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Russian Federation: Executive Branch

By Susan Cavan

Nature abhors a vacuum

President Yel'tsin has recently been more visible around the Kremlin and seemingly more relevant in both foreign and domestic politics: taking meetings with the prime minister and parliamentary leaders to hammer out an agreement on political stability; alternately threatening and offering to play the peacemaker over NATO's actions in Yugoslavia; leading a meeting of CIS Heads of State, where Boris Berezovsky's dismissal was formalized; and yes, once again firing the procurator-general. This flurry of activity can't quite disguise, however, Yel'tsin's diminishing authority in this last year of his presidency.

The agreement on stability, which has been initialed by representatives of the president's staff, the government, Duma and Federation Council but not signed by any of the four leaders, is the long-negotiated power-sharing agreement derived from the proposals put forth by Primakov last January. For the text of the agreement, see ITAR-TASS WORLD SERVICE, 1753 GMT, 16 Mar 99; FBIS-SOV-199-0317) While the initial proposal envisioned the curtailment of the president's right to disband the Duma and/or the government, as well as the suspension of the Duma's right to vote no confidence in the government, the current statement restrains these rights only by requiring prior consultations among the parties before any action is taken. The issue of impeachment has been dropped from this agreement, as have any safeguards for the president, his family or their personal wealth.

The statement does speak quite harshly of "serious errors" that have led to the political and economic crises in Russia, without attempting to reconcile the four

parties' views on the origins of the current situation. Among the areas highlighted for policy reconsideration are the tax system; privatization of state enterprises (including a potential "legal assessment"); extremism; and the prevention of electoral fraud and campaign finance abuses.

The language in the agreement regarding possible constitutional amendments is oddly contradictory. The parties "commit themselves not to raise the question of amending the constitution...without holding joint consultations first." In the very next line, however, they agree to form "a working group...to hold consultations and draw up agreed proposals on amendments to the constitution."

The president has, on many occasions, reiterated his position that no changes to the constitution should be made before the next presidential elections, so this would appear to be another concession granted to reach this consensus on stability. With impeachment hearings scheduled in the Duma this month, no guarantees for the personal or financial security of the president and his family, and constitutional amendments on the table (including possible parliamentary input into government formation), Yel'tsin seems to have traded several crucial aspects of the less than laudatory Primakov proposal in order to secure one of his most adamant demands: no limit to his constitutional authority. Unless of course, they amend it.

Yel'tsin's reactions to the NATO bombing of Serbia and Montenegro have certainly increased his profile and visibility, and his proposal to find a peaceful solution has garnered international attention. It seems likely, however, that it will be Primakov who will broker a deal with Slobodan Milosevic and increase his political support in the process.

The meeting with CIS leaders provided ambivalent results for the president. While his dismissal of Berezovsky was upheld, the forum served as a reminder that Berezovsky refused to go quietly, insisting that all the CIS Heads of State

confirm Yel'tsin's order of dismissal. The widely reported incident of Berezovsky's plane being denied permission to fly from Kyiv to Moscow, where the CIS meeting was being held, was an extreme measure which further reflected poorly on the president. The president's relationship with Berezovsky in general has become a significant handicap. It is clear that there is a complicated financial involvement, dating at least from the 1996 presidential campaign. Berezovsky's friendship with Yel'tsin's daughter, Tatiana, is often cited as evidence of the "oligarch's" influence on presidential decision-making. Now, however, with the issuing of an arrest warrant for Berezovsky, based on his financial interests in Aeroflot, Yel'tsin's son-in-law, as director of Aeroflot, may well be drawn into a complex criminal investigation.

Yel'tsin's battle with the procurator-general, Yuri Skuratov, could pose a far more serious challenge to his authority. Having failed in his first effort to fire Skuratov (due to the defection of the Federation Council), Yel'tsin has tried to suspend the procurator on moral grounds (prompting former Yel'tsin confidante, Korzhakov, to threaten to reveal more Kremlin sleaze). Yel'tsin strengthened his claim by revealing that an investigation of Skuratov had begun. The Moscow City Prosecutor's Office, which was to lead the investigation, has suggested that Kremlin pressure may have prompted the opening of the case. (MOSCOW TIMES, 6 Apr 99; nexis)

While Skuratov has overseen the launch of several surprisingly high-profile investigations recently (which is especially notable given the low level of prosecutorial activity in the earlier years of his service), he has also frustrated opposition ambitions by refusing to divulge the details of compromising materials he claims to hold on Kremlin personnel. He also seems to vacillate between acceding to various resignation demands, then reneging on these decisions and taking his fight to the parliament. One can assume from this wavering that there is probably substantial pressure on the procurator and his staff coming from various political directions.

Yel'tsin's re-emergence in the last several weeks has had the slightly reassuring effect of proving that the president is not so debilitated as to be written out of the political game. His actions and comments, and far more ominously, his apparent involvement in the scandals being investigated by the procurator, may yet reveal him to be seriously wounded, however. The difficulty in removing both Berezovsky and Skuratov from their offices, as well as the axing of scapegoats, such as Bordyuzha, signal a critical weakness in the Yel'tsin regime. It would take a remarkable act of political goodwill for the parliament (and perhaps even the prime minister) to restrain itself from challenging presidential authority yet further. Perhaps they will content themselves with impeachment hearings that fall short of removal.

