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Russian Federation: Executive Branch

By Susan Cavan

PRESIDENCY & GOVERNMENT

President Yel'tsin sacks government

On 23 March, President Yel'tsin announced the dismissal of his entire government, including the prime minister. While most analysts, in and out of Russia, reacted with shock and surprise, it now is clear that President Yel'tsin's move was neither as comprehensive nor as spontaneous as it may have first appeared.

In addition to the decree requiring the resignation of the government, specific individuals were targeted, via separate decrees, for dismissal. PM Viktor Chernomyrdin, First Deputy Anatoli Chubais and Interior Minister Anatoli Kulikov were all singled out. In subsequent interviews, Chubais has made clear that he submitted his resignation some time ago and that Monday's presidential announcement was no surprise. Kulikov has yet to comment, but his first deputy, Col. Gen. Pavel Maslov, who is now acting MVD chief, claims to have learned of his appointment only through media reports. (ITAR-TASS, 23 Mar 98; NEXIS) Kulikov's removal cannot be viewed as a wholly unexpected development however, given the diminution of his authority in the January restructuring of governmental responsibilities. (Obshchaya gazeta, 22 Jan 98; FBIS-SOV-98-023)

Prime Minister Chernomyrdin's dismissal, which was claimed to require the more sensational dissolution of the cabinet, initially appeared the most perplexing. Why would the president disassociate himself from a loyal ally, who, over his five years as PM, has demonstrated himself to be a cautious politician, capable of

balancing and placating such disparate forces as the security agencies, the Communist opposition and the young reformers? Perhaps because the very qualities that have made Chernomyrdin a valuable asset in the past have recently been exposed as potentially serious liabilities to the president, his government, and particularly his apparatus.

There are persistent media allegations that an influential group of advisers to the president engineered the ouster of Chernomyrdin. Some appear remarkably prescient: In an article in *Obshchaya gazeta* (29 Jan - 4 Feb 98), a correspondent cites a confidential source: "The President will remove both of them--both Chubais and Chernomyrdin. Keep in mind: The Family is displeased with Chernomyrdin."

"The Family," is used to refer not only to the Yel'tsin family influences on the president (and there is often the danger of overstating the policy impact of Dyachenko and others), but also the close friends and advisers, such as Valentin Yumashev and, possibly, Boris Berezovsky. Certainly Berezovsky's comments in an interview on the eve of the president's announcement suggest he had at least prior knowledge, if not input.

Whether there exists a Kremlin coterie which plotted against the prime minister, Chernomyrdin's actions of late have demonstrated none of his usual political savvy. His redistribution of governmental responsibilities in January, for example, certainly damaged what once appeared to be a strong alliance with Interior Minister Kulikov. As noted above, Chernomyrdin reduced Kulikov's sphere of oversight and declared his own personal supervision of the security organs. While the reasons for this shift remain unclear, Chernomyrdin certainly chose an inopportune time to alienate a powerful ally.

In what was a particularly egregious mistake however, Chernomyrdin himself turned his critical role as liaison with the parliament into a threat to presidential

authority. At a meeting of the "Big Four" (Yel'tsin, Chernomyrdin, Stroev and Seleznev) in late January, Chernomyrdin apparently supported a plan devised by Communist Duma leader Gennadi Seleznev for the creation of a coalition government. Reports on the details of the plan suggested that a government would be formed comprising three Communist members, three members from Chernomyrdin's NDR, and two from each of the remaining parties. (Moskovsky komsomolets, 26 Jan 98; FBIS-SOV-98-029)

Yel'tsin's reaction to the plan, which would have curtailed his appointment authority over government members, overturned the dominance of reformers and likely halted economic and privatization reform plans, was, unsurprisingly, negative. (Interfax, 9 Jan 98) There are no reports that the "Big Four" has since been convened.

By the end of January, therefore, Chernomyrdin had already damaged his alliance with Kulikov, overplayed his importance in parliamentary relations and simultaneously brought his loyalty to the president into question. If this did not provide sufficient grounds for dismissal, his overt campaigning for the year 2000 presidential elections was unseemly at best, if not disrespectful of an unwell, yet still powerful Yel'tsin.

