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The ISCIP Analyst

2002-05-01

The ISCIP Analyst, Volume VII, Issue 8

<https://hdl.handle.net/2144/11999>

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Russian Federation: Executive Branch

By Michael Comstock

PRESIDENCY

Putin's State of the Union address

In the last days before President Putin's annual address to parliament, a flurry of news concerned his dissatisfaction with the government's economic indicators. Economic Development Minister Herman Gref responded to one such report: "[T]he ministry does its best not to make any mistakes, but it will also do its best to raise the figures to which the president objects." (IZVESTIA, 13 Apr 02; via ISI Emerging Markets Database) Gref, who is believed to have had a great deal of influence over important sections of the address (namely those dealing with the economic situation in Russia), evidently was not able to avoid such "mistakes." (ZAVTRA, 25 Apr 02; via ISI Emerging Markets Database) When Putin addressed the Duma subsequently, he deadpanned, "The Government is not reckoning on higher rates of growth. Such a low assessment of Russia's capabilities doesn't help the cause. Moreover, it doesn't imply active policies, and doesn't envisage measures designed to make use of the capabilities of the Russian economy." (RUSSIAN TV, 0800 GMT, 18 Apr 02; BBC Monitoring, via ISI Emerging Markets Database) In effect, the emperor had been told he was wearing no clothes, to which he replied, "Yes I am, and you had better go and figure out what color they are." However, no one could respond to his satisfaction since, indeed, he was naked. Such is Russia's current situation. Putin asked his economic advisors to rewrite their analysis of the country's performance for the sake of his TV image. His advisors must be unprecedentedly honest, or the economic statistics already are stretched too thin, since, apparently, they were unable to comply.

This episode reflects the limits on Putin's power within his own government. Obviously he had requested important revisions before one of his most publicized speeches, and his request remained unfulfilled. It indicates also that Putin does not wish to shoulder responsibility for growth rates that he believes to be too low (3.5-4.2%). By criticizing the government, Putin is trying to distance himself from a harsh reality. Economic Development Minister Gref may be serving as a lightning rod.

Putin continued to address the need for administrative reform within the executive branch to create an apparatus that is "efficient, compact and functional." He emphasized that three reforms were critical to achieving this end: 1) "a wholesale modernization of the system of executive authority"; 2) "effective and clear mechanisms for developing the way in which executive decisions are taken"; and 3) "an analysis of the state functions being carried out today, [retaining] only those that are necessary." With such talk of reform Putin is avoiding the crosshairs, referring to "elements of the executive " and "ministries." (RUSSIAN TV, 0800 GMT, 18 Apr 02; BBC Monitoring, via ISI Emerging Markets Database)

In the instances cited here, Putin himself never offers any plan. He is quite explicit about the need for change, but never about the actual end toward which he is working. This is not to say that President Putin has no plan; merely that whatever plan he might have may never be acceptable to the Russian people. When the good president says, "we must substantially change the actual system by which state institutions operate," he means, and maybe even truly believes, that his own personal executive power needs to be enhanced for the good of the nation.

Reactions not overly optimistic (except for some in the Duma)

"The address does not contain a single new idea," Communist leader Gennady Zyuganov charged, "It reiterates the pro-American, pro-NATO agenda. It

reiterates the priorities of the liberal, hard-line, right-wing economy benefiting oligarchs and suchlike. It reiterates the intention to go on selling land and dismantle natural monopolies -- which will split the nation and the state. Integrity of the state, security of the population, development of science, culture, and education should be main topics in every address. [Putin's] speech did not mention a single method for implementing any of these objectives."

At the other end of the political spectrum, Anatoly Chubais said, "As for a revision of the economic growth rate, this is an attractive idea. I'm not sure, however, that the regime itself understands what price it will have to pay for it. There is more to it than merely new laws or new decisions by the government. The president will have to give up his political face, his image. He will have to make some thoroughly unpopular decisions. I'm not sure that the regime understands this or is truly ready for anything like it." (GAZETA, 19 Apr 02; via ISI Emerging Markets Database)

The newspaper Vremya novosti called the speech "the most prosaic document ever," and determined that it was far too boring to be leaked prior to delivery. However, this did not stop sycophantic reactions from within the Duma; Vremya notes that "the number of lawmakers who liked absolutely everything about the address increased."(VREMYA NOVOSTI, 19 Apr 02; via ISI Emerging Markets Database) Izvestia pointed out that Putin's favorite phrase, "strong state," was not mentioned at all. (IZVESTIA, 19 Apr 02; via ISI Emerging Markets Database)

Russian Federation: Security Services

By Fabian Adami

FSB discovers Irish Republican Army weapons purchase

Recently it has become increasingly clear that the IRA and some of its splinter groups, such as the Real IRA, are not as committed to the Northern Ireland peace process as they should be.

First, three IRA members were arrested in Bogota, Colombia, in August 2001, on charges of providing weapons and training to the Marxist FARC guerrillas, who control large sections of southern Colombia. The men are awaiting trial. More recently, raids on IRA safe houses carried out by police and British intelligence operatives uncovered IRA intelligence files which contained a target list of senior conservative members of parliament, and information concerning army bases around the United Kingdom. (BBC NEWS ONLINE, 27 Apr 02) Now it seems that the list should include secret attempts to purchase weapons and explosives from Russia, while publicly "decommissioning arms." (THE SUNDAY TELEGRAPH, 28 Apr 02)

According to both the Russian and British press, late in 2001 the IRA purchased at least 20 AN 94 assault rifles (which can fire up to 1,800 rounds a minute, and penetrate body armor) from "renegade Russian Special Forces Officers." (THE MOSCOW TIMES, 22 Apr 02; via ISI Emerging Markets Database) Reportedly, the deal was discovered after an earlier attempt to purchase arms had been made, at which point the FSB passed the relevant information to the Secret Intelligence Service (MI6). (AGENCE-FRANCE PRESSE, 21 Apr 02; via ISI Emerging Markets Database) As yet, it is unclear whether any arrests have been made in Russia. Downing Street and the FSB have refused to comment on the matter.

There is no indication as to what the quid pro quo for such information might be, especially in the current atmosphere of "cooperation" in the fight against terrorism, which supposedly has existed since last month's intelligence summit in St. Petersburg. The only return that the FSB conceivably might seek from British intelligence is support for the extraditions of former FSB agent Alexander

Litvinenko and exiled media mogul Boris Berezovsky. However, it is highly doubtful that the British government would agree to return either man to Moscow.

