish to be seen favoring them. (14) Possibly he has taken note of the worldwide sympathy his country received following the publication of images and accounts of the Beslan siege from all manner of media sources and reporters, and the favorable, if brief, support his administration received from other states in the days that followed.

Is this an indication that the Russian president has begun to change his restrictive and authoritarian ways? Unlikely, given only this evidence. This announcement, however, does bring us back to the fact that, given President Putin's moves to consolidate power, there are still opportunities to criticize his administration. Undoubtedly, there is a vast amount we cannot observe through

the media, but the parts that we can observe appear quite revealing, showing a state in transition and turbulence. And in these revelations, perhaps the president is beginning to learn a lesson in statesmanship that many expected he could not.

Source Notes:

- (1) BBC Monitoring, "Russian Soldiers Quit 'En Masse' In Protest At Benefits Reform," Moskovskiy komsomolets, 21 Jan 05, via Lexis-Nexis.
- (2) "Interior Ministry To Compensate Cancelled Benefits For Police," Interfax, 26 Jan 05 via Lexis-Nexis.
- (3) "Govt Reviews Monetization Law, Promises To Solve Problems," ITAR-Tass, 24 Jan 05 via Lexis-Nexis.
- (4) Valeria Korchagina, "Fradkov Asks Spies for Economic Aid," Moscow Times, 31 Jan 05 via Lexis-Nexis.
- (5) "Government Reviews Monetisation Law, Promises To Solve Problems," ITAR-Tass, 24 Jan 05 via Lexis-Nexis.
- (6) Yelena Shesternina, "Everyone Abducts People," Russkii kurier, 2 Feb 05, from What the Papers Say via ISI Emerging Markets.
- (7) Vyacheslav Izmailov, "Special Delivery Services: Do FSB agents get the ransom for abducted foreigners?" Novaya gazeta, 27 Jan 05 via ISI Emerging Markets.
- (8) BBC Monitoring, "Russian Police See Antiterrorist Role For Private Security Firms," ITAR-Tass, 2 Feb 05 via Lexis-Nexis.
- (9) Ibid.
- (10) Valeria Korchagina, "Fradkov Asks Spies For Economic Aid," Moscow Times, 31 Jan 05 via Lexis-Nexis; and "Government Hopes For FSB's Broader Security Role In Economy," Interfax, 28 Jan 05 via Lexis-Nexis.
- (11) Yuri Tretyakov, "The Military Agencies Share Conscripts: The Army Wants To Replenish Its Ranks At The Expense Of The Police," Trud, 12 Jan 05; BBC Monitoring via Lexis-Nexis.

(12) Svetlana Alikina, "Interior Ministry Acts As Guardian Of Moscow School," ITAR-Tass, 28 Jan 05 via Lexis-Nexis.

(13) The NIS Observed: An Analytical Review, Volume IX, Number 19, 9 Dec 04.

(14) "Russia's Putin Objects To Anti-Terror Law," Reuters, 2 Feb 05 via Johnson's Russia List # 9046.

Russian Federation: Foreign Relations

By Rebecca Mulder

Serious about Syria

Bashar al-Assad made his first visit as Syrian president to Moscow in January, and his talks with Russian President Vladimir Putin were said to be "a milestone in bilateral relations." (1) The main result was the signing of a declaration of friendship and cooperation, with the hope that it will open new opportunities for business ties, cultural exchanges, and maintain traditional areas of cooperation in hydro energy, oil and gas production and transport construction. A solution was found regarding Syria's debt to Russia, a long-standing issue between the two countries, one that will provide a stimulus for their economic ties. (2) Both leaders said they supported continuing peace talks in the Middle East, the withdrawal of Israeli troops from all Arab lands occupied since 1967, and the creation of a Palestinian state. (3) Support for UN initiatives, UN reform, the war on terror and the desire for Iraq to maintain territorial integrity were also matters upon which they agreed. (4)

Moscow's desire to assist Arab regimes and regain a greater position in the Middle East was evident during the Assad talks and a recent visit by Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas (see below). This could put Moscow in a difficult position with Washington, however, as the U.S. and Russia find themselves on opposite sides of many important issues in the region. Russia's

reported plans, for example, to export Iskander and tactical missiles to Syria, a state sponsor of terrorism, drew a sharp rebuke from Washington. (5)

Influence in the Middle East?

President Putin demonstrated an interest in cooperation with Middle Eastern states and reasserting Russia's role in the region during his talks with the recently elected President of the Palestinian Authority, Mahmoud Abbas. According to Putin, this meeting was a positive development in Russian-Palestinian relations, a continuation of what Yassar Arafat—"a sincere friend of our country"—began years ago. (6)

Development of economic ties and support for the Putin administration's efforts to bring about economic recovery, humanitarian relief issues in Palestine and scholarships for Palestinian students—the largest aid package that Russia allocates to any Middle Eastern country—were discussed. (7) Concerning peace negotiations, both leaders support a speedy normalization of the situation and the creation of an independent Palestinian state, which, according to Putin, "has the right not only to exist, but has the right to a secure existence." (8)

Abbas stated, "Russia should play an important part in international relations both through its own initiatives it puts forward and through the role it plays in the quartet of international mediators." (9) Putin pointed out that the Middle East lies in close proximity to Russian borders and that this, as well as the Middle East's direct impact on the world economy and on the energy sector, in which Russia holds a particular place, determine that Russia should play an active role regarding the Middle East settlement issue. (10)

In spite of Putin's desire for a greater role in the Middle East, some political experts, such as Aleksei Malashenko, acknowledge that Russia will be unable to promote Palestine's interests effectively "as it does not have the money, ideas or levers of influence to do so." (11) Malashenko further asserts that Russia can

only maintain its position as a world leader and retain its presence in the region by force of inertia. It must be remembered that the talks between Putin and Abbas are "only words." (12)

A six billion dollar deal

The secret is out concerning Rosneft's purchase of Yuganskneftegaz. Rosneft, the leading state-owned Russian oil company, borrowed \$6 billion from Chinese banks through Vneshekonombank in order to secure what was formerly the largest oil-producing subsidiary of YUKOS. (13) The Chinese bank loan seems to be aimed at securing long-term oil supplies from Rosneft. (14) Controversy surrounds this deal and the involvement of Chinese banks complicates the matter. Analysts have stated that the deal appears to have been structured via the banks rather than directly from company to company in order to avoid potential legal consequences for China National Petroleum Corp. The director of Group Menatep, YUKOS' majority owner, said the involvement of the Chinese banks was clearly aimed at complicating the deal and that CNPC would face legal action. (15) But regardless of the outcome of the controversy, there will now be "a little loan from China in every barrel of Yugansk oil." (16)

Not an outcast—for the time being

At a recent meeting with Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice communicated the hope that Russia would show a greater commitment to fundamental components of democracy in the coming years, and demonstrate cooperation with former Soviet republics where democracy is beginning to take hold. (17) According to Rice, there will be no radical revision of bilateral relations because present day Russia "is not the Soviet Union and a return to the past is out of the question." (18) Rice's first meeting with Lavrov, though essentially positive, underscored a comment she recently made in Washington: "We are keeping an eye on the strategy [of Russia's development –Vremya novostei] and decide what to do on the basis of these evaluations." (19) Though the U.S. is monitoring developments in Russia,