Russian Federation: Foreign Relations

By John McDonough and Sarah Miller

Moscow plays it cool, as NATO bombs Yugoslavia

While Russia clearly denounced NATO airstrikes against Yugoslavia, and continues to do so, it appears as though most of Moscow's pre-strike and ongoing rhetoric is shaping up to be mostly empty threats. Whether or not Moscow's response has been carefully orchestrated, Russia appears to have fallen into a comfortable position of condemnation, military threats and little action. Following President Boris Yel'tsin's immediate response in which he said, "morally, we are on a higher ground right now than America," and Washington would be "held to account" for launching the strikes outside the framework of UN resolutions (AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE, 1338 GMT, 25 Mar 99; nexis), official Moscow has taken a less aggressive approach. While the defense ministry, the Duma and the Federation Council have all rattled their sabers calling for everything from nuclear weapons back in Belarus to direct military assistance, the foreign ministry, prime minister and president have systematically re-

sheathed the sabers. After nearly 10 days of NATO bombings, Yel'tsin reiterated that Moscow would not get involved militarily, while First Deputy Foreign Minister Aleksandr Avdeev was dispatched to the Federation Council to criticize NATO aggression publicly. Yel'tsin did point out that Belgrade was in part responsible for ignoring international efforts to resolve peacefully the conflict. (Jamestown Foundation MONITOR, 1 Apr 99)

Clearly Moscow has much to lose and little to gain by becoming involved in Yugoslavia militarily, whether in the form of direct contact or military assistance to the Serbs. It became obvious that Russia's domestic crisis weighed heavier than the conflict in the Balkans on the minds of many in Moscow. Following several days of intense NATO bombings of Yugoslavia, one of Prime Minister Primakov's first orders of business was to secure a \$4.8 billion aid package from the IMF. (RFE/RL NEWSLINE, 30 Mar 99) This agreement may seem ironic to many observers: It was reached at the height of early NATO airstrikes, after Primakov had warned that NATO attacks on Yugoslavia would evoke "extremely negative reactions" from his country and that every attack on Yugoslavia would put a strain on relations between Russia and the United States. (DEUTSCHE PRESSE-AGENTUR, 24 Mar 99; nexis) Apparently this did not include relations with the IMF, although the US is the major contributor to this organization. While there is every indication that the IMF deal was in the works before the NATO strikes began, the West's desire to keep Moscow on the sidelines may have helped to seal the \$4.8 billion deal.

NATO bombs may have accelerated more than IMF deals. Primakov, who recently proposed a triple alliance with India and China, could be a bit closer to his goal thanks to NATO's actions in the Balkans. Having initially balked at the idea of any such alliance, India recently indicated that Primakov may have been on the mark with his proposal. Indian Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee on 28 March said his country was examining a possible alliance with Russia and China following NATO air strikes on Yugoslavia. Referring to the alliance, he said "such

a possibility is being considered" while member countries of the non-aligned movement were discussing the "one-sided action" by the United States. (AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE, 1242 GMT, 28 Mar 99; nexis) Such statements open the door for Primakov to renew his efforts to construct an alliance.

Russia to beef up conventional forces in the Caucasus?

While NATO was bombing Yugoslavia, Russia was scoring a major victory in another troubled region of Europe. Following the recent expansion of NATO, which was clearly viewed as a blow to Russian prestige in Europe, Moscow has apparently gained back some of the "security" ground it lost through a renegotiated Conventional Forces in Europe (CFE) Treaty. A Russian foreign ministry spokesman on 1 April called the agreements reached in Vienna by the signatories of the CFE "an important stage of the CFE adaptation." The spokesman pointed out that "in the current difficult international situation it was important that long-term legal foundations of European security be enhanced." (ITAR-TASS, 1 Apr 99; nexis) Apparently as far as NATO is concerned, enhanced European security in the Caucasus is Moscow's responsibility. Moscow not only succeeded in convincing the West it regarded NATO expansion as a threat; it also managed to turn that "threat" into a Russian prize, a stronger military presence along its southern flank. In exchange for the alliance's flexible deployment options in the new NATO states, Moscow is now able to station more tanks, armored combat vehicles and artillery pieces in the northern Caucasus. While the new version of the CFE will apparently include an overall cut of about 15 percent of the items covered in the treaty, it will include an increase in the Russian weaponry along its southern flank. (DEFENSE NEWS, 29 Mar 99) NATO's CFE "exchanges," while obviously designed to demonstrate the full integration of the new NATO members into the alliance, may only serve to further destabilize the Caucasus.

Strategic quadrangle?

A quadrangle? ...Maybe not just yet, but Russia is making no excuses for its "active" military and diplomatic consultations with China, India and Iran. (CNN ON-LINE, ITAR-TASS, 31 Mar 99) NATO airstrikes in Kosovo, NATO expansion, US Theater Missile Defense (TMD) proposals (see Editorial Digest, 22 March 1999), and joint military cooperation with Japan are quickly taking Russian cooperation with China and India to a new level. Both military and non-military cooperation with China is improving significantly. In mid April, Russian Defense Minister Igor Sergeev will meet with his Chinese counterpart to discuss NATO, the 1972 ABM treaty, and ways of furthering bilateral cooperation. On the Indian side, the Ministry for External Affairs has stated that good relations with Russia is a non-partisan issue that tops the foreign policy agenda.