And seeks to expand cooperation with CIS states

Between 16 and 19 April, FSB Director Nikolai Patrushev visited the Kyrgyz capital Bishkek, to hold talks with President Askar Akaev and the secretary of the Kyrgyz National Security Council, Misir Ashirkulov, concerning international terrorism and crime. (ITAR-TASS, 16 Apr 02; FBIS-SOV-2002-0416, via World News Connection)

Patrushev promised that Russia would help Kyrgyzstan to combat drug trafficking in the region, insisting that "Russia is no less interested than Kyrgyzstan in the drug threat not spreading." (ITAR-TASS, 17 Apr 02; FBIS-SOV-2002-0418, via World News Connection) Patrushev stated that cooperation between Kyrgyzstan and Russia was vital, because the US had announced its intention to remain there only for a short term.

In the wake of the comprehensive anti-terrorist exercise held in Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan and Tajikistan between 14 and 20 April, a public relations effort has been launched by the FSB that is designed to ensure that security services will, in the words of Deputy Director Col. General Viktor Komogorov, not "lose the struggle against this evil of the 21st Century," and to ensure that the CIS retains a viable and capable anti-terrorist force. (INTERFAX, 23 Apr 02; via lexis-nexis)

Clearly, Patrushev, and by extension, President Putin, are acting upon the assumption that the US may withdraw from Central Asia upon the completion of operations in Afghanistan, and that Russia will be able to re-establish its influential position. As has been made clear previously, the FSB has been given the task of ensuring that Russia retains influence in the region, particularly with regard to security. (See THE NIS OBSERVED, 3 Apr 02) The events of the last

two weeks prove that this is indeed the case. It remains to be seen how successful the FSB manages to be.

Russian Federation: Domestic Issues and Legislative Branch

By Luba Schwartzman

REGIONS

Spring cleaning...

The week of 15 - 20 April was "cleanliness week" in Rostov-on the-Don. Already on 10 April, thousands of city residents were busy sweeping streets, fixing up playgrounds, setting up trashcans, etc. Rostov Housing and Utilities Department Director Vladimir Artsybashev announced that the action would involve about 40,000 persons and culminate on 20 April in a subbotnik, a traditional Soviet Sabbath of large-scale community service work. (REGIONS.RU NEWS, 10 Apr 02; via ISI Emerging Markets Database)

...And spring cleansing

At the same time, Rostov police officials are conducting a very different "cleaning" procedure -- Operation Foreigner, a "preventative measure aimed at finding and detaining illegal immigrants and preventing them from breaking the law." (NEZAVISIMAYA GAZETA, 12 Apr 02; via ISI Emerging Markets Database) A similar action is taking place in neighboring Krasnodar Krai, where a new law restricting illegal migration was passed recently. (ITAR-TASS, 1012 GMT, 13 Apr 02; BBC Monitoring, via ISI Emerging Markets Database)

The date also coincides with Hitler's birthday, a major event for Russian extremist youths whose harassment of darker-skinned foreigners from the "near abroad" as well as from more distant lands has alarmed residents, visitors and foreign

officials in Russia. All of these events are connected. First, they resonate with a general European zeitgeist of increasing nationalist sentiments; secondly, they are a result of an absence of legislation addressing domestic extremism; and finally, they reflect the interests of various parties.

Everybody's doing it

A number of Russian politicians have spoken about the relationship between Russian ultranationalists and their European counterparts. Liberal Democratic Party leader and State Duma Deputy Speaker Vladimir Zhirinovskiy pointed to recent victories by a right-wing German party in a local election, to Austrian Freedom Party leader Joerg Haider, and the extreme-right French presidential candidate Jean-Marie Le Pen (to whom Zhirinovskiy recently sent a congratulatory letter), explaining that "the future belongs to rightist, to nationalistic parties." (INTERFAX, 0802 GMT, 22 Apr 02; FBIS-SOV-2002-0422, via World News Connection)

State Duma Foreign Affairs Committee Chairman Dmitry Rogozin also mentioned Le Pen's advance to the runoff for the French presidency, pointing out that the major influx of immigrants is a primary contributing factor to the "increase in nationalist sentiments and the formation of skinhead organizations." (INTERFAX, 0829 GMT, 22 Apr 02; FBIS-SOV-2002-0422, via World News Connection)

Moscow Mayor Yury Luzhkov suggested that "nationalist waves in Europe have been recently reaching Russia." (INTERFAX, 0844 GMT, 22 Apr 02; FBIS-SOV-2002-0422, via World News Connection) And finally, Communist Party leader Gennady Zyuganov touched upon the international idea of neo-Nazism. He, however, disputed the relevance of the link, stating that Russia "has suffered from fascism more than any country in the world," and that, therefore, "there is no place for Nazism" in Russia. Zyuganov stated that the neo-Nazi ideology is ascribed to Russia's youths as part of a campaign aimed at creating "conditions that would make it possible to force on the State Duma the adoption of the bill

concerning the prevention of extremism," a bill that would be aimed "first of all against organized opposition forces." (INTERFAX, 1231 GMT, 19 Apr 02; FBIS-SOV-2002-0419, via World News Connection)

Maybe if we ignore it, it will go away

In fact, there is no federal law on extremism, and it was only after last fall's pogrom at a Moscow market that a police department against extremism and terrorism was opened: the unit currently employs only about 20 persons. (REN TV, 18 Apr 02; What the Papers Say, via ISI Emerging Markets Database)

Russia's liberals not only blame the dearth of legislation on extremism for the recent problems, but also accuse the communists of stalling the process of developing such legislation. (ROSSIYSKIYE VESTI, 17 Apr 02; What the Papers Say, via ISI Emerging Markets Database)

Federation Council Chairman Sergei Mironov noted that he has passed a draft law to the House and advocated developing a legal basis for enabling law-enforcement bodies "to stop manifestations of extremism." Federation Council member Ramazan Abdulatipov said that Russia fights international terrorism but deals very little "with the roots of crime in our own country." (ITAR-TASS, 1456 GMT, 18 Apr 02; FBIS-SOV-2002-0418, via World News Connection)

Russian officials claimed success in preventing violence in Moscow on Hitler's birthday. However, the interior ministry's warnings, and the superficial compliance of the skinheads, had no substantive effect on the situation in Russia. Special units patrolled football stadiums, metros, and other public places, as well as foreign consulates and embassies (including missions from the US, Japan, India, the Philippines, Italy and Sweden), which had received threats from the extremist organizations. (ST. PETERSBURG TIMES, 16 Apr 02; via ISI Emerging Markets Database)

Meanwhile, many of the skinheads went south to Krasnodar Krai, where the weather and the reception were warmer. (INTERFAX, 19 Apr 02; via ISI Emerging Markets Database)

Out of sight...