"generally speaking, America's position remains unchanged. Russia is not cast out for the time being." (20)

These talks were meant to pave the way for the upcoming Bratislava summit with President Bush and President Putin. The summit will focus on bilateral economic issues with both sides understanding "the need to make a leap forward in [our] cooperationŠachieve a real expansion of business contacts in the energy and high technology sectors and ensure a steady rate of growth in investment." (21) Russia's accession to the WTO in light of current negotiations with the U.S., continuing cooperation in the war on terror and weapon disarmament and the two countries' policies in the former Soviet Union are matters that will also dominate the summit. The post-Soviet territory is a source of tension and potential conflict. Although Putin stated recently, "Stop telling me that no country other than Russia can act on post-Soviet territory," competition is one thing and an attempt to neutralize Russian influence is another. (22)

Source Notes:

(1) "Press Statement by the President of Russia Vladimir Putin and the President of Syria Bashar al-AssadŠ," Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation via Johnson's Russia List (JRL), 27 Jan 2005.

(2) Ibid.

(3) Ibid.

(4) Ibid.

(5) Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty via Johnson's Russia List, 14 Jan 2005, #11-JRL9016; (www.cdi.org/russia/johnson/9015-11.cfm).

(6) "Press Statements by Russian President Vladimir Putin and President of the Palestinian National Authority Mahmoud AbbasŠ," Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation via JRL, 1 Feb 2005.

(7) Ibid.

(8) Ibid.

- (9) Ibid.
- (10) Ibid.
- (11) RIA Novosti via JRL, 1 Feb 05, JRL#9044;
(www.cdi.org/russia/johnson/9044-27.cfm).
- (12) Ibid.
- (13) "A Little Loan from China In Every Barrel of Yugansk Oil." Nezavisimaya gazeta; 2 Feb 05 via What the Papers Say via ISI Emerging Markets, 1.4.
- (14) Ibid.
- (15) "Chinese Lend Rosneft \$6Bln for Yugansk." The Moscow Times, 2 Feb 05 via ISI Emerging Markets.
- (16) Nezavisimaya gazeta via WPS via ISI Emerging Markets, 2 Feb 05, 1.4.
- (17) AOL News, 5 Feb 2005;
(<http://aolsvc.news.aol.com/news/article.adp?id=20050203063609990003>).
- (18) Vremya novosti, 3 Feb 2005 via What the Papers Say via ISI Emerging Markets,; 1.1 "The United States Perceives Too Much Power In the Kremlin."
- (19) Ibid.
- (20) Ibid.
- (21) "Russia-US Talks in Ankara to Pave Way for Bratislava Summit". ITAR-TASS; BBC Monitoring via ISI Emerging Markets.
- (22) RIA Novosti via JRL, 1 Feb 2005, JRL #9044;
(www.cdi.org/russia/johnson/9044-24.cfm).

Russian Federation: Domestic Issues and Legislative Branch

By Robyn Angley

POLITICS AND SOCIETY

Pensions continued

"We have to admit today that we have lost at a moral and political level," said Russian Regional Development Minister Vladimir Yakovlev about the recent scuffle over the monetization of benefits. (1) Elderly pensioners took to the streets in protest over the inadequacy of the funds that replaced the in-kind benefits they had previously been receiving. Several Duma deputies proposed dismissing the government in the wake of the first spontaneous protests seen during Vladimir Putin's presidency. In response, the government announced that it would increase pensions by an average of 240 rubles. (2)

Benefit reform seems to have backfired on the Putin administration, although Finance Minister Alexei Kudrin is laying the blame elsewhere. "The president is not to blame for the initial faults in the reforms," said Kudrin. "We are already aware of our errors; we let him down." (3) According to Kudrin, discretion on the implementation of monetization was left up to regional leaders, based on the assumption that they would know best how to manage the transition. That assumption proved faulty as transportation benefits claimed the spotlight. However, four regions already have begun the process of complete monetization, including Tatarstan, without any negative backlash. The failure of most regional leaders to implement monetization successfully may give support to Putin's decision to appoint governors in the name of strengthening the power vertical.

Although Kudrin cites regional leaders as a primary source of the problems, it is the Duma that seems to be on the receiving end of the public's wrath, according to a recent survey. The survey said that only 3 percent of Russians think the Duma is doing a good job. Fifty-two percent of those surveyed rated the Duma as doing "bad" or "very bad." The benefit reform issue is revealing an interesting facet of Russian politics. Those with little real power take the heat for problems, while those who consolidate the power vertical sidestep the public's ire. Putin's ratings are falling, but not nearly to the extent that the Duma's have plunged. The Duma, as an institution, has been so thoroughly emasculated by Putin's reforms that it now serves as little else but a rubber-stamping scapegoat - but a

scapegoat that, until recently, has received everything free except its mobile phones. (4)

Gubernatorial elections vanquished

Russia conducted its last direct election of governors on February 6. The event took place, with minimal protests, by about 100 people, many of whom were members of the Yabloko and Union of Right Forces political parties in Nenets Autonomous District. (5)

Meanwhile, Putin recently suggested that regional leaders tender their resignations. In exchange for early voluntary compliance with the recently passed law eliminating the direct election of governors, Putin proposes to consider their appointments himself rather than putting them through the screening process conducted by his regional envoys. (6) Sergei Darkin of the Primorye territory (located on Russia's Pacific coast) was the first governor to accept the president's invitation. In late January, he requested Putin's formal approval for his re-nomination. (7) On February 1, he offered the regional legislature his resignation and asked for their confirmation in his nomination as governor. (8) The Primorye legislature approved Darkin's request almost unanimously on February 4.

Darkin's appointment marks the formal shift from direct elections to appointment by head of the executive branch with confirmation by the regional legislature. The legislature may be dissolved if they consistently fail to confirm the president's nominee. Although this initial appointment has proven unproblematic, the sticking point for the new legislation will be the ethnic republics such as Tatarstan. Tatarstan's president, Mintimer Shaimiyev, has opposed the caveat allowing the president to disband parliaments for failing to confirm his appointee. (9)

And the mayors start to fall?

Obninsk, the second largest city in Russia's Kaluga region, recently became the first town with an appointed mayor. Vladimir Morozov was named mayor in early February by governor Anatoli Artamonov. (10) The move may be the first step toward a Kremlin-proposed plan to scrap the direct election of municipal leaders. Kaluga's legislature also passed a law establishing elections for a town council in each town throughout the region. Once elected, it is the council's job, according to the new law, to appoint a mayor for their town. The decision to appoint Obninsk's mayor has drawn criticism for revoking citizen's rights, as well as sparking allegations of a Kremlin conspiracy. The actual impact remains to be seen.