While the president's dismissal of the government initially appeared both shocking and rash, the move may substantially bolster both Yel'tsin's authority and the economic reforms. The appointment of Boris Nemtsov's protege, Sergei Kiriyenko, as acting prime minister proved a buoyant trial balloon: On 27 March, after only minor negative parliamentary reaction to Kiriyenko, Yel'tsin named him as Chernomyrdin's successor and dared the parliament to reject his nomination. (AP News Online, 27 Mar 98) Threatening the Duma with dissolution if it rejected Kiriyenko's candidacy three times, Yel'tsin said, "Do not make a spiral of confrontation. I won't have any indulgence in it. And this is useless." (ITAR-TASS, 27 Mar 98; NEXIS)

Duma Speaker Seleznev has already signaled a reluctant willingness to confirm Kiriyenko and avoid the dismissal of the parliament. (ITAR-TASS, 27 Mar 98; NEXIS)

For a man often viewed as too ill or erratic to rule, President Yel'tsin comes through this once again, looking crazy like a fox.

Russian Federation: Foreign Relations

By John McDonough

Primakov: Kosovo events are Yugoslavia's problem

The events in Kosovo, a volatile area of Serbia predominantly populated by ethnic Albanians, is Yugoslavia's internal problem which has no direct bearing on the settlement process in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Russian Foreign Minister Yevgeni Primakov said at a news conference in Moscow on 4 March. (Interfax, 1435 GMT, 4 Mar 98; FBIS-SOV-98-063) Two weeks later, while in Belgrade, Primakov reinforced this point of view, stating that "two principles should be observed in settling disputes regarding national minorities: territorial integrity, i.e., resolving issues within one state, and giving wide-scale rights in self-governing, which meet the interests of this minority." Noting Russian relations with Chechnya he said, "We exercise this approach in resolving conflicts on the territory of the former USSR." (Interfax, 1417 GMT, 17 Mar 98; FBIS-SOV-98-076)

Primakov's statements on the Kosovo situation, however, should in no way be seen as a reversal of foreign policy.

Citing the Russia-NATO act and the Russian role in the recent Iraqi crisis as recent foreign policy successes, Primakov said Russia "acts as a world power, a

world player in the world arena." On 6 March he told young diplomats who joined the ministry in 1997 that "the role of a world power is not an aim in itself, but a thought-out role for Russia in conditions of a difficult and zigzag-style transition to a multipolar world." (Interfax, 1651 GMT, 6 Mar 98; FBIS-SOV-98-065)

Russia angles for international position

Russia has requested that UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan appoint a Russian representative as a deputy head of the UN Special Commission on Iraq, or UNSCOM. Russia made the proposal in order to make UNSCOM's work more effective and to ensure a more just "geographic representation" of countries on the commission, a Russian spokesman said. The commission currently includes specialists from 21 countries; UNSCOM Chairman Richard Butler, from Australia, currently has only one deputy, a US citizen. (Interfax, 1213 GMT, 6 Mar 98; FBIS-SOV-98-065)

Broader ties with Iran... but no weapons of mass destruction

Following his one-on-one talks with his Iranian counterpart Kamal Kharrazi, Primakov said that he favors "the continuation of the long-established practice of bilateral cooperation" between Russia and Iran. He had stated before enlarged talks with Kharrazi that "the two neighboring states are interested in good-neighborly relations and try to broaden them in all areas and not only for the sake of mutual advantage." (Interfax, 1044 GMT, 25 Feb 98; FBIS-SOV-98-056)

At the same time the foreign ministers "deny as absolutely groundless various claims of alleged cooperation between Moscow and Tehran in developing weapons of mass destruction in Iran." A separate report reinforced this stance as "the sides reaffirmed their unchanging loyalty to the principles of the UN charter and their international commitments and favored the continuation of cooperation in the peaceful use of nuclear energy under effective IAEA control." (Interfax, 0922 GMT, 27 Feb 98; FBIS-TAC-98-058) However, perhaps in an attempt to silence international attention on the nuclear project, Moscow stated that Russia

will not sign any new documents with Iran until it has completed the contract to build the nuclear power station at Bushehr. (ITAR-TASS World Service, 1228 GMT, 6 Mar 98; FBIS-TAC-98-065) The ministers' statements evade the real issue: Russian transfer of missile technology to Iran.