Immigration is a major issue in Krasnodar Krai, where legislation was passed recently to increase state control over migration: Foreigners are required to register with krai authorities, and persons illegally present on the krai's territory are now subject to deportation. According to officials, about a million persons have arrived in the region over the last decade, forcing locals out of the job market. (NEZAVISIMAYA GAZETA, 12 Apr 02; via ISI Emerging Markets Database)

The legislation was supported immediately by action. Within days, several families were forcibly deported, and it has been noted already that the victims of the deportations are "ethnic migrants," while numerous Slavic illegal immigrants are given free rein. (IZVESTIA, 15 Apr 02; via ISI Emerging Markets Database) According to Nezavisimaya gazeta, the new measures are supported by a majority of the local population. (NEZAVISIMAYA GAZETA, 25 Apr 02; via ISI Emerging Markets Database)

In the Rostov Oblast', more liberal than its southwestern neighbor and considered less likely to adopt equally stringent legislation, settlement by ethnic minorities -- currently at 16% -- also affects internal politics. (NEZAVISIMAYA GAZETA, 12 Apr 02; via ISI Emerging Markets Database) The Don Cossacks have volunteered to take the "restoration of the ethnic balance" into their own hands. The Cossacks accuse Chechen, Ingush, Chinese, Roma and Azeri groups of "ethnic aggression" and plan to send Russian President Vladimir Putin an open letter requesting a meeting to discuss the issue. (VREMYA NOVOSTI, 17 Apr 02; via ISI Emerging Markets Database)

While Russia's southern regions are particularly prone to endorsing the suppression of ethnic minorities, according to the VTsIOM Public Opinion Research Center, 58% of the Russian population nationwide supported the slogan of "Russia for the Russians." This number has risen steadily from 49% in 2000 and 43% in 1998. (IZVESTIA, 19 Apr 02; via ISI Emerging Markets Database)

...Out of mind

With the lack of legislation and the encouragement of national sentiments by various political forces, actions by extremist youths in effect are condoned. The 17 April vandalism at an Armenian cemetery in Krasnodar, especially painful to the local Armenian community as it came just two weeks before the Day of Remembrance of the Dead, was officially condemned. (INTERFAX, 0818 GMT, 18 Apr 02; FBIS-SOV-2002-0418, via World News Connection) However, no action was taken by the authorities.

Similarly, while 392 members of extremist youth organizations were detained, and 198 described as "deserving close attention," only two criminal cases were initiated against the skinheads since the offenses "were not committed in public places and did not take the form of large-scale street rallies." (INTERFAX, 0902 GMT, 25 Apr 02; FBIS-SOV-2002-0425, via World News Connection)

A journalist from the popular daily *Moskovsky komsomolets* (owned by Moscow Mayor Yuri Luzhkov and recognized for the attention it devotes to the actions of nationalists) reported that she infiltrated an extremist organization and made two fascinating discoveries: First of all, the nationalist actions were planned not on the anniversary of Hitler's birthday, but on the anniversary of his death; and second, the skinheads are trained at a special-purpose police [OMON] center in the Moscow area. (EKHO MOSKVY, 23 Apr 02; via ISI Emerging Markets Database)

Russian Federation: Foreign Relations

By Scott Bethel

A new Axis?

Russia President Vladimir Putin has met with Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi four times during the past six weeks, both in formal and informal sessions. Since Berlusconi's election in 2001 and his focus on increased economic growth and defense (and subsequent decreased focus on social issues), Italy's status in Europe has grown. (THE NEW YORK TIMES, 13 Feb 02; via nytimes.com) The prime minister has widened Italy's reach on international issues. Berlusconi has long championed the Russian cause among European powers and was among the first to endorse a more extensive relationship between NATO and Russia, as proposed by NATO Secretary-General George Robertson and UK Prime Minister Tony Blair. (See THE NIS OBSERVED, 28 Nov 01) In addition, starting in the Fall of 2001, Berlusconi established regular dialogue with Putin, discussing a range of topics including the war on terrorism, increased economic cooperation between Europe and Russia, and closer Russian-Italian ties. (ASSOCIATED PRESS, 13 Apr 02; via yahoo.com)

The current round of Russian-Italian meetings began with a series of informal discussions on the Middle East, the war against terrorism, and Iraq. [RUSSIA PUBLIC TV (ORT), 1700 GMT, 2 Apr 02; via ISI Emerging Markets Database] A prepared set of statements and a press conference held by the two leaders confirmed that "[Prime Minister Berlusconi] like President Putin does not imagine a united Europe without Russia and is prepared to do anything possible to fully integrate Russia into the European economy." (RUSSIA TV, 1300 GMT, 2 Apr 02; via ISI Emerging Markets Database) This kind of support is crucial for increased Russian economic relations with the European Union. Other European states, such as France and Germany, have expressed reluctance to increase commercial ties with Russia because of questions about the strength of the

Russian economy, lack of significant political and judicial reform, and its ongoing war in Chechnya. (REUTERS, 10 Apr 02; via yahoo.com)

Berlusconi apparently has decided to play a major role in finalizing a formal agreement between Russia and NATO. The initial discussions between Putin and the Italian prime minister on this issue were concluded in Moscow on 3-4 April. (ASSOCIATED PRESS, 12 Apr 02; via yahoo.com)

What has yet to be clarified is the method of choosing which issues will be on the agenda for the proposed new NATO-Russia group (the "Twenty") and what force the resulting decisions made will have. A joint Russia-EU summit is to take place on 29 May, and could provide additional details about the future of economic relations between the European Union and Russia. (ITAR-TASS, 1508 GMT, 18 Apr 02; via ISI Emerging Markets Database)

It appears that Vladimir Putin's carefully laid groundwork is about to pay off: Putin and his foreign policy team (including both Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov and Defense Minister Sergei Ivanov), seeking further integration with NATO and closer economic ties with Europe, have held several high-level meetings in Europe and regular exchanges with NATO since 11 September. The final details of the new NATO-Russia association will be made public during a meeting on 28 May. The future of the EU-Russia relationship remains to be seen.

Closer ties with Iran

Putin and Co. have labored over the last year to forge even closer ties with Iran. Russia has entered into major arms deals with Iran and has contracted to build at least one and perhaps two nuclear reactors there. (See THE NIS OBSERVED, 27 Feb 02)

Moreover, the Russians have favored the Palestinians, bringing Tehran and Moscow even closer. Iranian Foreign Minister Kamal Kharrazi confirmed the

increasingly warm relationship between the two countries during a recent trip to Moscow. Though the focus of the visit was to confirm Russia's support for Iran and discuss their mutual interests in the Caspian Sea area, there was plenty of opportunity for anti-American rhetoric.

"The proclamation by Washington of an 'axis of evil', to which Iran was linked, is just a sign showing that the new doctrine of a uni-polar world has begun to operate," Kharrazi noted. (ITAR-TASS, 2055 GMT, 4 Apr 02; via ISI Emerging Markets Database) At the same time, Kharrazi made it clear who Iran's friends are: "Fortunately, the European Union, Russia, and China oppose such a doctrine."