(pns.meadev.gov.in/foreign/russia.htm)

Russia is clearly not alone in its condemnation of NATO airstrikes in Kosovo or its worries about future security. In fact, it seems that the bombing has advanced the anti-NATO dialogue among Russia, China, and India that makes the prospect of a "strategic triangle" increasingly less far-fetched.

Russian Federation: Domestic Issues and Legislative Branch

By Michael Thurman

PROCURACY

The J. Edgar Hoover of Russia

Unlike the American FBI chief who reportedly liked to don Chanel dresses on occasion, Russian Prosecutor-General Yuri Ilich Skuratov seems to prefer taking them off -- off pretty call girls, that is. Russian television ran a video clip showing Skuratov in flagrante delicto with two half-dressed women in some hotel room. Beyond the public titters and the prurient interest which always surrounds affairs

involving persons of note, larger questions loom as to who put the video clips on the air and why.

Rumors abound. Some claim that Skuratov has been assembling compromising dossiers on the Russian political and industrial elite a la Hoover, and the embarrassing video footage was released to cow him into submission or force him from office. Others believe that Boris Yel'tsin and/or his aides are behind it all. It seems that Skuratov, working with the Swiss federal prosecutor, Carla Del Ponte, launched an unprecedented raid on offices within the Kremlin itself during which numerous documents were taken. At issue is a series of lucrative construction deals won by the Swiss firm Mabetex to refurbish the Kremlin's interior appointments. Although Mabetex denies it has done anything wrong, it is hard to imagine that Russian interior designers are in such short supply that Helvetian specialists had to be summoned.

It would seem, then, that the Kremlin returned the favor by releasing the video footage. Skuratov, under duress, submitted his resignation (ostensibly due to health concerns) to the Federation Council; however, the council refused to accept the resignation and Skuratov now remains in office more zealous than ever to be the St. George to Russia's dragon of corruption. Alas, this imagery is less noble than it would seem at first glance. It is widely known that Skuratov is less than evenhanded in his zealotry, ignoring abuse of authority by persons with connections to the Communists while holding forth on those with ties to the presidential administration.

The real lesson here is how degraded Yel'tsin's power has become when he cannot remove the prosecutor-general, an office he is accustomed to controlling. Some believe that the raids on the Kremlin constituted an attempt to remove Yel'tsin from office, but a more likely and less dramatic scenario would be that the president was simply put on notice that he is no longer the autocrat he once was. This does not mean that Russia has finally received the independent

prosecutor it so desperately needs. Rather, Skuratov's phone calls now come from the prime minister's office.

Prime Minister Yevgeni Primakov is not directly implicated in this affair, but it would be foolish to believe that he is not fully aware of, if not complicit in, the prosecutor-general's new muscle flexing at the expense of the president. It is a good thing parliamentary elections are scheduled for this December. Perhaps a new, feistier Duma can withstand the shrewd political manipulations of this prime minister who ministers more to himself than to anything else.

MEDIA

Primakov's relationship with the media continues downhill

Some politicians use the media to their advantage, others are ruined by them, but all are wary of the media's power. Prime Minister Primakov takes wariness to a new level. He does not recognize the legitimate value of a free press or the role of information in a democracy, even one as malformed as Russia's. Primakov refuses to answer questions, even simple ones. Despite his efforts to control media outlets, the media cannot be trusted to convey his true message.

Distortion of news does occur in all societies where the media are allowed to operate freely. Much of this can be attributed to antagonistic bias on the part of reporters, editors, and publishers, but it is more often due to the fact that rarely do different persons hold the same opinion on a given matter. Primakov's predecessors understood this. Chernomyrdin once asked, "Is that what it says in the newspaper? That means it's not true!" and Kirienko proclaimed, "I await with burning interest the publication of compromising material about myself." In both cases there was an apparent understanding that the mass media were part of the new Russia, no matter how inconvenient or unfair they might be. (MOSKOVSKY KOMSOMOLETS, 17 Mar 99; BBC/nexis]

Primakov is not of the same mind. His tenure as prime minister began ominously with the announcement of his intention to set up monitoring committees in all of

the country's news organizations. The process has not proceeded as far as he would have liked, but the intent is there. Primakov takes personally negative or inaccurate reporting, no matter how slight. He and his minions retain the distrust of the printed or spoken word that was characteristic of the Soviet era. This is quite dangerous at a time when Russia needs more, not less, information, and when the actions of the prime minister are becoming increasingly autocratic, and thus accountable to no one.

Russian Federation: Armed Forces

By LCDR Fred Drummond

Russian military views on Operation Allied Force

Not surprisingly, the majority of press articles relating to the Russian armed forces from the past two weeks center on NATO's combat operations against Serbia. We shall start with the shutdown of the US Air Force F-117A stealth attack aircraft.

It was one of our systems that did it...

As seen worldwide on TV, on 26 March an F-117 crashed, an apparent victim of the Serbian air defenses. The US still hasn't conclusively stated the exact cause of the loss, though speculation and claims were rampant. The Russians are naturally interested for various reasons, not the least of which is that Russian weapons may have shot down the aircraft. Yugoslavia's air defenses, specifically its surface-to-air missile (SAM) systems, are second-generation, Soviet-era weapons. The missile inventory includes the SA-2, SA-3, and SA-6 radar missile systems as well as short-range infrared (IR) manheld missiles. (Reports of the fourth generation S-300 SAM being in-country have been floating around for several years now -- see below for the latest from Russia on this topic.)