Russia prepared to mediate India-Pakistan agreement

Russian Federation Deputy Foreign Minister Grigori Karasin was received by Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif and met with Foreign Minister Gohar Ayub Khan during a two-day working visit to Islamabad. The Russian envoy stated that Russia and Pakistan must engage in vigorous joint efforts to overcome the stereotypes of ideological confrontation of the "cold war" era and start a stable and progressive development of mutually beneficial relations in all areas. (ITAR-TASS World Service, 2018 GMT, 3 Mar 98; FBIS-SOV-98-063) Karasin also stated that better Pakistan ties will not harm existing Russian-Indian ties. (Interfax, 1204 GMT, 5 Mar 98; FBIS-SOV-98-064)

Finally, in keeping with Primakov's desire to play a leading role in Mideast and Asian affairs, Karasin said if both countries show interest in its assistance, Russia is prepared to help normalize relations between India and Pakistan. Karasin told ITAR-TASS that Moscow's mediatory role had been discussed during his visit to Islamabad in the beginning of March. (ITAR-TASS, 1519 GMT, 11 Mar 98; FBIS-SOV-98-070)

Primakov on OSCE

"The Organization for Cooperation and Security in Europe must play a greater role in the formation of a system of European security in this connection it is necessary to intensify work on the Charter of European security," Primakov stated on 3 March. He also expressed a view that "a system built on the basis of different organizations must not be hierarchic." Moreover, he said, "at the same time the OSCE differs from other organizations by its composition and

multifunction activities, and therefore it must, and can play a system-forming role." (ITAR-TASS, 2124 GMT, 4 Mar 98; FBIS-SOV-98-063)

Comment

Although Primakov also stressed the valuable role the OSCE is playing in Belarus and Azerbaijan, the idea of the OSCE playing the lead role in European security has become a continual theme for the foreign minister, especially as the possibility of further NATO expansion remains.

Russia excluded from Caspian conference

Russia has officially expressed its "legitimate bewilderment" over the list of countries whose foreign ministers took part in a conference on the Caspian Sea in Istanbul 1-2 March, foreign ministry spokesman Gennadi Tarasov told a briefing in Moscow on 3 March. The conference, which focused in part on the project to build a Baku-Ceyhan oil pipeline, involved the foreign ministers of Turkey, which organized the meeting, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan. "Regardless of the make-up of one or another meeting, nobody can undo the fact that Russia is one of the countries surrounding the Caspian Sea," he said. (Interfax, 1342 GMT, 3 Mar 98; FBIS-SOV-98-062)

Russian Federation: Domestic Issues and Legislative Branch

By Lt. Col. Michael Thurman

REGIONS

ELECTIONS

Ex-minister Rodionov and others register as candidates for Duma seat

Former Defense Minister Igor Rodionov has been registered as a candidate for district number 197 in Moscow--Orekhovo-Borisovo. Other registered candidates

include the former deputy of the Moscow City Duma, Anatoli Stankov, Chairman of the Conservative Party Lev Ubozhko, and the leader of the Officers' Union, Stanislav Terekhov. Fourteen other hopefuls are tendering their applications as well. It seems that the Duma--at least from this district--is becoming a chamber of ex-political officials looking for a title, an income, or perhaps parliamentary immunity (Interfax, 0920 GMT, 16 Feb 98; FBIS-SOV-98-047).

The next day, General Andrei Nikolaev, the former Federal Border Service commander, also registered as a candidate for the same seat. The residents of Orekhovo-Borisovo grimly joke that the military is assembling in order to take over eventually. Let us hope that the voters choose wisely (NTV, 1100 GMT, 17 Feb 98; FBIS-SOV-98-048).

Lebed interviewed on his plans if elected governor of Krasnoyarsk

Denying that the present run for governor is in fact a move toward the presidency--or a seat in the Federation Council--General Aleksandr Lebed claims that his true interest is only in serving the people of Krasnoyarsk region (NTV, 1100 GMT, 17 Feb 98; FBIS-SOV-98-048).