The Iranian foreign minister also took the opportunity to blast the US presence in Central Asia saying, "The US presence in Central Asia will not help the security situation there . Central Asian Nations have an obligation to effect their own security." (ITAR-TASS, 1822 GMT, 4 Apr 02; via ISI Emerging Markets Database) Official Russia has not echoed these fears, and in fact has expressed muted support for the US activities in the region, perhaps because Moscow has continued to be consulted on troop levels and basing in post-Soviet republics.

Kharrazi conveyed the impression of Russo-Iranian entente over the Caspian: "The Caspian Sea should be a sea of peace and friendship with all littoral areas and states having equal access to its resources," he said. (ITAR-TASS, 1822 GMT, 4 Apr 02; via ISI Emerging Markets Database) He claimed that the existing Caspian treaties, signed by Iran and the Soviet Union, are effective but require modification and improvement over time to maintain their effectiveness. (ITAR-TASS, 1822 GMT, 4 Apr 02; via ISI Emerging Markets Database) Just what such modifications would entail, of course, has been the subject of intense debate among the littoral states that achieved independence after the treaties were signed. In effect, Moscow and Tehran coordinated positions in the run up to the

Caspian Summit, so that Moscow would appear conciliatory, while Iran blocked progress.

Indeed, Kharrazi signaled that all was well with Russian-Iranian endeavors, including ventures that seemed at risk recently. Despite rumors that both sides were dissatisfied with the progress and were preparing to pull out, he stated that "Russia and Iran have the opportunity to expand cooperation, including the completion of the nuclear power plant at Bushehr." (ITAR-TASS, 1822 GMT, 4 Apr 02; via ISI Emerging Markets Database) The official Iranian news agency echoed that assurance. (VOICE OF THE ISLAMIC REPUBLIC OF IRAN, 1630 GMT, 20 Apr 02; via ISI Emerging Markets Database)

State of the Nation address -- foreign policy issues

During his State of the Nation address on 18 April, Vladimir Putin did not tackle much of the foreign policy agenda for the coming year. However, he did highlight two major issues as priorities of the Russian government.

First, he outlined the importance of Russian participation in the global marketplace. "Competition has now assumed a genuinely global character. Owing to our weaknesses we have had to yield to others our numerous niches in the world markets it is we ourselves who have to fight to regain our place in the economic sunlight." (RUSSIA TV, 0800 GMT, 18 Apr 02; via ISI Emerging Markets Database) One of the Soviet Union's key exports has continued to be military hardware; under Putin, Russia has made every effort to capture as much of that market as possible. These efforts have been successful in the Middle East, Asia and even South America. Though military hardware is not the only market Russia can and will pursue, it offers the best chance at hard cash.

Putin also addressed Russia's desire to join the World Trade Organization (WTO). Many of his critics in Russia have accused him of viewing WTO membership as a panacea for the country's economic ills. Putin made it clear that

the WTO is a means to an end rather than an end unto itself. "I would like to state the WTO is not an absolute evil or an absolute good. It is not a reward for good behavior the WTO is a tool the problem is that our country is currently excluded from making the rules of world trade," he explained. (RUSSIA TV, 0800 GMT, 18 Apr 02; via ISI Emerging Markets Database)

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Russian Federation: Armed Forces and Military-Industrial Complex

By Walter Jackson

Leadership, education or more hardware?

Following Russian Defense Minister Sergei Ivanov's recent inspection of the Moscow Military District, part of a nationwide evaluation conducted over the last year, he said the picture is not too bleak. "I don't consider the situation in the army as being hopeless, though the plight of military units and fleets, which I have already visited, differs depending on commanders' skills," Ivanov stated.

(GAZETA, 24 Apr 02; What the Papers Say, via ISI Defense and Security Database)

He also met with officers, who reportedly complained about the quality of basic military training. Their concerns ranged from the study of obsolete military hardware to the outdated combat tactics used during WWII.

However, Ivanov reported, "The main problems of the Army and the Navy are connected with rearmament. Weapons and military hardware used by the Army were created in the 1970s and 1980s. However, it is impossible to replace everything [at once]. Some weapons can be used for several more years." It is the defense minister's responsibility to "keep the balance of the social status of servicemen, their money allowances, and realize the [modernization and acquisition of new] armament program[s]," he said. "In such circumstances, the situation will slowly improve." (GAZETA, 24 Apr 02; What the Papers Say, via ISI Defense and Security Database)

Priorities, priorities

Thus, Ivanov stated fairly concisely what his competing priorities were, and acknowledged that it would take some time to make all the needed changes. Perhaps, Ivanov will not fall for the notion that rearmament will solve all of the military's other problems. New equipment without the resources to maintain or operate it (such as tanks without fuel) will not address the armed forces' social, educational, leadership, readiness and training funding problems.

Especially interesting, however, is the realization by the younger officers that an overwhelming part of what they are learning is "obsolete." Perhaps access to the Internet, and an overall more "worldly wise" and skeptical generation will force the acceleration of the military educational system's overhaul. Although modern military theory has its roots in previous military campaigns, proportional amounts of time must be spent on current and future warfare tactics and innovations.

Alternative service debate continues

While there are still many opposing views concerning the ideal time requirements of military and alternative service, the consensus seems to be developing that the latter should be longer. Tiring of the nearly nine-year debate, senior military officials from the General Staff just want the Duma to specify the length of service requirements and the application procedures for alternative (non-military) service. But it is not that simple.

The real issue is how long is enough? The more liberal Union of Right Forces proposes one year of alternative service, or a six-month military service commitment. This is unrealistic. One could even argue that the existing two-year military service commitment isn't sufficient, given the time needed to train recruits.

More of the same

If the solution isn't found soon to the alternative service issues, then desertion and draft evasion will continue to erode Russian society's perception of the military. The armed forces spring recruitment is best described as "disastrous." According to sources in the military and registration offices, the number of recruits is expected to be only 11.7% of the total registered for the draft. An analysis of those recruited shows that one out of every five is either from a single-parent dysfunctional home, uses alcohol or drugs, or only has primary school education -- not exactly ideal hands to be entrusted with modern weapons. (NEZAVISIMOYE VOYENNOYE OBOZRENIE, 17 Apr 02; What the Papers Say, via ISI Defense and Security Database)

One serious consideration will have to be the elimination of college deferments. Another option well within the military's existing capabilities is to clean up the rampant hazing, and other criminal disciplinary excesses prevailing today. The

caliber of Russian recruits, after all, is the foundation upon which the military forces are built.

MILITARY-INDUSTRIAL COMPLEX

Bartering away more Russian debt at what cost?