Marching Without Putin

A new youth organization determined to bring the 'Orange Revolution' to Russia has formed. Marching Without Putin, an organization whose title plays on the pro-Putin youth movement Marching Together, has vowed to work to bring democratic elections to Russia by 2008. Some members of Marching Without Putin purportedly were involved in the protests at the recent gubernatorial election in Nenets Autonomous District. (11)

Source Notes:

(1) Russian Regional Development Minister Interviewed, Izvestia, 4 Feb 04 via Johnson's Russia List (JRL) #9050.

(2) "Russia's basic pensions to increase to 900 rubles from 1 March," INTERFAX, 27 Jan 05 via WNC.

(3) "We misjudged the situation," Kommersant-Vlast, 31 Jan 05 via ISI Emerging Markets.

(4) "Russian State Duma deputies may give up certain fringe benefits," Izvestia, 4 Feb 04 via JRL #9050.

(5) "Small protest as Russia conducts last gubernatorial election," Associated Press Worldstream, 6 Feb 05 via Lexis-Nexis.

- (6) "Governors do not want to be appointed," RIA Novosti, 2 Feb 05 via Lexis-Nexis.
- (7) "Russian governor seeks Putin's blessing," UPI, 25 Jan 05 via Lexis-Nexis.
- (8) "Russian regional leader wins Putin's nomination under new law," Associated Press Worldstream, 1 Feb 05 via Lexis-Nexis.
- (9) "Tatarstan President Disagrees With Initiative on Disbanding Parliament," INTERFAX, 25 Oct 04 via WNC.
- (10) "Kaluga moves to scrap mayoral elections," Moscow Times, 3 Feb 05 via ISI Emerging Markets.
- (11) "Small protest as Russia conducts last gubernatorial election," Associated Press Worldstream, 6 Feb 05 via Lexis-Nexis.

Russian Federation: Armed Forces

By Jeff Kubiak and Kyle Colton

INTERNAL

The impact of the monetization of social benefits on the armed forces has been significant and maybe not even fully appreciated yet. Short-term readiness deficiencies caused by the reform are real and nearly comical. Lt. General Vladimir Shamonov, Deputy Prime Minister for the Social Protection of Servicemen, cited examples of units unable to travel to their posts because they had no money to pay for the public transportation upon which they relied. "An honor guard platoon which was supposed to be present when meeting a foreign delegation also wasn't allowed into the subway. In this case the soldiers turned around and returned to the barracks." (1) The Minister of Defense, Sergei Ivanov, still claims that the reforms are good, just poorly implemented. Failure on the part of the Ministry of Defense to prepare for the inevitable impact of the reforms with alternative ways to fund troop transportation, leaves local commanders scrambling, as always, to find creative ways to overcome resource shortages, so the troops might accomplish the mission.

Desirability and prestige of military service

The benefits reform also accelerates the decline in the socio-economic status of servicemen. This will certainly have both short and long-term implications for the combat readiness of the Russian military. President Putin's announcement at the end of January that servicemen will receive a 20% pay raise this year appears as his attempt to douse an already raging political brush fire. Although Putin's effort came quickly, and would be significant if actually acted upon, it still is unlikely to undo the damage to the armed forces that has already occurred. The Kremlin and the Ministry of Defense appear not to be sensitive to the fact that the benefits, as noted by a military analyst with the group Generals for Democracy and Humanism, "have always brimmed with symbolism, highlighting the prestige of military service in the public eyes." (2) Combined with the reduction of benefits in retirement, this reform strikes a significant blow to the socio-economic status of the armed forces.

This most recent decline in the economic condition of Russia's servicemen only accelerates the trend of the past two years. While Ivanov claimed that the troops he visited recently in Siberia actually have benefited from the reform, the reality, according to a Defense Ministry survey, is that 80% of servicemen oppose the action. (3) According to the same poll, only a meager 5% of servicemen are content with their current economic well-being, down dramatically from 20% contentment just 2 years ago. Of course, with no salary increase to keep pace with inflation despite a modest attempt in October 2003, servicemen are experiencing a real income decline in pay. (4) The inability to house servicemen is still a major failing of the MOD, and Ivanov has reported to President Putin that more than 134,000 military families are without housing; the current plan to remedy this situation already extends beyond 2015. (5)

Shamonov gets to the heart of the issue when he predicts "with a high degree of probability—that with the decline of prestige of military service because of the

cancellation of benefits and a number of other aspects, there will be a problems with attracting contract servicemen. I can say with the very same degree of probability that an outflow of junior officers will begin." (6) Again, the reality is that retention is already a major problem, especially among junior officers, and the impact is already having a deleterious effect on military capability. According to an Auditing Chamber report, almost one third of lieutenants quit the military within a year of graduating from a military institute. (7) A chronic shortage of officers has required the military to draft officers into the armed forces that were trained in the military departments of civilian schools. These officers (30,000 to 40,000 per year), who in the past had been allowed to serve in the reserves but were not drafted into the active force, are being called to duty in far greater numbers than back in 1999 and are almost as numerous as those officers graduating from military colleges. The system of military departments at civilian schools was created, according to Ivanov, "to enable students not to serve in the army but become officers of reserves without serving." (8) The programs vary in their effectiveness, but in general, the level of training provided to graduates of these programs is far inferior to that provided to the military college graduate. Because the Russian armed forces have not yet developed a professional NCO corps, the preponderance of the responsibility for training conscripts falls to the junior officers. According to experts "when they find themselves in the troops, lieutenants from military departments know less than the conscripts." (9)

Recruitment of contract soldiers is also a problem. Ivanov recently has tried to lower the public's expectations of the transition to a contract force, conceding that Russia will always need conscripts to fill out the one million man armed forces that he says are required to secure a country of ten time zones. "Theoretically," Ivanov noted, "it is possible [to create a contract military], but practically it is unrealistic." (10)

What Ivanov means is that he is incapable or unwilling to provide sufficient resources to make contract service attractive enough to fill the ranks of the

Russian army. While the conversion to contract soldiers progresses haltingly in other regions, professional units assigned in Chechnya never have a shortage of soldiers applying to serve there. This is most assuredly due to the fact that the average professional soldier serving in Chechnya makes three times what a soldier makes in Pskov (home of the other completely professional unit, the 76th Airborne Division), even before combat pay is considered. (11) At the right price, individuals interested in military service increase in number and even improve in quality.

But there is more to the "desirability" of a military career than just pay. A significant source of the pride associated with a military career has been extinguished through extensive decay of discipline and moral fiber in the armed forces. Highlighting this was a report recently released by the General Prosecutor's Office, which concluded that "the crime rate in the army and other security structures has increased; theft and beatings have become a serious problem." (12) According to Prosecutor-General Vladimir Ustinov, more than R1.7bn has been stolen or embezzled by servicemen in the last two years. Ustinov notes that "the volume of kerosene stolen from the Army would be enough to organize four months of flight training for a regiment of the MiG-29 fighters." (13) These are official government figures; The reality is likely many times worse.

There is also new information documenting that life in the military is increasingly dangerous. Novaya gazeta recently published an article citing an anonymous Duma source who claimed that 10,799 servicemen have died in non-combat related incidents over the past five years. Because this information was relayed the day after Sergei Ivanov had briefed Parliament, the information is purported to have originated with him. With incredulity, the article goes on to compare the more than 2,000 deaths per year in the Russian army with the 1,000 deaths per year suffered by the Soviet army while in heavy combat in Afghanistan, and the 1,300+ deaths suffered by the U.S. in its nearly two-year-old Iraqi campaign.