Yet considering Lebed's national standing and his past popularity, one might assume that he is a "shoo-in." However, a public opinion poll shows that the region's incumbent, Valeri Zubov, has more than a 2:1 lead over Lebed. This speaks to the power of the incumbency, the importance of local issues and personalities, or that Lebed has lost some of his appeal. It is perhaps too early to judge whether Lebed can make a successful bid for the presidency, but defeat would certainly not help the case he would need to make to the nation (ITAR-TASS, 0632 GMT, 26 Feb 98; FBIS-SOV-98-057).

LEGISLATIVE BRANCH

Duma Chairman Seleznev calls for amendments to the constitution

"If we do not amend the constitution, we risk ruining the Russian Federation, because there are very serious contradictions which must be resolved... by means of convoking a constitutional assembly," according to the Duma chairman, Gennadi Seleznev. High on Seleznev's list is the need for clarifying division of power between the center and the regions. But most importantly, the relationship between an overly powerful executive branch and a much weaker legislative branch needs to be re-ordered in favor of the Duma. Seleznev claims that the present constitution was drafted and ratified too quickly and that this is the reason for the basic law's problems.

The chairman is undoubtedly correct, but not only has the amendment process yet to be defined, it is not clear whether the Federal Assembly is presently capable of meeting greater responsibilities. Before power relationships can be addressed, the question of Duma elections needs to be resolved (Interfax, 1533 GMT, 14 Feb 98; FBIS-SOV-98-045).

Federation Council to hold 'government hour'

Just as in the Duma, members of the government will be invited to answer questions from members of parliament's upper chamber. Oleg Sysuev and Yakov Urinson, deputy prime ministers of the government, and Emergencies Minister Sergei Shoigu, are expected to take part in the first such government hour. Governmental accountability is certainly a good thing; with luck, this will help to encourage the concept (ITAR-TASS World Service, 1612 GMT, 17 Feb 98; FBIS-SOV-98-048).

Duma appoints new CIS Committee chair

The lower house of parliament removed Sergei Baburin (People's Power) from his post as chair of the CIS Committee. Deputy speaker Svetlana Goryacheva (Communist Party) was appointed to the post. Baburin has been harshly critical of the Communists, a move which, according to Gennadi Zyuganov, is in violation of cooperation agreements between the two parties. This has

exacerbated the division within the People's Power into pro-Baburin and pro-Ryzhkov blocs.

The existence of the People's Power (Narodovlastiye) faction is the result of an uneasy alliance between Baburin and Ryzhkov, validated by Communist Party recognition of its status as a parliamentary faction. The original quid pro quo was that the People's Power unit would provide unflinching support for the Communists in exchange for committee chairmanships. With Baburin's removal, this agreement, indeed the very existence of the People's Power faction, is brought into question. (ITAR-TASS, 1608 GMT, 3 Mar 98; FBIS-SOV-98-063)

Russian Federation: Armed Forces

By Lt. Col. Dwyer Dennis and CDR Curtis Stevens

Urinson and Chubais outline the defense industry's prospects

During an expanded session of the Russian government, a new program for modernizing the defense industry was revealed. This program is a joint product of the Ministry of Economics and the Ministry of Defense and outlines the restructuring and conversion of the defense industry in 1998-2000 and until 2005. Urinson stressed that "organizational, financial, and economic mechanisms ... will enable defense production to be concentrated at ... most effective enterprises." Chubais said that the current 1,749 defense enterprises would be trimmed to 650-670 by the year 2000. Urinson noted that, to begin implementation, a six-month period to repay debt and restructure finances would be necessary. If the debts were considered "good" (due to nonpayment by the state), then they would be repaid this year. The total amount of debt accumulated for the 1997 state order is estimated at around 10 billion new rubles (Moskovsky Komsomolets, 17 Feb 98; FBIS-SOV-98-061, and ITAR-TASS, 1032 GMT, 26 Feb 98; FBIS-SOV-98-057).