On 16 April the Russian and Czech governments signed a long-awaited agreement to settle the outstanding Russian debt to Czechoslovakia. The \$400 million debt will be met by the sale of three Russian-Ukrainian built An-70 military-transport planes, seven Mi-24 combat helicopters, and miscellaneous spare parts for existing Soviet and Russian military hardware used by the Czech military. Reportedly, the AN-70 transport planes had been slated to go to the Russian Air Force. (NOVYE IZVESTIA, 17 Apr 02; What the Papers Say, via ISI Defense and Security Database)

This is yet another example of the difficult balancing acts facing Moscow: Pay off costly debt (receive no cash for the sale, but reduce cash expenditures servicing foreign debts), sell military hardware for export and receive cash to bolster the defense industry (and perhaps meet payroll demands), or replace aging aircraft within the Russian Air Force all difficult choices. Given the current politico-military situation in Russia, paying off the debt probably was a good decision, since Russia is in no immediate need of new transport aircraft or additional combat helicopters.

India, what's the rush?

As tensions flare up along the Indian-Pakistan border, it may be Russian and Ukrainian tanks that wind up confronting each other. Indian Defense Minister George Fernandez

recently met with Russian Defense Minister Sergei Ivanov to discuss future Indian purchases of Russian military equipment. Fernandez signed a preliminary agreement for India to purchase 310 T-90S tanks for \$800 million in response to

Pakistan's decision to purchase 320 T-84UD tanks from Ukraine. Fernandez expressed his hope that "there are no obstacles to this contract, and we hope that tanks will be shipped on time. We will be glad if the tanks are sent to India ahead of the schedule in April [2002]." (NOVYE IZVESTIA, 17 Apr 02; What the Papers Say, via ISI Defense and Security Database)

The Indian contract is good news for the Uralvagonzavod plant, since funding to build new tanks for the Russian Army has not materialized. But India has its eyes set on fighter aircraft as well. Fernandez expressed his hopes that the Irkutsk aviation plant can speed up delivery of SU-30MKI fighters currently under contract.

Joint Russian-Indian military ventures, such as the development and production of the Brahmos supersonic anti-ship missile, have proven successful. The Brahmos missile is being featured on the international military arms-show circuit. The Russian military-industrial complex is also looking for partners to share in the funding and development for the Sukhoi design bureau's fifth generation fighter, and India may be that potential partner. (VREMYA, 15 Apr 02; What the Papers Say, via ISI Defense and Security Database)

Newly Independent States: Western Region

By Tammy Lynch

UKRAINE

Little international will for fight over Gongadze

In mid-April, four journalist organizations appealed to the Council of Europe to increase its pressure on Ukraine to investigate further the circumstances behind the murder of their colleague, Georgiy Gongadze. There has been no response so far from the CE, and it is doubtful that anything significant will be forthcoming. It appears that President Leonid Kuchma and his allies have been successful in

blocking the efforts of Gongadze's widow, media and human rights organizations to have his death openly investigated. It also appears, based on recent events, that the administration's intimidation and repression of the media in Ukraine is continuing unabated.

Kuchma's latest success in thwarting efforts to examine the Gongadze murder (in which allegedly he is implicated) came earlier this month when his administration blocked the FBI from examining evidence gathered during the initial investigation. The bureau had been invited very publicly to advise and assist the prosecutor-general's office on the case and earlier had participated in identifying Gongadze's remains. In fact, over the last year, prosecutors routinely referred to their request for assistance from the FBI as evidence that they were working diligently to solve the murder. On 17 September 2001, for example, when asked about progress on the case, Deputy Prosecutor-General Olexiy Baganets trumpeted the impending arrival of the FBI. "A group of FBI experts would already be in Ukraine if the tragedy had not hit the US," he explained. (AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE, 17 Sep 01; via lexis-nexis) Unfortunately, Mr. Baganets neglected to mention that when these experts did arrive, they wouldn't be allowed to do anything.

On 16 April, the US Embassy in Ukraine revealed that the FBI had left Ukraine after being blocked from assisting in the investigation. According to a statement released by the embassy, the four FBI representatives were told that Ukrainian law prohibits prosecutors from releasing any information to them. They were "unable to discuss any aspects of the case, share evidence or conduct a joint site inspection," the statement said. (ASSOCIATED PRESS, 17 Apr 02; via lexis-nexis) Baganets confirmed this information when questioned. "We provided them with material that is no longer an investigation secret as under international and Ukrainian law we cannot share information that constitutes an investigation secret," he said. (INTERFAX, 16 Apr 02; via lexis-nexis) Baganets did not identify the laws about which he was speaking. And up to this point, no one seems to know.

Following the release of the US Embassy statement, Myroslava Gongadze, Georgiy's widow, told Radio Liberty that Ukrainian law "allows for bilateral agreements. International law enforcement officials -- if they have been invited into the country -- are subject to the same laws as the Ukrainian prosecutor general." Baganets justification for non-cooperation, she said, "is simply not true." (RADIO LIBERTY, 18 Apr 02; via www.rferl.org, and follow-up interview with author, 23 Apr 02)

The justification certainly won't impress US National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice, who in March discussed the FBI's anticipated involvement in the Gongadze case during an interview with Kyiv-based 1+1 television. "We have a team of FBI experts who will go to Ukraine in April to assist the investigation," she said. "We have said very clearly that we are ready to help anyone in the Ukrainian government to complete this investigation. We are certain that this is a case that will affect the climate of Ukrainian-US relations. Therefore, we [will] provide political and technical assistance to ensure an open investigation." (ONE PLUS ONE, 1730 GMT, 4 Mar 02; BBC Monitoring, via lexis-nexis)

Even though Rice is likely to be irritated by the FBI's treatment in Ukraine, it is doubtful that the US will respond with any vigor, at least publicly. The advances made by reformers in the 31 March parliamentary elections (after Rice's interview) have provided the US with an unexpected "light at the end of the tunnel." When Kuchma's final term ends in a little over two years, a reformer realistically could win the presidency -- a potential outcome that did not appear at all likely before the elections. The Gongadze case, therefore, ironically seems to have become a casualty of reformist success. In the grand scheme of geopolitics, justice for Georgiy Gongadze simply is not a compelling enough reason to continue confronting an obstinate, out-of-touch, weakened regime. This is particularly true when the possibility of success is so remote, and when Kuchma's domestic opponents are doing a good job of debilitating him for you.

Instead, the US probably will try to encourage reform while waiting for Kuchma to go -- a delicate mix of hands-on, but hands-off.

This "wait for Kuchma to go" strategy seemingly is also being embraced by the Council of Europe. Despite significant attention to the Gongadze case by the Parliamentary Assembly (PACE), the Council of Ministers -- which embodies what limited legal authority exists in the CE -- has taken no action.