One of the first reports in the Russian media on the shutdown quoted Russian Defense Minister Igor Sergeev claiming that the Kub SAM system (NATO code name SA-6) was responsible. (ITAR-TASS, 0742 GMT and 1330 GMT, 29 Mar 99; FBIS-SOV-1999-0329) The Kub is a semi-active, short- to medium-range system. (A semi-active SAM means that the missile has a seeker that looks for an illumination signal provided by a ground or airborne radar that essentially tells the missile where to go, namely, against the targeted, illuminated enemy aircraft.) The follow-up Tass news release provided specific engagement envelope figures, something that was unheard of in the days of the USSR.

...Or maybe not

Not so fast, Mr. Defense Minister. Tass next released a short report in which a high-ranking officer from the General Staff refused to speculate on what weapon may have been responsible for the shutdown. The reason given by the official is that releasing that information may prevent the Serbs from obtaining another shutdown. That's a good point. It makes sense from the American side, too; why let the other side know your aircraft's vulnerabilities to a particular weapons system? Then again, maybe the Russians, and the Serbs, don't really know what happened. The aircraft may very simply have been a victim of intense antiaircraft artillery (AAA) fire, where a great many guns are fired into the air, preferably into the flight path of an enemy aircraft. The video footage from Serbian TV showed what appeared to be bullet holes, so maybe it was a case of the F-117 being in the wrong place at the wrong time.

The significance of it all

The performance of Russian weapons against Western, and particularly US, aircraft may be a matter of pride and future arms sales. During Operation Desert Storm, coalition aircraft dealt with the Soviet-supplied radar missile systems in a very effective manner. The Soviets were not pleased with the prestige fallout from the apparent lack of success of their weapons. If an older SAM such as the SA-6 can be proven to have shot down a high technology stealth aircraft, this

obviously increases the "value" of Russian weapons overall. And there's this potential pitch: Hey, if you liked how the Kub works, you just have to buy our high-tech S-300. That in essence is pretty much the tone taken by the arms supplier Rosvooruzhenie.

In an article by Nikolai Novichkov, the director general of the firm made the claim that, had the Yugoslav air defense been equipped with newer systems including the S-300, "far from all NATO planes" would have returned safely. (ITAR-TASS, 1216 GMT, 30 Mar 99; FBIS-SOV-1999-0330) The director further stated that, if the Russian government so deemed, his company would be ready to supply arms to Yugoslavia. This brings us back to the point about S-300s already being deployed to that country. This writer was asked that question several years ago when flying support missions over Bosnia -- we saw no indications that S-300s were in-country then. Despite talk from Russia on supporting Serbia and comments like those of the director of Rosvooruzhenie, we don't expect that S-300s will be arriving anytime soon in Yugoslavia.

What is expected to arrive soon in the Adriatic, though, is at least one Russian navy ship, a "reconnaissance ship" to be a little more precise. (WASHINGTON POST, 1 Apr 99) The obvious purpose of the reconnaissance ship would be to monitor NATO/US communications and then pass information to Yugoslavia. The same news sources reported on the movement of six more naval vessels, these being described as "warships," to the area.

Russian fleet, arriving

The spy ship may prove of some value to the Serbs; certainly some amount of useful information can be gleaned from the airwaves. Sending ships is a relatively cheap and ultimately low-risk way for the Russians to show solidarity for their Slav brothers. The actual intelligence value of collected transmissions from NATO aircraft is probably pretty low. Much potentially useful information can be obtained simply by standing outside the NATO airbases and noting launch

times and numbers of aircraft. Combined with the air traffic control radar picture provided by the numerous commercial and military radars in Yugoslavia, the Serb air defense forces can predict general strike times and possibly figure out intended target areas. One thing that we have not seen many US or Russian media sources point out is that the Pentagon itself was providing some potentially useful information early on in the war campaign in describing the types of targets that NATO aircraft were to strike.

Of more significance in regards to the Russian ships is that the Russian navy can actually sail that many ships into foreign waters at one time. In an age when the completion of a warship whose construction was begun way back in the days of the USSR makes headline news and is cause for Russian celebration, we wonder what few scarce resources are being used up in this endeavor. Editorial Digest has been following the state of the Russian armed forces' decline in some detail; we wonder where the money is coming from, or what will be sacrificed in future upkeep and upgrades. The Russian naval vessels may prove to be a very expensive way to annoy NATO vessels. The Russians seem to think that the political costs (both towards Yugoslavia and against the US) are worth it.

Note: This column is dedicated to Lt Col Mike Reardon, USAF; may you have clear and friendly skies on your way home, my friend.

Newly Independent States: CIS

By Sarah Miller

Officially unwelcome

Boris Berezovsky heard the news in Kyiv, far from the Moscow Kremlin where his fate as CIS Executive Secretary was sealed on 2 April. He did try to make it to the meeting (despite his fears that he would be arrested upon arrival) but his plane was denied access to the capital city and forced to land instead in the

Ukrainian capital. (Reuters 2 Apr 99, RUSSIA TODAY) The CIS Heads of State' Committee gave final approval to Boris Yel'tsin's 4 March unilateral decision to oust Berezovsky from the position. Earlier in March, Berezovsky said that, if the heads of state decided to dismiss him, he would step down. Now that the deed is done, the heads of state have appointed Yuri Yarov, presidential representative to the Federation Council, to the post. Yarov appears to be a safe bet for Yel'tsin. He has been a Kremlin advisor since 1996 and has a relationship with parliament -- aided by his grooming in the Soviet government -- that Berezovsky lacked.