As example of the crippling effect this debt has had on defense industry reform, Sverdlovsk Region Governor Eduard Rossel met with Chubais and described the situation there. Over 40 enterprises of the military/industrial Sverdlovsk complex are on the verge of striking. The defense ministry's and the atomic energy ministry's debt totals over 1 billion "new" rubles; wages in arrears account for R200 million of this amount (ITAR-TASS, 1112 GMT, 2 Mar 98; FBIS-SOV-98-061). Similarly, the federal debt to Russia's Zabaykalsky military district is also over 1 billion redenominated rubles with R105 million associated with salaries. Military installations are beginning to feel the backlash directly, as energy workers switch off heat and electricity in military installations. (ITAR-TASS, 0707 GMT, 4 Mar 98; FBIS-SOV-98-063)

Russia seeks new markets as arms exports continue to decline

Announcing a 26 percent drop in Russian arms exports from 1996 to 1997, Russian Foreign Trade Minister Mikhail Fradkov identified financial troubles in many customers' economies as the culprit. His solution to this is to expand Russia's market base by finding both new partners and new market niches. He attempted to put a positive spin on the decline by saying that "efforts to improve the structure of settlements ... were successful," claiming that 75 percent of 1997 arm export payments were made in convertible currency. He specifically targeted Latin American, Asian, Pacific and African markets as objectives for increased arms exports in 1998. Russia currently engages in military cooperation with 64 countries and projects signing agreements with 13 additional. (Interfax, 1554 GMT, 4 Mar 98; FBIS-SOV-98-063)

In spite of Fradkov's claims concerning movement towards a stronger cash basis, Russian armaments continue to be delivered in repayment of debt. Seoul took delivery of a regular shipment of goods to service a debt that has grown to \$1.47 billion. A cargo ship delivered 10 BMP-3 infantry fighting vehicles and tank ammunition worth over \$30 million. Seoul has agreed to partial repayment of the debt by taking deliveries of 33 BMP-3s, 33 T-80U tanks, and portable anti-tank

missile systems designated Igla valued at \$210 million. Delivery of raw mineral materials will total another \$210 million. (ITAR-TASS, 0733 GMT, 11 Mar 98; FBIS-SOV-98-070)

In keeping with Russia's need for capital, Interfax reported, military and diplomatic sources have threatened that Russia may revise its promise not to conclude new arms export contracts with Iran, especially if the US uses force against Iraq. One source was quoted as describing Iran as "a solvent country" which "pays for arms supplies with cash and oil." Iranian interest include offensive helicopters and high-speed ships equipped with antiship missiles. (Interfax, 1247 GMT, 25 Feb 98; FBIS-SOV-98-056)

Russia struggles to push privatization of the defense industry and to find marketable, competitive commercial products to support defense conversion. The debt owed the defense enterprises continues to accumulate and cash from arms exports is apparently a trickle, considering offsets and debt repayments. The result is little overall capital to support the defense industry reforms. Recent agreements such as the An-70 transport aircraft production program between Russia and Ukraine are hopeful, but it remains to be seen if the required investment, estimated at \$150-200 million, can be obtained. This is the sort of dual-use conversion that has hope for success, more so, considering the potential that the An-70 may be able to serve as the basis for a joint European military and cargo aircraft. The old adage is true: "It takes money to make money." Until the debts are repaid and cash is flowing into the state coffers as well as the defense enterprises, there will be little long-term success. And as far as Chubais' and Urinson's commitment to "find" the 10 trillion rubles to clear the debt in six months--the lights are still going out on military installations and officers' salaries are paying for operational capability.

Yel'tsin asks for parity

President Yel'tsin has tasked the new atomic energy minister, Yevgeni Adamov, with ensuring international parity in nuclear technology including weapons "so that the parity is maintained, while resources necessary for securing it can be reduced." Yel'tsin described nuclear power engineering as a very subtle and dangerous industry, noting that "both diplomacy and weapons" were present. (ITAR-TASS World Service, 0949 GMT, 4 Mar 98; FBIS-SOV-98-063)

In other weapons news, Moscow and Kyiv are discussing the sale of 19 TU-160 and 21 TU-95MS strategic bombers. Ukrainian military officials have privately reported that Ukraine is unable to maintain the aircraft because the necessary technical documentation remains in Russia. Russian officials have stated that two-thirds of the aircraft have lost their combat capability. (Interfax, 0907 GMT, 26 Feb 98; FBIS-SOV-98-057)