On 27 September 2001, PACE recommended that the Council of Ministers "set up an independent commission of enquiry including international investigators for this purpose, and ask the governments of the member states of the Council of Europe to propose assistance by their investigators." (PACE RECOMMENDATION 1538, 27 Sep 02) In December, however, Council of Ministers President Antanas Valionis met with Ukrainian lawmakers investigating the Gongadze case and chose not to suggest an international inquiry. (ITAR-TASS, 8 Dec 02; via lexis-nexis) At the time, it was privately suggested that the CE would monitor the success of the FBI before making any decisions. Now, given the non-cooperation of Ukrainian officials and the clock ticking down on Kuchma, it would seem unlikely that Valionis will take any action.

Still, Gongadze's widow and colleagues recently made what may be one final attempt to have his case investigated. On 12 April, the International Federation of Journalists, the National Union of Journalists, Reporters Without Borders and the Institute of Mass Information of Ukraine sent a letter to Valionis. In it, the groups asked him "without further delay and in accordance with the Parliamentary Assembly's recommendation 1538 (2001), to ask member countries formally to send investigators to participate in the inquiry." (12 Apr 02; via National Union of Journalists) In a clear sign of the current atmosphere, while the letter received some attention in Ukraine, it barely registered in the West.

Although it is distressing that Gongadze's murder probably will not be solved (at least during Kuchma's term in office), the most dangerous side effect of the failure to pursue the investigation is the sense of impunity it bestows on administration officials. "[Reopening the investigation] is not only about the Gongadze case," Myroslava Gongadze said in a 3 April interview with this writer. "It's for all journalists who are under pressure now." (See PERSPECTIVE, 16 Apr 02) And there are many. Since 1998, 11 journalists have been killed and 48 severely injured in unexplained attacks. (REPORTERS WITHOUT BORDERS STATEMENT, 18 Apr 02) But it seems that the administration's success in staving off a Gongadze investigation has emboldened it. Media intimidation has become more public and less apologetic in the last year. The persecution of Oleh Lyashko is a case in point.

And then there was Lyashko . . .

On 11 April, the Cherkasy Regional Prosecutor's Office ordered the arrest of Oleh Lyashko for allegedly obstructing a police investigation of him. The editor-in-chief of the Svoboda newspaper is accused of libeling an as-yet-unnamed public official. Not coincidentally, Lyashko is associated with Yulia Tymoshenko and has written a number of articles critical of former Prosecutor-General Mykhaylo Potebenko. Even more important, Lyashko announced in Svoboda on 27 March that he had written a "32-page booklet" called "Secrets of the Prosecutor-General" based on "a two-year journalistic investigation." Lyashko complained that his attempts to publish the booklet had failed and noted that "the Svoboda editorial office is still looking for a publisher that would agree to print" the material. (SVOBODA, 27 Mar 02; BBC Monitoring, via ISI Emerging Markets Database)

Officials apparently heard of the booklet on 23 March, when Lyashko took it to a local printing house. Shortly after, the printing house refused to publish the material, while police confiscated the entire 107,000-copy run of Svoboda and dumped it into the river. The next day, 30 police officers searched Svoboda's

offices and printing house. Lyashko was then questioned several times, ordered to turn himself in (he refused), and finally arrested on 15 April.

The journalist is no stranger to the Ukrainian justice system; Lyashko first was arrested on a libel charge in 1997 and acquitted in 1999. But like many cases against journalists, a Kyiv appeals court overturned the acquittal in June of 2001 and attempted to bar Lyashko from working as a journalist. Reporters Without Borders responded sharply. "To forbid a journalist to carry out his professional duties is unacceptable. Only Iran and Yemen have so far resorted to similar punishment," the organization pointed out in a statement. (UNIAN, 1536 GMT, 15 Jun 01; BBC Monitoring, via ISI Emerging Markets Database) Charges were dismissed suddenly and inexplicably several months later. On 24 January 2002, however, the reporter was physically attacked in Kyiv as he was registering for his unsuccessful run in the parliamentary elections.

Following this latest arrest on 15 April, Lyashko remained in detention for eight days. He was released after vigorous protests from several media organizations and the possibility of a PACE resolution over the case. One day later, the Cherkasy Regional Court of Appeals dismissed all charges against him. Whether that will be the end of the case is the question, of course, but it is doubtful.

Throughout this latest media affair, the prosecutor-general's office seemed unconcerned about the negative responses being generated by its continuing harassment of Lyashko. Clearly, the office -- now under the control of former Potebencko deputy Olexiy Baganets -- has little regard for either domestic or international opinion. But then, why should it? No official from the prosecutor's office has ever been held responsible for his actions. The Kuchma administration's sense of impunity has been well earned. Consequently, today in Ukraine, the Gongadze murder remains unsolved, Oleh Lyashko must always look over his shoulder, and the rest of the journalists in the country -- who normally lose two colleagues to unsolved homicide each year -- remain at the

mercy of the prosecutor-general. Unfortunately, there seems little possibility that this will change -- at least before the 2004 presidential election.

Newly Independent States: Caucasus

By Miriam Lansky

CHECHNYA

Khattab dead?

The FSB and Chechen websites are reporting that Khattab was given a poisoned letter on 18 March, the vapors of which killed him; he was buried in secrecy in the mountains in Chechnya. The burial was filmed to show his family that the proper rites had been observed. The FSB came into possession of the tape when one of Khattab's bodyguards, Esli Ryzhyi, was killed by the federal forces during a cleansing. (KOMMERSANT, 29 Apr 02) These details seem to confirm FSB Spokesman Alexander Zdanovich's 25 April contention that Khattab had been killed.

Initially many experts approached with caution the Moscow news broadcast that Khattab had been killed. No one has seen Khattab's body. He had been dead for over a month, yet no one in Chechnya, in the Russian military or among the Chechen resistance, noticed.

So when Alexander Zdanovich announced on 25 April that Khattab had been killed in a special operation, even the Russian president sounded skeptical. "If he was really destroyed, this certainly is another blow for the terrorists," Vladimir Putin said. "At least, I believe that such will be the fate of all those terrorists. I have no doubt of that." (ORT, 25 Apr 02; BBC, via ISI Emerging Markets Database)

On 18 March Russian wire services reported that Khattab's communications had not been detected in four months and he was presumed dead and buried in a cave. The propaganda organ linked to Khattab, kavkaz.org, explained that he had simply upgraded his communications technology. Then, on 11 April, anonymous sources in the FSB were quoted as saying Khattab "apparently has been liquidated." (KOMMERSANT, 26 Apr 02)

Chechen OMON members were not persuaded by Zdanovich but also could not be certain about Khattab's whereabouts. According to OMON Commander Musa Gazimagomadov, for a long time neither Basaev nor Khattab has been in Chechnya. They are represented by "naibs" or lieutenants. The head of the Chechen special forces, Dzhabrail Yamadaev, has a different opinion: "Khattab is probably in Chechnya, all our information points in that direction. But if he was killed, it would be this way, by accident. To mount an operation to kill him is virtually impossible." (KOMMERSANT, 26 Apr 02)