On with the show

Once the administrative issue was settled with Yarov's appointment, the heads of state quickly issued a joint condemnation of NATO actions in Kosovo. (BBC NEWS, 2 Apr 99) This followed the 25 March CIS defense ministers meeting at which six states jointly condemned the "inhuman bombing of Yugoslavia by NATO" and its abrogation of "the fundamentals of international law and order." (RIA NOVOSTI, 1745 GMT, 25 Mar 99, BBC SUMMARY) However, the cooperative spirit sparked by Kosovo couldn't bridge the Collective Security Treaty impasse. Neither the CIS defense ministers nor the heads of state were able to convince the three dissenting members (Azerbaijan, Georgia and Uzbekistan) to reconsider withdrawal. Yet, Kosovo and the Berezovsky sacking provided enough of a diversion that little notice was paid when only six of the original nine signatories to the treaty approved an extension of the agreement. (ITAR-TASS, 0945 GMT, 2 Apr 99; FBIS-SOV-1999-0402)

The Kosovo situation has created a policy conundrum for many CIS member states. Earlier in March, GUAM (Georgia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan, and Moldova) heralded NATO expansion as a source of stability and security. (Jamestown Foundation PRISM, 26 Mar 99) However, NATO airstrikes have prompted at least one member country, Azerbaijan, to sign the CIS condemnation calling the strikes "a threat to peace and security." (RFE/RL NEWSLINE, 26 Mar 99)

Ukraine has also joined in condemning the airstrikes but still supports NATO expansion. (Jamestown Foundation PRISM, 25 Mar 99)

Newly Independent States: Western Region

By Tammy Lynch

UKRAINE

NATO or Russia? What's a president to do?

This hasn't been the best of years for President Leonid Kuchma. From a powerful leftist speaker of parliament, to the Russian nationalist rhetoric of Yuri Luzhkov, to surging communist/socialist presidential candidates, to mounting pressure from Yevgeni Primakov, to growing debts for electricity, to a contracting economy, to wage arrears, Kuchma has captained a listing, if not sinking, ship lately. Throughout it all, Kuchma has tried to balance his policies on a very thin line between Russia and the West, often being one of the few voices in favor of continuing to build ties with Western organizations. He has overseen the implementation of the largest Partnership For Peace program -- the NATO-Ukraine Special Partnership Charter -- while continuing to maintain ties with Russia on a number of issues.

Now, NATO's bombing campaign over Kosovo has given Kuchma's Communist opponents in parliament new and powerful fuel in their crusade against NATO and Western influences. Kuchma has been forced farther into Russia's corner than ever before. Consequently, one of the loudest voices in favor of integration with the West has become softer in recent weeks.

Kuchma has staunchly opposed NATO's airstrikes, based on the concept of territorial integrity, and has said repeatedly that airstrikes should be approved by the UN Security Council. Perhaps with visions of Sevastopol and Crimea in his head, he said, "Separatism is a disease that is too quick to spread in the world

and can lead to a complete alteration of the political map of the world."
(INTERFAX, 1835 GMT, 23 Mar 99; nexis) Kuchma's statements were echoed by Foreign Minister Boris Tarasyuk, who insisted that Yugoslavia's territorial integrity be maintained. "Any attempts to change the territorial integrity of European countries may have unpredictable consequences," he said. (INTERFAX, 31 Mar 99; nexis)

Shortly after the airstrikes began, parliament responded by adopting a resolution "condemning NATO attacks on Serbs," urging the Kuchma administration to end Ukraine's non-nuclear status, and ratifying the Black Sea Agreements with Russia. (UKRAINIAN RADIO, 0800 GMT, 24 Mar 99; BBC Summary of World Broadcasts; nexis, AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE, 1345 GMT, 24 Mar 99; nexis, and DEUTSCHE PRESS-AGENTUR, 1419 CET, 24 Mar 99; nexis) Parliament was largely unified on these votes, with no more than 65 votes in opposition to any of the measures. Clearly, the little influence Kuchma had over parliament has now evaporated, and he has been forced to "jump on the bandwagon" on several issues. From joining the CIS Interparliamentary Assembly, to supporting the Crimean Constitution, Kuchma has shifted his policies to fit the leftist surge in Ukrainian politics.

Kuchma wholeheartedly supported Russian Prime Minister Yevgeni Primakov's initiative in Belgrade, saying, "I feel that the Russians have a plan to resolve the problem." The conflict cannot be ended, he said, without the support of Russia. (INTERFAX, 30 Mar 99; nexis)

Shortly after his remarks in support of Primakov, Kuchma traveled to Moscow to participate in a ceremony celebrating the ratification of the Russia-Ukraine Friendship Treaty and the Black Sea Agreements. (For extensive background, see three previous Editorial Digests.)