Regardless of the precise causes of these deaths (left unclear in the article), the high number of losses prompted the author to note that "It appears the Russian army is conducting a heavy and exhausting war against itself and suffering huge losses." (14)

Ivanov's track record and his plan

Ivanov knows the armed forces are in a social crisis. He knows that the decision to reduce the length of conscripted service from two years to one year by 2008, "a major task of national importance identified by the President," presents an additional challenge ahead, especially when combined with Russia's negative demographic trends. (15) By failing to support even inflation-matching pay raises for the servicemen in 2004 and 2005, by supporting the monetization of benefits (which substantially hurt the soldier economically), and by failing to provide enough money for an aggressive transition to contract service, Ivanov demonstrates that he is trying to resolve problems on the cheap. The core of Ivanov's solution still appears to center on conscription. His plan to improve the quality of personnel serving in the Russian armed forces was to increase the talent pool from which the military drew its troops by removing deferments. He was forced to back away from that plan early in 2005 because the government could not withstand the political heat generated by the issue. But student soldiers would not have been helped, as pointed out by Pavel Felgenhauer, "the Soviet mass conscript army with university students as foot soldiers did miserably in the war in Afghanistan in the late 1908's." (16) Even if the deferments were eliminated, well-to-do parents would find another way to keep their children from serving in a military as abusive and dangerous as the Russian military is today.

Military analysts like Pavel Felgenhauer continue to assert that the real answer is to modernize the Russian military personnel system by recruiting and retaining talented officers and continuing the transition to a force of professional soldiers, especially at the NCO level. But what makes the military profession more or less

attractive? Apparently Ivanov thinks he can increase the prestige and status of a military career by preaching to the public on a national patriotic TV station run by the Ministry of Defense, and by making "basic military preparedness" compulsory in Russian schools. Studies by the Russian Armed Forces Sociological Center show that the same culture that allowed the military to survive the extreme conditions of the past 15 years still exists today, but is declining. The bedrock of officers who still feel compelled to serve the fatherland are a shrinking plurality in today's Russian military. (17) More and more frequently material security—including housing—is playing a role in the decisions of young men and women with regard to a career in the military. As society's esteem for the military declines, so too do the social motivations to make the military a career. The creation of a professional force, along with the elevated awareness of economic well-being in modern Russian society is causing the economics of a military career to become more important. Civilian salaries in Russia are much higher, even the salaries of servicemen in Kazakhstan and Belarus are higher than that of the Russian soldier. (18) Economic realities add to the negative pressures already eroding the Russian military.

Failure of the Russian military to reverse the negative trends in the socio-economic status of servicemen will have a long-term impact on readiness. In addition to the ongoing problems with crime and corruption, increased problems with retention and recruitment are sure to reduce the effectiveness of the force. Each generation plays an important role in the evolution of a professional military and if a generation is marred by defective elements, or simply by flight, it will take several additional generations to undo the damage that undoubtedly will occur.

Source Notes:

(1) "Benefits Monetization Threatens the Armed Forces," *Nezavisimoye voyennoye obozreniye*, 27 Jan 05 via Johnson's Russia List (JRL).

- (2) "Putin Tries to Soothe an Irate Military," Nabi Abdullaev, Moscow Times, 25 Jan 05 via ISI Emerging Markets.
- (3) Ibid.
- (4) "The Military-Police Budget As A Sign of Our Times," Nezavisimaya gazeta, 26 Jan 05 via JRL.
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- (7) "The Military-Police Budget As A Sign of Our Times," Nezavisimaya gazeta, 26 Jan 05 via JRL.
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- (16) "Drafting Students Means Trouble," Pavel Felgenhauer, Moscow Times, 11 Jan 05 via JRL.
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EXTERNAL

President Putin at the Russian Security Council

Russian President Vladimir Putin gave his first Security Council address since Russia's ill-advised intervention in Ukraine's presidential elections and the subsequent election of opposition leader Viktor Yushchenko. President Putin highlighted lingering Russian fears over further NATO expansion, but promised to increase cooperation with the alliance. President Yushchenko, inaugurated just days prior to Putin's speech, repeatedly has made it clear that he will push for Ukrainian membership in NATO. Russia opposes membership for Ukraine based on several emotional reasons linked with its enduring self image as a superpower, but actual security concerns include: the location of the Black Sea Fleet in the Ukrainian port of Sevastopol and the thousand mile plus border Russia would have with NATO, if Ukraine joined the alliance.

Putin's discussion of increased NATO cooperation in this year's address was significantly different from his last Security Council speech in July 2004.

President Putin then focused on Russia's preeminent role within the Commonwealth of Independent States. He stated, "Russia's role in increasing the influence and authority of the CIS is highly significant." (1) At the same time, he acknowledged, "We (Russia) are facing increasing political and economic competition with the CIS (region)." (2)

The Kremlin's desire to strengthen the CIS seems to have accomplished little in stemming the tide of frustration within some former Soviet countries. President Putin is now facing the question, of how to return Russia to its previous greatness without political and military domination of the post-Soviet lands. Revolutions in Ukraine and Georgia have made it more difficult for Russia to influence political processes across the near abroad. This new reality finally may

force the Russian government to find other avenues, outside of bullying, to further its agenda within its proclaimed "sphere of influence."

Russian attitude calmly negative

During his speech, President Putin emphasized a long-standing component of Russian foreign policy, "As before, we are convinced that there is not an arguable basis for the geographic expansion of NATO." (3)

Andrei Kelin, Deputy Director of the European Cooperation Department in the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, put it this way, "As far as our attitude to the (NATO) expansion is concerned, it remains calmly negative." (4) He also said, "To put it briefly, there is nothing good in the NATO expansion for Russia. And we have both military and political objections."

Russia's primary concern with former Soviet states joining NATO appears to be the growing dependence of the NIS on NATO's system of decision-making, both in the political and military arenas. The influence that Russia once wielded over these countries has dissipated with NATO's expansion; without this influence, Russia finds itself with less control over the post-Soviet sphere.

The secondary issue is Russian residual distrust, notable after the breakup of Yugoslavia, particularly after the 1999 Kosovo conflict. NATO basically enlarged its military mission to include out-of-area operations in a region whose problems did not directly threaten any member states' security, but did threaten European stability as a whole. After NATO's action against the Serb-dominated rump Yugoslav state, 96 percent of Russians either agreed or totally agreed with the proposition that "NATO's bombing of Yugoslavia is a crime against humanity," and 77 percent either agreed or totally agreed that "there is nothing stopping NATO from getting involved in Russia as it did in Yugoslavia." (5)

Options for Russia-NATO Cooperation

If President Putin is serious about significantly increasing cooperation between Russia and NATO, certain options present themselves: strengthening or altering the existing NATO-Russia Council; establishing a new joint NATO-Russia command; or moving toward the inclusion of Russia as a full NATO member.