Aslan Maskhadov's representative, Mairbek Vachagaev, puts forward another possibility: "In my view, the Federal Security Service is unable to find out his whereabouts and is trying to force him to appear on air. This is the only way to explain the diligence with which the FSB is trying to prove that Khattab is dead." (EKHO MOSKVY, 25 Apr 02; via ISI Emerging Markets Database) Another possibility is that the false news and perhaps a doctored tape allowed Khattab to slip away. As Kommersant commented on 29 April, several of his lieutenants have been killed recently. Khattab must have felt a noose tightening, and "death and with it an end to investigations seemed to him the best option." (KOMMERSANT, 29 Apr 02)

but Abu Valid lives

On 17 April the director of the Border Guards, Konstantin Totsky, acknowledged that the wreckage of one of the helicopters, the Mi-24 that had been lost over Chechnya on 3 February, had been found. However, the federals found no

bodies. Chechen intermediaries reported the identification of some crew members and sought to trade the bodies for Chechen civilians held in detention. Totsky said that he was ready to begin negotiations but could not reach Abu Valid, Khattab's naib -- now, apparently, his successor. (gazeta.ru, 17 Apr 02)

GEORGIA

Georgia braces for more blows

Since Russia's incursion into the Kodori Gorge on 11-14 April, the situation has not stabilized. The Russian "peacekeepers" insist on the right to "patrol" the Kodori Gorge on their own, without so much as the minimal presence of the UN observers (UNOMIG). Some Georgian leaders, such as Nodar Natadze, the head of the Georgian National Front, say that two divisions of the Russian 58th army have arrived in Abkhazia. (NEZAVISIMAYA GAZETA, 25 Apr 02)

President Eduard Shevardnadze sought to allay fears of escalation at a 19 April press conference, addressing his remarks to those Abkhaz who might be watching: "We want all this to end peacefully. I would like to tell them unambiguously that we have no plans to carry out an attack and we have no plans to launch new operations." (GEORGIAN TELEVISION, 19 Apr 02; BBC, via ISI Emerging Markets Database)

Russian spokesmen claim that the troop movements in Abkhazia constitute rotation, not escalation. Two armored personnel carriers arrived, and two will be removed. Similarly, the paratroopers are being replaced by motorized riflemen. "Peacekeeping" operations had been carried out by paratroopers but are now the duty of regular army, and similar rotations did indeed occur in Kosovo along with other relocations of Russian peacekeepers. (AVN, 19 Apr 02; BBC, via ISI Emerging Markets Database) The UN military observers certified after a patrol that no unusual troop buildup was occurring. (KAVKASSIA PRESS, 19 Apr 02; BBC, via ISI Emerging Markets Database)

This was contradicted a day later by two Georgian officials. The deputy secretary of the Security Council, Jemal Gakhokidze, characterized the position of the Russian "peacekeepers" as "radical" and repeated that a buildup had been observed. (RUSTAVI-2, 20 Apr 02; BBC, via ISI Emerging Markets Database) The chairman of the parliamentary defense committee, Gia Baramidze, speaking on state television, went further. "I had a conversation with Dieter Boden [chief UN representative] and I asked him to send a UN patrol to the lower zone of the Kodori Gorge [controlled by Abkhazia] and the Tqvarcheli district [in Abkhazia] where separatists and the Russians, as well as mercenaries, have been amassing. They are heavily armed and have armored vehicles and other hardware, including artillery, with them. They are engaged in serious preparations," Baramidze said. The goals of this buildup transcend the Kodori Gorge. "The principal aim is to destabilize the situation throughout Georgia and even, if you will, the overthrow of the existing authorities, which obviously will cause chaos. We may or may not like the authorities but when an outside enemy is the issue, the whole of Georgia should unite," Baramidze added. (GEORGIAN TELEVISION, 20 Apr 02; BBC, via ISI Emerging Markets Database)

Ukrainian peacekeepers?

The possibility of making the peacekeepers in Abkhazia a truly CIS force, i.e., including contingents from other CIS countries, has been broached repeatedly in recent years. Current instability makes such initiatives more urgent. The possibility of including Ukrainian peacekeepers was discussed at a meeting in Kyiv during the 23 April visit of Georgian parliamentary speaker Nino Burjanadze. Burjanadze emphasized that Ukraine has been a reliable friend to Georgia and could participate in the peacekeeping. His Ukrainian counterpart, Ivan Plyushch, expressed the hope that the CIS would initiate roundtables or other diplomatic avenues for settling the conflict. (UKRAINE FIRST TELEVISION, 23 Apr 02; BBC, via ISI Emerging Markets Database) According to ITAR-TASS, the Ukrainian foreign minister, Anatoly Zlenko, sounded slightly more enthusiastic,

saying Ukraine would consider this request. (ITAR-TASS, 25 Apr 02; BBC, via ISI Emerging Markets Database)

Newly Independent States: Central Asia

By Michael Donahue

KAZAKHSTAN

At the (Silk) Crossroads of history

While the Bush administration has been carefully setting the conditions for prolonged presence in Central Asia since 11 September, Russia and China have been attempting to counter, or at least to temper, the growing American influence in the region. Kazakhstan, with its significant energy reserves, important strategic location, more favorable demographics, and relatively low Islamic fundamentalist population, seems the logical target for American statesmen in crafting mutually beneficial bilateral agreements. The United States, however, is not alone in the competition for Central Asian hegemony; it has Russia, China, and now Iran with which to contend.

For more than a half-century Central Asia served as the southern doormat for Russia and the Soviet Union. Since the fall of the Berlin Wall and the subsequent collapse of the socio-economic farce that was Communism, however, many Central Asian states, such as Kazakhstan, have sought to distance themselves from Moscow and its influence. The war on terror and the region's newfound geopolitical influence have provided Kazakhstan and others with just that opportunity.

In the midst of a veritable influence vacuum, Kazakhstan finds itself courted not just by America, but by a newly revived Sino-Iranian relationship. In an attempt to counter America's growing presence in Central Asia, Chinese President Jiang Zemin visited Iran last week, pledging cooperation in a number of areas and

reminiscing about the cordial Sino-Iranian relations of the "Silk Road" that bound the two, through Central Asia, more than 2,000 years ago. While the visit did include the signing of a cooperative agreement on a broad range of issues, including oil, trade and transportation, more than anything else it demonstrated that each is very concerned about the growing influence of the US in the area separating the two states. (MIDDLE EAST, 1301 GMT, 20 Apr 02; BBC World Service, via www.bbc.co.uk)

It cannot be a coincidence that less than six days after President Zemin visited Tehran, and a few days before US Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld was due to arrive in Kazakhstan, Iranian President Mohammed Khatami traveled to the country to voice his concern over the presence of US troops in Central Asia, calling it a "humiliation." The US ought to be concerned about Tehran's increased muscle-flexing in Kazakhstan. (EURASIA INSIGHT, 26 Apr 02; via Eurasianet) Already President Nursultan Nazarbaev has entertained the idea of building an oil pipeline through Turkmenistan to Iran, which would be in direct competition with the planned Baku-Ceyhan pipeline and (presumably) exclude the possibility of American investment and profit. The plan itself, however, is likely little more than a pipe dream (no pun intended) without major American or European investment and construction. Considering that the US and the EU are deeply involved with Baku-Ceyhan, and with the Caspian Oil Consortium to a lesser extent, the discussion is more important as a symbol of Iranian discontent than a true alternative.