Kuchma tellingly avoided the media during this visit, but Yel'tsin could barely contain his enthusiasm for his new friend. "We are now united practically all-around," he said. "Over recent time, we have been having less conflict issues." "This is a big victory," he added. (ITAR-TASS, 0601 EST, 1 Apr 99; nexis)

Comment

As is common with swells of nationalistic rhetoric, the anti-NATO surge in Ukraine seems to have at least stabilized in recent days, enabling the Kuchma administration to once again reach out to the alliance. Throughout the crisis, Foreign Minister Tarasyuk has continued his strong support for the organization. He repeatedly explains that Belgrade "actually triggered the development of current events," and that, just as Ukraine does not support continued NATO bombing, the country is also opposed to a "crusade of all Slavs in defense of the Serb brothers." (ITAR-TASS, 26 Mar 99; nexis)

Kuchma, meanwhile, has offered to mediate in the conflict. He has spoken favorably about discussions with US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, and announced on Ukrainian radio that he had received a letter of support from President Clinton. (UKRAINIAN RADIO, 1400 GMT, 25 Mar 99; nexis)

At the same time, the IMF and World Bank this week both resumed lending to Ukraine based on recent reforms. Many of those reforms, however, were instituted through presidential decree. As Kuchma's isolation becomes more pronounced, the sharp contrasts between the policies of his administration and the policies of the parliament become more evident. It is clear that Kuchma is swimming against the political tide, and the water is rising. The people of Ukraine will have an interesting choice, therefore, in the upcoming presidential election. The polls indicate that Kuchma is near the front, if not slightly ahead of, the pack of candidates. However, the Kosovo conflict has exacerbated Kuchma's problems, and has hampered his ability both to win another term and to continue his Westward policies.

BELARUS

Yes to Nukes! No to Nukes! Well ... maybe.

On 25 February, President Aleksandr Lukashenka announced that, because of NATO's expansion, "the security of Russia's borders is in question," and therefore, "nuclear weapons could be returned" to Belarus. (INTERFAX, 25 Feb and 26 Feb 99; nexis) Russia was apparently listening. According to several sources within the Russian defense ministry, in response to NATO's air strikes against Serbia, Russia is considering the redeployment of nuclear weapons on Belarusian territory. (UPI, BC Cycle, 24 March 99; nexis, and ITAR-TASS, 0211 GMT, 24 Mar 99; BBC Summary of World Broadcasts/ nexis)

In fact, Russian representatives have recently begun to deny vigorously reports that Russia is either about to or has already deployed "strategic bombers" in Belarus -- reportedly Tu-22, Tu-160 and Tu-95MS bombers. (INTERFAX, 26 Mar 99; nexis) Those bombers would be capable of carrying guided nuclear missiles.

Curiously, around the same time that Russia began denying these reports, Lukashenka began denying that Belarus wants Russian nuclear weapons. In fact, Lukashenka now says that he never suggested such a thing. "Belarus is a peaceful nation," he said on 31 March. (INTERFAX, 31 Mar 99; nexis) Judging from the number of denials about the situation, it seems that the redeployment of strategic bombers may be imminent, if it has not already happened.

Given the government's tight control over movement and the media in Belarus, this is something that could be difficult to substantiate, especially since Lukashenka has now cut off all ties to NATO, and ended all bilateral military contacts with NATO-member countries. However, Lukashenka's statements about nuclear weapons seem to have triggered a backlash inside his country. On 31 March, 8,000 people gathered at an opposition rally to mark the 80th anniversary of the Belarusian National Republic. During the gathering, the

protesters chanted "No to Unification of Belarus and Russia" and "No to Nuclear Weapons in Belarus." (BELAPAN, 1740 GMT, 28 March 99; BBC Summary of World Broadcasts/nexis) As he did with his statements about the Belarus-Russia Union, Lukashenka has added more fuel to the opposition's fire.

MOLDOVA

Where, oh where, have the Russian guns gone?

On 24 March, Russia began withdrawing weapons from the Transdnestr area. According to ITAR-TASS the "first trainload of military equipment was dispatched from Tiraspol to Russia today." The equipment reportedly included six missile-transporting platforms, also known as "missile tugs." According to the same ITAR-TASS article, "there are still over 2,000 wagons of armaments and munitions at storage depots of the former Russian 14th Army in Dniestr." (ITAR-TASS, 1634 GMT, 24 Mar 99; BBC Summary of World Broadcasts/nexis)

The sudden and unexpected withdrawal of part of the Russian military equipment in Dniestr came around the same time that Russia threatened to send arms shipments to Yugoslavia, leading Moldovan President Petr Lucinschi to wonder out loud where the withdrawn weapons would end up. (SEGODNYA, 31 Mar 99; nexis)

Standing up for NATO

The Moldovan parliament, in which the Communists are the largest single party (40 of 101 members), has rejected Communist calls to condemn NATO's airstrikes against Yugoslavia. In fact, many deputies spoke in favor of the action, blaming Milosevic for the current situation. (RIA NEWS AGENCY, 1344 GMT, 26 Mar 99; BBC Summary of World Broadcasts/nexis)

Newly Independent States: Caucasus

By Miriam Lansky

GEORGIA

CE compels Georgia to repatriate Meskhetian Turks

During a recent trip to Turkey, President Eduard Shevardnadze of Georgia told reporters that his country will comply with the Council of Europe's demand to allow the resettlement of Meskhetian Turks. There is a catch, however: Georgia can only hope to absorb a sizable migration over a 12-year period. (INTERFAX, 1 Mar 99; nexis) Shevardnadze explained that, while his government is ready to tackle the problem of the deported nationalities, it can not do so immediately due to Georgia's dire economic situation and the need to accommodate nearly 300,000 internally displaced persons from Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Turkish President Suleyman Demirel's comment that his country has already accepted several thousand families served to emphasize Georgia's slow progress: Only a few hundred Meskhetian Turks have been allowed to return to Georgia since 1992.