Option 1 – Strengthen the NATO-Russia Council. Contacts in the context of the NATO-Russia Council are usually high level. Direct military to military interaction or cooperation is often limited to a single exercise. The council could set up a standard annual exercise schedule, increase the numbers of lower level personnel exchanges, and look for creative ways to promote military technology sharing. Strengthening the council in these ways would probably not have any immediate effect on interoperability for either Russia or NATO.

Option 2 – Establish a joint NATO-Russia Command. With the prospect of significant changes to U.S. force disposition within Germany and even Korea, the opportunity exists to establish a joint Russia-NATO command. The command, headquartered in Russia, could help eliminate Russian fears of NATO troops massing on its borders. The command's mission focus should be something relatively low tech, such as joint peacekeeping, stabilization and reconstruction. Focusing in these areas, the command would be able to deal with security concerns on both sides, while at the same time allowing the inclusion and participation of all troops regardless of their readiness level.

Option 3 – Russia steps on the path toward full NATO membership. In 1995, NATO advised potential new members that the general membership criteria were as follows: (1) an established democracy (with individual liberty and the rule of law); (2) respect for human rights; (3) a market-based economy (with social justice and environmental responsibility); (4) armed forces under civilian control; (5) and good relations with neighboring states (with the resolution of internal ethnic disputes). The current situation in Russia appears to be diverting ever

further from this "western" model. Currently, it is not useful to discuss Russian NATO membership.

Conclusion

NATO will remain the key provider of European security and stability for the foreseeable future. Russia already has chosen a course of cooperation with NATO. If President Putin truly wants to take the NATO-Russia alliance to a new level, Russia must overcome psychological scars it carries from the Cold War. Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov noted at the Russian-U.S. Council for Economic Cooperation, that current U.S.-Russian relations still bear traces of the past, featuring "attempts to play a zero sum game." (6)

Russia, not the United States or NATO, is fixated on the idea of keeping its superpower "sphere of influence." Russia's inability to deliver security and stability to the former Soviet states will only provide the impetus for continued NATO expansion. Russia simply cannot compete—even in their own backyard. NATO and the United States will not limit their own military or political initiatives in any post-Soviet region based solely on Russia's historical claims. Ukraine, Georgia, Moldova and Azerbaijan are in various stages of the NATO membership process. Increased NATO-Russian cooperation certainly could be mutually beneficial, but until Russia overcomes its self image problems, it is not likely to happen.

Source Notes:

(1) Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs press service, (www.in.mid.ru/brp_4.nsf/0/b598305270713908c3256ed70025f90c?OpenDocument).

(2) Ibid.

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(5) "What do Russian voters think?" Russian Election Watch, number 4, 4 Nov 99, page 3 via The Washington Quarterly, Winter 2002, "Russia in NATO?"

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Newly Independent States: Western Region

By Elena Selyuk

UKRAINE

Yulia Timoshenko—Prime-Minister

Last Friday, the 450-seat Verkhovna Rada approved Yulia Timoshenko for the post of the Prime-Minister with a vote of 370-0. Shortly thereafter, Timoshenko announced the members of her government, notably: First Deputy Prime Minister Anatoliy Kinakh, Interior Minister Yury Lutsenko, Foreign Minister Boris Tarasyuk, Head of the Secret Service Oleksandr Turchinov, Deputy Prime Minister on European integration Oleg Rybachuk, and Deputy Prime Minister on Administrative Reform Roman Bessmertniy, among others. (1)

Earlier, Timoshenko stressed that a candidate's beliefs, goals, and intents, not arbitrary personal characteristics, should be the main criteria when selecting any political candidate for a government position. The presentation of her "Toward the People" action plan consisted of five main subsections: Fairness, Harmony, Life, Security, and the World. Timoshenko started the presentation of her program by underlining the importance of spiritual education, faith in God, in Ukraine, and in the people's own abilities to build a corruption-free, prosperous state. Timoshenko, reaching out to the wide Ukrainian population, emphasized the importance of offering equal opportunities to all Ukrainian children, regardless

of their family financial abilities. She underlined the significance of fair courts, separation of business and government and the importance of reforming the military.

After the vote which confirmed Timoshenko's appointment for the post of the Prime-Minister, Yushchenko was the first to congratulate her. Speaker Litvin gave her a big bouquet of white roses. Timoshenko expressed her gratitude to everyone, saying that due to the collaboration between the government and the parliament, Ukraine now "sparkled in the world as a diamond." (2)

BELARUS

Flourishing state ideology

Last week, the Charter-97 website reported that all scripts of a comical Belarusian TV show, KVN, which features humorous competitions between university student teams from around the country, now will have to pass an ideological test in respective universities' administrations before appearing on the air. In addition, student teams will be prohibited from making jokes about Lukashenko or even imitating his voice. Students were lectured on how much the President was doing for their country and how joking about the leader was disrespectful towards their Motherland. (3)

The ideological education of the Belarusian nation, initiated by Lukashenko several years ago, seems to be taking on an ever more absurd form. Now, Belarusians are being deprived of the last outlet to ease their frustration with the current regime—an ability to laugh openly at it. In schools, on the jobs, on TV and radio, ideological education has been thriving for several years already.

Education has been one of Lukashenko's main targets for promoting state ideology. One example of his methods of achieving universal patriotism is forcing state ideology students at the Mahilyow State Teacher's Training University to subscribe to state-owned newspapers. Students will be allowed to sit state

examinations only upon presentation of their subscription slips. Even after graduation, future Social Science and History teachers will be obliged to subscribe to a government mouthpiece—Sovetskaya Belorussiya and a local newspaper Mahilyowskiya vedamasti. (4)

All Belarusian university students have been facing compulsory courses on the fundamentals of state ideology since 2003. Acclaimed philosophers, historians, political sociologists and economists were trained to teach such courses. History textbooks were rewritten on Lukashenko's order last year: those Lukashenko deemed "talentless people" were excised; his designated "patriots" remain in the textbooks. (5)

The Yakub Kolas Lyceum, which had been attended by the children of many opposition members, was one of many Belarusian schools closed down by Lukashenko, who declared that "Education is one place where the opposition is not going to put down roots." (6)

University and high school students are forced to join a government supported clone of the Soviet Komsomol organization, the Belarusian National Union of Youth (or popularly known as "Lukomol"—a blend of Lukashenko and Komsomol), membership in which is an unwritten prerequisite to entering university.

In the work place, the ideological brainwashing is in full swing. Organizations now have ideology managers or deputy directors of ideological work. These people are required to hold regular political meetings and provide interpretations of the political events unfolding in the country.

Media is yet another crucial means through which the government brings the teachings of the President to the people. Most TV channels are government mouthpieces. Government-affiliated organizations (about 80% of all in Belarus)

are forced to subscribe to state-owned newspapers. Recently, Lukashenko passed a law which forced all FM radio stations are required to fill 75 percent of their music airtime with "domestic products." (7) There are restrictions even on this law—Belarusian musicians who supported opposition candidates during the past parliamentary elections, are banned from radio and TV by an informal government order. (8)

What is the essence Lukashenko's state ideology? What kind of citizen is he trying to cultivate and what type of state is he trying to create? Lukashenko claims that the main purpose of teaching ideology is to help the young Belarusian state, which has gained independence for the first time in centuries, to consolidate into a strong patriotic nation. "A state isn't worth much if it does not have its own ideology. Our state is in its infancy and it should have a powerful immune system in the shape of ideology to ensure its continued survival," said Lukashenko while addressing students of the Belarusian State Academy of Arts two years ago. (9) Indeed, given the tender age of the Belarusian nation and lack of history of sovereign statehood, it might be reasonable to create some common foundation for independent political and cultural development.