America, for its part, seems intent on solidifying its relations with Almaty quickly. According to the US State Department, US Ambassador to Kazakhstan Larry Napper recently presented representatives from the Committee for National Security (KNS) with five crates of equipment as a substantive sign of America's commitment to the State Department's Anti-Terrorism Assistance (ATA) Program. More important than the symbolic transfer of assistance, however, Kazakhstan also has sent over 200 security force members to the United States

to participate in ATA training, in exercises ranging from five days to five weeks. (US PRESS STATEMENT, 11 Apr 02; via www.state.gov) Furthermore, the US officially declared that Kazakhstan is now a "market economy," which, despite the admitted presence of corruption, opens the door for increased US investment and trade, and possibly acceptance into the World Trade Organization. (ECONOMY, 26 Mar 02; via www.globe.kz)

If one accepts the fact that Russia, China, and Iran have joined American in a zero-sum "Great Game" for Central Asia, then, given the substantive support that the US has provided Nazarbaev's regime -- including raising the country's economic status and essentially giving it a pass in the State Department's Annual Report on Human Rights -- one must conclude that America is in the game to win and the others are simply playing catch-up. Is a theoretical Kazakh-Turkmen-Iranian pipeline, thus far devoid of details, a true alternative to either Baku-Ceyhan or an expanded Caspian Pipeline Consortium? Can China, which is sparsely populated along its Central Asian borders and still building up military or economic power projection, limit Kazakh westernization through rhetoric alone? Thus far the answers to both questions seems to be "no."

Newly Independent States: Baltic States

By Michael Varuolo

NATO-Russian relations do not deter the Baltics

There has always been the possibility that NATO's sensitivity to Russian concerns would cause the Baltic states to be excluded from the next round of alliance membership expansion. Given the size and power of the Russian military, not to mention the historical enmity of Russia, the very idea of being excluded from NATO membership because of geographic location has irritated many Baltic politicians. Estonian MP Toomas Hendrick Ilves once noted that leaving countries out of NATO due to Russian concerns is "flawed both morally

and intellectually. Morally, because it gives what I would call vampire status to one of the most despicable and repugnant regimes ever, the Soviet Union. Vampire, because it is dead, yet it lives on in the form of its erstwhile and unrecognized borders." (MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS, 7 May 99; via ISI Emerging Markets Database) That frustration among Baltic politicians continues.

With the impending formation of the NATO-Russia Council, fear of potential NATO-Russian animosity developing over the Baltic region has been greatly diminished. Instead, cooperation rather than animosity may empty NATO expansion of its purpose: Given the proposed changes, the Baltic states may find themselves about to join an alliance that no longer provides the firm territorial guarantees of collective defense but rather the obscure protection of a collective security organization.

The particulars of the new NATO-Russia council will not be finalized until the May Reykjavik Summit but the working draft includes a broad swath of issues ranging from crisis management and peace support operations to joint management of airspace. (THE NEW YORK TIMES, 23 Apr 02; via lexis-nexis) Although the proposed arrangement does not afford Russia a veto on enlargement or a role in the collective defense aspect of NATO, the proposed changes cannot be encouraging for the Baltic states, which have viewed NATO as a shield against a possible resurgent Russia.

The Baltic states have long been concerned about Russia's intentions. According to former Estonian President Lennart Meri, although each country is free to choose its own security organizations and structures, "the small Baltic States still fear the might of their former Russian rulers." (DEUTSCHE PRESSE-AGENTUR, 1157 CET, 26 Jul 01; via lexis-nexis) Given Russia's haphazard commitment to democratic reform, the eastern borders of the Baltic states remain open to renewed Russian imperialism.

Since achieving independence in 1991, the Baltic states have sought security guarantees from NATO in order to reduce that vulnerability. Because details of the impending NATO-Russia Council have not been finalized, the Baltic leaders have declined to comment extensively on the topic. Instead they have chosen to focus on reducing future uncertainty by improving military preparedness and reiterating their willingness to join the alliance.

After Estonia submitted its Membership Action Plan (MAP) to NATO, Prime Minister Siim Kallas noted the continued development of the Estonian Rapid Reaction Battalion (ESBAT), which is expected to be ready for service in 2005. (MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS PRESS RELEASE, 8 Apr 02) ESBAT would form a core for Estonian assistance to NATO in a variety of operations ranging from peace support to territorial defense in accordance with NATO's Article V. By developing ESBAT as a rapid reaction unit, Estonia is ensuring that its military development conforms to the new strategic concept for NATO, which emphasizes rapid deployment forces over large, standing armies that would take time to mobilize.

Lithuania, like Estonia, also presented its review of the Membership Action Plan to NATO. In preparation for the presentation, Vilnius rushed to pass its National Security Strategy so that the Lithuanian representatives meeting in Brussels could show that all domestic legal obstacles had been overcome. (BNS, 1459 GMT, 22 Apr 02; FBIS-SOV-2002-0422, via World News Connection) Now all criteria for membership have been met. Defense Minister Linas Linkevicius subsequently hinted at the inevitability of accession when he noted that it had been suggested that Lithuania should begin to consider possible areas of specialization after admittance. (FINANCIAL TIMES INFORMATION, 25 Apr 02; BBC Monitoring, via lexis-nexis). He did not specify who had made the suggestion. In fact, Linkevicius is driving Lithuania toward specialization sooner rather than later.

For the time being, the Baltic states seem to accept the premise that, although NATO is changing, its core function of collective defense will remain, and with it the protection of the members' territorial integrity. At a recent conference between the Baltic defense ministers and their German counterpart, Rudolf Scharping, they were reassured that, despite political maneuvering, NATO will not lose sight of its primary purpose: maintaining the military capacity to provide Europe's security guarantee. (BNS, 0805 GMT, 16 Apr 02; FBIS-SOV-2002-0416, via World News Connection)

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Unless otherwise indicated, all articles appearing in this journal were written especially for

Analyst. This article was originally published at

<http://www.bu.edu/iscip/digest/vol7/ed0708.html>.