The current misery and vulnerability of the dispersed and stateless Meskhetian Turk people stems from Stalin's 1941-1944 deportations. Virtually all the members of eight nations Chechens, Ingush, Balkars, Karachai, Kalmyk, Volga Germans, Crimean Tatars and Meskhetian Turks were sent to Central Asia. In 1956 Khrushchev rehabilitated all but the last three nations listed, allowing the others to return to their original places of residence and in some cases restoring (to some degree) the regional autonomy they had enjoyed prior to the deportations. The reasoning behind the decision to rehabilitate some nations but not others remains murky. A recent publication of the International Organization for Migration (IOM) refers to Soviet archival documents which suggest that Soviet authorities failed to overcome the complexities of the social issues involved in repatriation. (International Organization for Migration, THE DEPORTED PEOPLES OF THE FORMER SOVIET UNION: THE CASE OF THE MESKHETIANS, January 1998, p. 5) Robert Conquest gives another explanation in his book, THE SOVIET DEPORTATION OF NATIONALITIES, where he

comments that Khrushchev may have continued to regard the non-rehabilitated nations as security risks. [Robert Conquest, THE SOVIET DEPORTATION OF NATIONALITIES (London:1960), p. 193] Presumably the security concern stems from the fact that the Meskhetians lived in the southwestern portion of Georgia bordering on Turkey.

Finally, in 1968, the Meskhetians were rehabilitated and accorded the normal rights of citizenship, but in practice they still were prevented from returning to Georgia. Many migrated to Azerbaijan because there had been an effort to classify them as Azeri and because Azerbaijan was closer than Uzbekistan or Kazakhstan to their original districts in Georgia. According to the 1989 census, there were 207,000 Meskhetians, half of whom continued to reside in Uzbekistan. That census probably understated the number of Meskhetians because so many of them were registered as Azeri, Uzbek, Kazakh, or Kyrgyz. A more realistic estimate would put the total number of Meskhetians at roughly 300,000. (IOM, p. 7)

In 1989 rioters in Uzbekistan's Ferghana valley killed over 100 Meskhetians. The causes of this incident remain obscure: Some point to possible KGB provocation meant to illustrate the ill effects of democratization on nationalities; all mention the lack of rapid governmental interference on behalf of the victims. The killings prompted a substantial migration to Ukraine (10,000), Azerbaijan (46,000) and the Russian Federation (roughly 60,000).

With the dissolution of the USSR, Ukraine became the only state to grant them citizenship. In other places the Meskhetians became a stateless people, living at the edge of legality. Whereas in Azerbaijan they were classified as refugees and provided with some basic humanitarian assistance, in Russia they were systematically denied legal status. With the tacit approval of the federal government, the regional authorities have denied residency permits to the Meskhetians, on the grounds that they did not have Russian residence when the

country became independent and that they do not need official registration in Russia because they should be resettled to Georgia. The Russians are quite determined to preclude any assimilation of the Meskhetians into their society: Birth certificates with a "non-citizen" stamp are issued to Meskhetian families.

In 1998 Krasnodar authorities began a campaign to force the Meskhetians to emigrate to Turkey. Those who agreed to leave were compensated for their dwellings from federal funds, and were given a travel allowance and an external passport. The internal papers were confiscated. The external passport, in violation of the law, was valid for only one year; entry visas to Turkey expired after 30 days. Thereafter the family is left stranded without valid documentation, unable to claim a legal residency in Turkey or Russia. (Alexander Ossipov, "Meskhetian Turks in Krasnodar Territory," MEMORIAL NEWSLETTER, 4 Dec 98)

Russia, Turkey, and international humanitarian organizations have applied considerable pressure on Georgia to allow and facilitate the repatriation. In 1996 President Shevardnadze announced a program that would repatriate 5,000 families over four years. The program envisioned granting them full social support and citizenship. However, it required that the returnees define themselves as Georgian by signing below the statement "We are Georgian by origin. Our religion is Islam." (IOM, p. 27) Clearly the Georgians have some concerns about creating yet another compact ethnic settlement within their borders. The fact that ethnic Armenians have settled in the villages that were once Meskhetian complicates matters further. The Armenian population of the Akhalkalaki region, with the support of the local Russian military base, has already exhibited some tendencies towards separatism. The Georgians fear that an influx of large numbers of Meskhetians can only aggravate the situation.

The Council of Europe's concern about the injustices visited upon Meskhetian Turks by Soviet and post-Soviet rulers has thus far found political expression

only vis-a-vis the Georgians. While the Meskhetians' right to a safe and dignified return ought to be supported by the European countries, it is hardly fair to make a state as vulnerable as Georgia carry the entire burden. Surely as a Council of Europe member and the legal successor to the USSR, the Russian Federation should also provide a hospitable refuge for the unfortunates still suffering for Stalin's crimes.

Newly Independent States: Central Asia

By Monika Shepherd

UZBEKISTAN

Opposition groups respond to crackdown with threats and violence

As the Uzbek government shows no signs of ending its assault on the country's Muslim and secular opposition groups, some recipients of government attention are turning to more forceful ways of defending themselves. For approximately the first month after several bomb explosions rocked Tashkent, both Muslim and secular opposition spokesmen limited their reactions to oral and written condemnations of the arrest of hundreds of their supporters. However, their protests and denunciations fell on deaf ears; President Karimov's administration continued its persecution of opposition sympathizers unabated. Consequently, since the end of March, various opposition members have begun using more militant methods to convey their demands to the authorities.