Russia to build floating nuclear power plants

Plans are well advanced to begin construction next year at the Baltiisky Shipyard near St. Petersburg for a floating nuclear power plant. The first plant is scheduled to go the Siberian mining town of Pevek in 2003. The plan calls for the plant to be built on a 126-meter pontoon. The plant would consist of two type KLT-40C reactors, the same type used on Russian nuclear powered ice-breakers and the Kirov class battlecruisers. (St. Petersburg Times Weekly Internet Edition, 9-15 Mar 98)

Elsewhere, the construction of nuclear power plants in Iran, India and China is a priority for the atomic energy ministry. Current international projects are valued at over \$5 billion. Atomic Energy Minister Yevgeni Adamov is expected to sign contracts worth \$2.5 billion with India next month for two VVER-1000 pressurized water reactors. The Russian nuclear construction industry is currently operating below capacity. (Interfax, 1505 GMT, 17 Mar 98; FBIS-SOV-98-076)

Comment

The VVER-1000 is a third-generation Russian pressurized-water reactor plant. Although the plant attempts to incorporate Western-style safety features, the design falls well short of Western standards. For general information on this and other Russian civilian nuclear plants, see Argonne National Laboratory's International Nuclear Safety Center at <http://www.insc.anl.gov>.

Military urges deserters to return; those who remain face hazing, threats

Moscow military authorities have launched their second special operation of the year to round up military deserters. The operation, called "Deserter, Give Yourself Up," promises clemency to deserters who surrender themselves. Many of the deserters have left the services due to the climate of hazing and brutality found throughout the military. (Jamestown Foundation Monitor, 6 Mar 98)

One danger facing recruits is death. A junior officer has been sentenced to seven years of hard labor for the beating death of a teenaged recruit. The military court found Lieutenant Valery Mantulenko guilty of savagely beating a 19-year-old soldier to death and "overstepping his authority." (Agence France-Presse, 0005 PST, 4 Mar 98; C-afp@clari.net)

Defense Minister Igor Sergeev warned that discipline has broken down to such an extent that the military could fall prey to organized crime. "There is the very real threat of organized crime breaking through into the ranks of the military (...)

Today the problem of law and order in the armed forces has assumed a nationwide scope," he was quoted as saying. The defense minister was speaking to a special session of the military leadership devoted to the problems of discipline in the armed forces. (Agence France-Presse, 0400 PST, 10 Mar 98; C-afp@clari.net)

Additionally, staff exercises being held by the North Caucasus Military District were disrupted when utilities to the headquarters of the 8th Army Corps in Volgograd were cut off for non-payment of electric, water and heating bills. The

payment arrears for the unit's sauna alone are 2.5 million new rubles. (ITAR-TASS World Service, 0853 GMT, 17 Mar 98; FBIS-SOV-98-076)

Hero Arrested

In an example of the plight facing many retired Russians, a World War II veteran and recipient of the Soviet Union's highest award, "Hero of the Soviet Union," was arrested for selling drugs near the infamous Lubyanka Prison. The arrested pensioner admitted to selling drugs and said he did so to supplement his income. (Agence France-Presse, 0253 PST, 4 Mar 98; C-afp@clari.net)

HISTORY NOTE

Soviet Union sought navy base from Portugal in 1975

A Portuguese daily, *Diario De Noticias*, reported the Soviet Union asked Portugal's Communist government in 1975 for permission to build a naval base on the Atlantic island of Madeira. The base was to be used as a refueling facility for Soviet naval and merchant ships. Although the request was first reported on the island of Madeira in 1975, no mainland paper picked up the story since mainland Portugal was still preoccupied from a failed coup attempt. (Agence France-Presse, 1025 PST, 11 Mar 98; C-afp@clari.net)

Newly Independent States: CIS

By Mark Jones

Heads of State summit postponed

Due to President Yel'tsin's poor health, the Heads of State meeting scheduled for 19 March was canceled. This marks the second summit in as many months to be canceled at Yel'tsin's behest, again pointing up the fact that the president and other Russian officials are the only decision makers who matter in the CIS. Both Presidents Shevardnadze and Aliiev threatened not to attend the Moscow summit because they feared for their own safety. Both have been victims of

assassination attempts committed by criminals who were later harbored in Russia. The threats of these two presidents, however, were not enough to force a cancellation.