Lukashenko's publicized ideals and his true motives and actions are drastically different, however. One of the priorities of Lukashenko's ideological teachings is cultivating civic and patriotic feelings in the population. The common definition of patriotism, however, is the love of one's Motherland, not unquestioned loyalty to a president, which seems to be Lukashenko's focus. Lukashenko does not hide the fact that his ideological teachings are a "campaign for the current regime." (10) "We must inoculate the people so that no one can lead them astray," said Lukashenko. "If any washed-up crazies come along, no one will listen to them. The people will be staunchly hostile to them." In the past, the phrase "washed-up crazies" was used by Lukashenko to describe the opposition. (11) Lukashenko also spoke against the artificial creation of a party of power. "This process should go and ripen on its own," said the Belarusian President. (12)

Reviving and strengthening use of the national language and celebration of culture is yet another established way to create a strong, patriotic nation. Unfortunately, Belarus' President suppressed the revival of a Belarusian culture throughout his decade-long presidency. During the past several years, Lukashenko closed 118 schools where Belarusian was used as the language of instruction, and 51 schools, where Belarusian was used together with Russian as the language of instruction. (13) Numerous Belarusian language newspapers have been closed and even the official presidential website is written only in Russian and English, sending a strong message about the President's language preferences.

It appears that many Belarusians are skeptical about Lukashenko's ideological teachings and realize that Belarusian state ideology is nothing more than brainwashing aimed at creating loyal followers of the current regime. That awareness is not leading to protest however. By not raising their voices, the Belarusians are condemning not only themselves, but also their children to remain small screws in the big dictatorial machine for years to come.

Source notes:

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- (2) Ibid.
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- (4) Charter-97 website, 25 Jan 05 BBC Monitoring via Lexis-Nexis.
- (5) Belapan Analytic Bulletin, 28 Dec 04 via ISI Emerging Markets.
- (6) Current Digest of Post-Soviet Press, 10 Sep 2003 via Lexis-Nexis.
- (7) Belapan Analytic Bulletin, 18 Jan 05 via ISI Emerging markets.
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Newly Independent States: Caucasus

By Tammy Lynch

Aftermath of the loss of a revolutionary prime minister

During the early morning hours of February 3, Georgian Prime Minister Zurab Zhvania and his friend Raul Usupov were found dead in Usupov's Tbilisi apartment. Usupov served as the deputy governor of Shadi Kartli. Zhvania, with President Mikheil Saakashvili and Parliament Speaker Nino Burjanadze, led Georgia through the "rose revolution." He was known as perhaps the smartest and most strategic politician in the country.

Authorities immediately suggested—even before medical testing had begun—that Zhvania's death was a "tragic accident" caused by carbon monoxide poisoning. Less than three hours after the prime minister's body was discovered, Interior Minister Vano Merabishvili told reporters, "This was apparently an accident." (1) Merabishvili explained that the installation of a new "Iranian made" gas heater at Usupov's home just two days earlier was completed improperly. Later in the day, Justice Minister Levan Samkharauli confirmed that the carbon monoxide level in Zhvania's blood was abnormally high—more than twice the level considered fatal. (2)

Nevertheless, the timing of Zhvania's death, combined with the country's long history of political violence, has led many in the media and some in the parliament to wonder if the cause was really as benign as authorities suggested.

In particular, opposition MP Alexander Shalamberidze alleged that Zhvania's death was masterminded "by outside forces," and implied that those forces originated in Russia. (3) Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov immediately denied the accusation, and said, "The statements of those who rush to make judgments . . . will remain on their consciences." (4)

Media outlets also questioned the quick conclusion of authorities. The Georgian daily, 24 Hours, suggested that the actions of the authorities seemed to indicate an attempt to cover up evidence. The paper noted that officials had shown journalists a video tape of the scene in Usupov's apartment "in an attempt to disavow doubts," but that "the tape was surely edited, which even more triggered a sense that it was made in an attempt to hide something." (5)

The daily Rezonansi (Resonance) said, "This is very strange. It is quite possible that Zhvania really could have died by carbon monoxide poisoning, but was it really a tragic accident?" (6)

The questions are logical, given the many critical and often dangerous issues that were being addressed directly by the Prime Minister at the time of his death.

Most notably, Tbilisi's relations with the leaders of the Abkhaz and South Ossetian breakaway republics are at a precarious point. On January 26, President Saakashvili announced that talks with Abkhaz representatives had been suspended because Abkhazia effectively had "left the negotiating table" by refusing to negotiate certain points. In supporting the President's announcement, Zhvania said, "The most important thing is that a tragic fact must be recognized [in order] to continue talks on Abkhazia – ethnic cleansing of Georgians took place in Abkhazia in 1993." (7) However, despite this statement, several peace plans have been proposed by Georgian government and NGO organizations, and Zhvania had been asked to generate support on both sides of the conflict for a final settlement proposal.

On January 26, President Saakashvili also announced a new South Ossetian peace initiative during a session of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE). The plan proposed broad autonomy for South Ossetia, including its own president, but the plan would keep the republic within Georgia. The proposal has many similarities to the agreement negotiated by Prime Minister Zhvania with Adjarian representatives in mid-2004, technically ending the armed conflict there. (8) PACE members generally reacted positively to this latest initiative, with PACE Venice Commission member Gianni Buquichio calling it "a very good starting point which should facilitate settlement of this conflict." (9)

Not surprisingly, South Ossetian representatives balked at the initial announcement of the initiative. "We have always said that the South Ossetian Republic does not refuse to hold dialogue Š but we do not intend to discuss the issue of the South Ossetian Republic's status," the self-titled South Ossetian Foreign Minister Alan Pliev said. (10)

Still, South Ossetian leaders claimed good relations with Zhvania, and progress had been made in recent months. On November 5, the republic's self-styled President, Eduard Kokoity, signed a demilitarization agreement with Zhvania and, at least publicly, remained committed to the plan. On November 14, Kokoity said Zhvania led a "party of peace" in his efforts to solve the situation. He suggested that other Georgian leaders, most notably then-Interior Minister (current Defense Minister) Irakli Okruashvili, "contribute to the tensions" and he implied a clear unwillingness to work with individuals outside the Prime Minister's circle. (11) Following Zhvania's death, Kokoity's envoy told Interfax that a delegation from the republic would attend the funeral. "We were talking about ways of settling the conflict with Zhvania, who tried to do a lot to normalize the situation in the region," Vazha Khachapuridze said. (12) In fact, the Prime Minister reportedly had intended to focus primarily on the South Ossetian issue in the coming months. Kokoity's spokeswoman noted that Kokoity "does not rule

out the possibility that the negotiating process may now become more complicated." (13)