On 19 March, the Voice of the Islamic Republic of Iran broadcast a statement by the Uzbekiston Islom Harakati (Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, led by Tahirjon Yoldoshev), in which the group demanded that President Karimov and his government resign, and threatened violence similar to the 16 February attacks in Tashkent if the president refused to comply with their demands. (VOICE OF THE ISLAMIC REPUBLIC OF IRAN, 0200 GMT, 19 Mar 99; FBIS-NES-1999-0319)
This statement marks the first time that President Karimov's government has

been publicly threatened by any of Uzbekistan's opposition groups and may be a sign that the country's opposition movements are beginning to abandon moderate, nonviolent tactics in favor of more radical strategies in order to achieve their aims.

A little more than ten days after Yoldoshev's group had issued its ultimatum to the Uzbek government, a group of armed men (three to eight, depending on the news report) hijacked a bus traveling from Khorezm (located in eastern Uzbekistan, not far from the Turkmen border) to Tashkent. All of the passengers on board were taken hostage and the hijackers then proceeded to contact authorities (it is not clear precisely whom they contacted) and demand that a number of their companions who had been arrested in connection with the 16 February bombings in Tashkent be released. Interior ministry troops stormed the bus on 31 March and managed to free most or all of the passengers (according to one report, two passengers were killed). A few of the hijackers were killed in the ensuing shootout, as well as an undetermined number of law enforcement officials. [THE INDEPENDENT (London), 1 Apr 99, p. 16; nexis, and TASS, 31 Mar 99; nexis] It is not clear with which opposition group the hijackers were associated, nor has the Uzbek interior ministry released the names of the prisoners whose liberation the hijackers were demanding.

Thus, it would appear that the war of words being waged by prominent Muslim and secular leaders against President Karimov's latest attempt to destroy his political opposition is now turning into a real war. Given this atmosphere, it is difficult to believe that in approximately six months' time fair, open parliamentary and presidential elections are expected to take place. Instead of ensuring a peaceful and predictable outcome in the upcoming elections by eradicating the opposition, President Karimov's policies may provoke his opponents to take up arms against his regime, which could result in widespread political and social destabilization.

Newly Independent States: Baltic States

By Kate Martin

States told not to expect welcome mat at the April NATO summit

Clearly basing its stance on the belief that the pen is mightier than the sword, or in this case, the press release is mightier than any NATO weapon, the US has sought to reassure the Baltic states and other NATO aspirants that, someday, the alliance might include them, but no country should expect an invitation this month. Stopping just short of empty promises, US Deputy Secretary of State Strobe Talbott said that NATO's "open door" would not be slammed shut to the countries seeking inclusion, but warned that there would be no invitation forthcoming at the summit scheduled for April in Washington. "On the critical issue of the door remaining open and that geography and history are issues that do not exclude membership, I am sure the message will be absolutely clear," Talbott said in a satellite interview with journalists from several countries, including the Baltic states. (Baltic News Service DAILY REPORT, 1900 GMT, 18 Feb 99)

Baltic hopes to the contrary, there apparently is growing consensus that the concept of including the countries simply does not hold great appeal to the West. A recent Congressional Research Service report notes a hesitancy on the part of some US defense and NATO officials about Baltic inclusion in the alliance until there is a noticeable improvement in relations between the countries and Russia. At issue is the proximity of the Baltic states to a possibly antagonistic neighbor, and the difficulty which that geography would pose to the mounting of a NATO defense using conventional weapons. (RADIO RIGA NETWORK, 1730 GMT, 10 Feb 99; FBIS-SOV-1999-0210)

In addition to geography, politics plays a role in the decision-making process. A report by an international group of observers focusing on Baltic military readiness

notes that, while Estonia may be following the right path toward the alliance, much work still is needed. Sir Garry Johnson, the former commander in chief of NATO forces in northern Europe and the leader of the international group, said that Estonia's military forces may be capable of working alongside Western troops, however, Estonian politicians have not demonstrated a firm commitment to providing a stable source of funding for defense purposes. (ESTONIAN TELEVISION NETWORK, 1900 GMT, 15 Feb 99; FBIS-SOV-1999-0217) To be sure, finances will continue to constitute a stumbling block for all three Baltic states. Although each has stated its commitment to allocating funds for the defense budget, rises have been incremental.

Despite these reports, Baltic politicians have stated publicly their optimism for the upcoming summit. Latvian President Guntis Ulmanis said he was sure that, "in April the candidate countries will get definite signals about further development and actions. (...) NATO enlargement process is not to be stopped (...)." (Baltic News Service DAILY REPORT, 1400 GMT, 8 Feb 99) That optimism apparently is not shared by at least one country's population, though: A poll conducted by the Center of Sociological Studies showed that support in Estonia for joining NATO is on the wane, although still slightly more respondents reacted favorably than negatively to the idea. According to the survey conducted in January, 41 percent of persons polled supported the idea of NATO membership, while 39 percent were opposed to the idea. This ambivalence is nowhere near as evident if ethnicity is taken into account, however. Estonian natives supported the idea of NATO much more strongly (55.4 percent) than non-Estonians did (14.6 percent). (Baltic News Service DAILY REPORT, 1100 GMT, 10 Feb 99)

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