The intention to focus on South Ossetia was given new impetus on February 1, when a car bomb exploded outside the police station in Gori, located just a few kilometers outside of South Ossetia, about 30 kilometers from the South Ossetian capital of Tskhinvali. The bomb killed three police officers and injured 27 civilians. (14) Almost immediately, some media speculated that South Ossetian separatists were to blame in an effort to derail recent progress in negotiations. One day after the bombing, Saakashvili blamed "anti-peace forces" for the attack, and without naming South Ossetia, noted that the blast came after his government had "initiated peace proposals." (15) A South Ossetian government spokeswoman, however, fervently denied involvement. "What happened is terrible," Irina Gagloyeva said. "We hope this won't be repeated. We definitely aren't guilty of it." (16)

Soon after, Zhvania supported Gagloyeva's statement. He suggested that the bombing was not planned by Georgians or South Ossetians and implied the involvement of a third country. Foreign Minister Salome Zurbishvili also told reporters on February 1 that the attack seemed to be planned outside Georgia. (17) At the same time, all government ministers urged calm. On February 3, just hours before his death, Zhvania said, "The organizers of this terrorist act aimed to spread panic among the population and destabilize the situation. However, we should respond with consolidation and effective activities." (18)

The bombing attack, coincidentally or not, came just days after what one Russian newspaper called a "summit of separatists" in Moscow. On January 25, the leaders of South Ossetia, Abkhazia and Transdneistria arrived in the Russian capital. It is somewhat unclear with whom they met, and they claimed not to have coordinated their visits. However, the Kommersant Russian daily newspaper reported that Kokoity met with Deputy Foreign Minister Yuri

Loshchinin, while newly elected Abkhaz "President" Sergei Bagapsh met with Duma Speaker Boris Gрызlov. Kommersant also noted that former Ukrainian presidential candidate Viktor Yanukovich, who tacitly supported eastern Ukrainian separatist activity during his election campaign, was in Moscow at this time. (19)

Zhvania's implication of a third country connection with the Gori bombing and his stepped-up negotiations with Kokoity have added to the questions surrounding his death. Without Zhvania, South Ossetia negotiations will become more complicated, and the conflict could continue to plague Georgia indefinitely, draining its resources and having a destabilizing impact on its economic and political standing in the international community.

Domestically, Georgia's attempts to consolidate its power ministries and curb police corruption—spearheaded by Zhvania—also likely will be impacted, at least initially. Clearly, numerous parties stand to benefit from his death.

Realizing that questions remain about Zhvania's death, Justice Minister Levan Samkharauli announced on February 4 that, although tests had revealed a lethal level of carbon monoxide (technically carboxyhemoglobin) in Zhvania's blood, there will be additional analysis. "In other cases," he said, "a bio-chemical test would have been enough, but this is a case of high-ranking officials and it has been decided to make other tests within ten days." (20) In addition, officials announced that the U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigation will assist the government by conducting forensic tests on blood and tissue samples taken from Zhvania. (21) In response to questions about possible tampering with the gas heater, Georgian Deputy General Prosecutor Giorgi Janashia told reporters on February 5 that they are questioning "dozens" of persons who may have information. (22)

In the meantime, Saakashvili is serving as Acting Prime Minister while he prepares to nominate a replacement for Zhvania. He must do so by February 10, while a new cabinet must be formed by February 20.

Media reports suggest fierce battles over the prime minister position between two "camps" represented in the government—one loyal to Saakashvili and one loyal to Zhvania. The battle is one not only of personality, but also of strategic policy. "Zhvania was the person Saakashvili really listened to and in many cases, he managed to stop Saakashvili on the brink of fairly radical things," Paata Zakareishvili of the Center for Development and Cooperation in Tbilisi said. (24) Zhvania's camp may be searching for some way to continue its "checks and balances" function, as Zhvania did with Saakashvili over the past year.

Currently, leading prime minister candidates include State Minister for Euro-Atlantic Integration and Zhvania protégé Giorgi Baramidze, Defense Minister and Saakashvili supporter Irakli Okruashvili and Parliament Speaker Nino Burjanadze, who served as interim president following Eduard Shevardnadze's resignation. Clearly, the most logical and acceptable choice would be Nino Burjanadze. The Speaker was a member of the "rose revolution" leaders troika, and has been described repeatedly by Saakashvili as his most important partner, along with Zhvania. She has shown a skill at not being pulled into one camp and has impressed both Georgians and Western organizations with her attempts to increase the power of the parliament to balance an extremely strong president. In addition, her relations with the separatist republics have been more productive than not.

Saakashvili now faces a number of daunting challenges, and he must face them without the man on whom he depended heavily. He will be tempted to lean on his supporters who urge strident action and moves that could undo the progress made over the last year. It is in his and his country's interest to have an independent, balanced, tested partner by his side. It is also in his interest to

ensure that the circumstances surrounding the death of Zurab Zhvania are examined thoroughly and transparently. Otherwise, any choice he makes for the premiership will be tainted even before the first cabinet meeting is convened.

Source Notes:

- (1) Agence France Press, 03 Feb 05, 11:33 AM EST via (www.bakutoday.net).
- (2) Civil Georgia, 03 Feb 05, 6:14 PM EST, "Official Speaks of Details of Zhvania's Forensic Expertise" via (www.civil.ge).
- (3) Associated Press, 04 Feb 05, 3:01 PM via Yahoo! News.
- (4) The Independent Online Edition, 04 Feb 05, "Moscow Denies Link to Georgia PM's Death;" via (news.independent.co.uk).
- (5) 24 Hours, "Results of Official Forensic Examination Fail to Disavow Doubts," 05 Feb 05; Civil Georgia via (www.civil.ge), 05 Feb 05, 19:45.
- (6) Rezonance, 05 Feb 05; Civil Georgia via (www.civil.ge, 05 Feb 05, 19:45).
- (7) Civil Georgia, 29 Jan 05, 5:10 PM EST, "Abkhazia Agenda Overshadowed by South Ossetia" via (www.civil.ge). (both Saakashvili and Zhvania quotes located here)
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- (13) Interfax, 03 Feb 05, 11:28 AM EST via (www.interfax.ru).
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(23) Associated Press, 05 Feb 05, 8:18 PM EST, "Georgians Mourn Prime Minister as Authorities Investigate" via Yahoo! News.

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Newly Independent States: Central Asia

By Fabian Adami

Ukraine blowback

Six weeks ago, parliamentary elections were held in Uzbekistan. As was to be expected, the electoral process was questionable at best. Weeks before the balloting was due to be held, Uzbekistan's opposition bloc withdrew from the election, citing large-scale governmental fraud and intimidation. (1) The result of this action was that Uzbek voters were forced to choose between five political parties, all of which were pro-presidential.

In spite of this "democratic setback," President Karimov conducted a campaign designed to present a democratic image to the outside world, insisting that the elections would be free and fair, and that all legitimate criticisms from the OSCE and other observers would be accepted. (2)

Immediately after the election, Karimov's rhetoric concerning democratization and the OSCE returned to its previously defiant note. Karimov noted that the OSCE had little right to pass judgment on Uzbekistan, as the country had joined the organization only because of its status as a post-Soviet Republic. In addition to attacking the OSCE, Karimov, in an exclusive interview with *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, claimed there would be no color revolution in Uzbekistan since the country lacked "protest potential" as well as any significant foreign influence. (3) Karimov's interview showed that he was worried by events in Ukraine this winter and was determined to ensure that revolution did not occur in Uzbekistan. His actions in excluding opposition parties must be viewed within the framework of domestic "protest potential." Karimov's evident concern with the spread of both unrest and willingness to demonstrate for political change made him extremely cautious. In the last two weeks, Karimov has begun to address the second of his concerns, namely foreign interference in Uzbek affairs.

On January 28, President Karimov addressed the newly formed Parliament for the first time. A considerable portion of his speech was geared towards discussing the role of foreign NGO's in the country. Karimov stated that "inspections of some nongovernmental and non profit organizations that have been set up primarily with the help of certain foundations have shown that the activities of such organizations are significantly deviating from those stipulated in their statutes and programs and are pursuing specific objectives ordered by certain forces." (4) Pointing directly at the gallery occupied by Western (including U.S.) diplomats, Karimov added "we have enough power to curb aid groups that violate our laws. I hope those sitting in the balcony understand that." (5) Karimov's concerns regarding revolution are also affecting Uzbekistan's foreign policy. Significantly, his remarks contained no references to the U.S./Uzbek relationship. Instead, he stressed the value to Uzbekistan of regional alliances such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, the Central Asian Cooperation Organization and the Commonwealth of Independent States. (6)

This pattern continued during Karimov's post-speech press conference, during which he emphasized that U.S. troops would leave the country upon completion of operations in Afghanistan, and indicated that due to "tendencies that are taking place in Ukraine and Georgia—and also in Moldova, which is a member of GUUAM," Uzbekistan might withdraw from the organization in the near future. (7) Finally, Karimov addressed the Strategic Partnership Treaty signed with Russia last year, stating that relations between President Putin and himself were "strengthening" and that the two countries would together take "preventative measures in a complicated world filled with threats and challenges to the security of the people." (8)

President Karimov's statements seem to indicate that events in Ukraine have caused deep concern and paranoia in Uzbekistan. Karimov clearly is concerned that the U.S. presence in-country might have 'unwanted' effects on the political situation. As such, he is less interested in regaining the financial aid cut off by the State Department last year, and with maintaining the U.S./Uzbek alliance, than he is in instituting all possible measures to ensure that Ukraine 2004 does not become Uzbekistan 2005.

KYRGYZSTAN

Kyrgyz parliamentary elections are due to be held on February 27. In the last two months there has been considerable political activity in the country indicating that Kyrgyzstan may follow a dynastic succession. As yet, President Askar Akaev has refused to be drawn on whether he would run for a third Presidential term. But both Akaev's son and daughter—the latter more politically experienced—have been nominated as candidates for the polls. (9) Significantly, Bermet Akaeva is running in a constituency previously occupied by one of Kyrgyzstan's most important opposition leaders, Roza Otunbayev, a former Foreign Minister and current co-leader of Ata-Jurt. When Otunbayeva was excluded from the elections, allegedly on the grounds of residency violations, (10) protests occurred

outside the Parliament in Bishkek, which lasted several days. President Akaev's ostensible response to the demonstrators was to dismiss them as agitators wishing to re-create the "Orange Revolution." Prime Minister Nikolai Tanayev also addressed the demonstrators, warning them that the government would be prepared to use force on February 27 to enforce "political stability," should such action be necessary. (11) The war of words has continued in recent weeks, coinciding with the official start of electoral campaigning on February 2.

President Akaev has expressed similar concerns to those aired by Uzbekistan's President Karimov regarding events during the winter in Ukraine. In an interview given to *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, and published online in Britain by the BBC, Akaev alleged that the United States government is secretly supporting Ata-Jurt and Otunbayeva's candidacy (12) —an allegation which was denied strenuously by Otunbayeva. (13) Believing U.S. involvement to be a key element, Akaev has sought to place his rule firmly in the context of alliance with the United States. Akaev claimed that the "emergence of political disorder" in the country would have detrimental effects on Central Asia as a whole and specifically on Kyrgyzstan's position as an "active" participant in the Global War on Terrorism. (14) As such, his tactics are different from those adopted by President Karimov. Akaev has chosen to stress Kyrgyzstan's usefulness to the United States in order to prevent what he believes is foreign interference in internal affairs: Kyrgyz "stability"—represented, of course, by himself—is "best of all" in the United States' interest. (15)

The idea of meddling or fraud (both foreign and domestic) has been a persistent part of the Kyrgyz government's rhetoric over the last two weeks: Prime Minister Tanayev warned the OSCE on January 31 that "interference" (16) in the polls by any observer missions would not be tolerated, while also promising that the government itself would not intervene in the electoral process. (17)

The Kyrgyz leadership also is seeking to ensure that revolutionary change does not take place, by appealing to the country's most important demographic, namely the youth. Akaev's first official campaign business was to attend a youth rally in Bishkek. Addressing almost 3,000 school children, Akaev warned that the upcoming elections were a "test" for them, and told them that Kyrgyz youth "have already demonstrated their immunity to the sickly foreign rose, orange and yellow viruses that some home grown opposition figures are trying to implant in our soil." (18) Akaev also used the rally as a venue to attempt to assure the youth that the elections would be fair, noting that ballot boxes would be marked and counted in a transparent fashion, and that voters would have their fingers stained with ink in order to ensure that no voter falsification takes place. (19)

Realistically, the chances of a fair election in Kyrgyzstan are virtually nil: not only has Otunbayeva been excluded, but the vote will also in large part be conducted using the same 'SAYLAU' computerized voting system used last September in Kazakhstan, and which is at the center of fraud allegations in that country. (20)

As in Uzbekistan, the reverberations of Ukraine are causing deep concern in Bishkek. But in contrast to Uzbekistan, the Kyrgyz opposition is increasingly vocal, with Otunbayeva stating that Kyrgyzstan has "matured" to the point where it is ripe for peaceful revolution. (21) The real test of Akaev's intentions will come on February 27 and 28, once election results are announced: if opposition groups make significant gains, will Akaev remove himself from the presidential picture in the fall? Most importantly, Akaev has always styled himself as Central Asia's most moderate leader. As such, how will he behave if protests emerge after the elections; will he use force to suppress dissent, or will he allow peaceful expressions of dissent to occur? Based on current statements, and the level of concern being aired at the highest levels of the Kyrgyz government, the prediction must be that protests will be stopped—violently, if necessary.

Source Notes:

- (1) See NIS Observed: An Analytical Review; Volume X Number 1 (31 December 2005).
- (2) Ibid.
- (3) Ibid.
- (4) Uzbek Radio first programme, 28 Jan 05; BBC Monitoring via ISI Emerging Markets Database.
- (5) TCA-Uzbekistan, 31 Jan 05; Times of Central Asia via ISI Emerging Markets Database.
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