The postponement did not affect the usual pre-summit meetings of the subordinate councils. The CIS Interparliamentary Assembly (IPA) convened on 28 February despite the absence of the Ukrainian, Turkmen, and Uzbek representatives. The main result of the meeting was the re-election of Russian Federation Council chairman Yegor StroeV as chairman of the IPA. Despite CIS resolutions requiring rotation of key CIS posts among member states, no non-Russian has ever held the chairmanship (Ruslan Khasbulatov and Vladimir Shumeiko were StroeV's predecessors). Of the subjects discussed, StroeV singled out the strengthening of cooperation between the IPA and CIS statutory bodies and said that the IPA agreed on the need to move from model laws to laws which would apply to the CIS as a whole. StroeV continues with his desire to re-integrate the NIS through these types of laws, which he insists must "pertain to regulating economic integration, creating a basis for unified interstate structures, and resolving social issues" (ITAR-TASS, 1105 GMT, 28 Feb 98; FBIS-SOV-98-060).

The CIS foreign ministers held a meeting on 4-5 March which, apparently for the first time, was also attended by representatives from the Council of Defense Ministers, other power structures and law enforcement agencies. The ministers discussed security issues, organized crime, military cooperation, and peacekeeping operations (ITAR-TASS, 1701 GMT, 5 Mar 98; FBIS-SOV-98-064). The attendance of other "power organs" heads indicates that Russian Foreign Minister Primakov has been somewhat successful in linking Russian foreign policy to CIS military, security, and crime policy. Perhaps soon when Primakov speaks, he will do so on behalf of the commonwealth's power committees.

The CIS Council of Heads of Government held its meeting on 6 March and adopted eleven wide-ranging draft agreements. Conventions on transnational corporations, agreements on a common agrarian market, a treaty on the status of law enforcement officers of other CIS states, and a convention on criminal extradition were signed in addition to several economic agreements. One other major development was the signing, over Georgia's objection, of a plan for military cooperation through 2001.

At the urging of Russian Minister for Cooperation with CIS Countries Anatoli Adamishin, the Heads of Government also agreed to form yet another CIS organization--the CIS Inter State Forum--which is to be a top level conference that within six months will prepare a plan and documents to implement urgent reforms of [CIS] bodies (ITAR-TASS, 1103 GMT, 6 Mar 98; FBIS-SOV-98-065). The idea for the committee was first advanced during a meeting between Presidents Kuchma and Yel'tsin as a way of solving the commonwealth's problems (ITAR-TASS, 0856 GMT, 27 Feb 98; FBIS-SOV-98-058). Although the mission of the forum appears to be a complete revision of the commonwealth's founding documents and subsequent agreements, it is doubtful that any new and workable ideas can come of it. For the same reason that the CIS fails--the desire of sovereign states to pursue their own national interests--any new organization seems likewise doomed. The composition of the forum is also puzzling. The CIS already has councils of heads of state, government, parliament, foreign and interior ministers. What new role could the forum play that current councils do not already cover? This may end up as a case of reorganizing to give the appearance of progress.

Kuchma and Yel'tsin support closer CIS cooperation

As mentioned above, the Ukrainian and Russian presidents spoke of pursuing closer ties within the commonwealth. This announcement from Kuchma, the staunchest opponent of supra-national structures, was hailed by CIS Executive Secretary Ivan Korotchenya who immediately announced, "If Russia and Ukraine

have agreed on such an approach" to the commonwealth's development, "the rest have nothing to do but join in." (ITAR-TASS, 1922 GMT, 2 Mar 98; FBIS-SOV-98-061) This does seem to be an about-face for Kuchma, but it may just be a small payback to Yel'tsin for his support in the upcoming Ukrainian presidential election. We will see if Kuchma's attitude has really changed if and when he is re-elected.

Serov out, Rybkin in as deputy premier

Expressing their dissatisfaction with the level of cooperation with CIS countries, both President Yel'tsin and Premier Chernomyrdin announced that Valeri Serov, the Russian deputy premier for CIS affairs, was being replaced by Ivan Rybkin. The new deputy premier's last position in the Russian government was chief of the Security Council. He has also held posts in the USSR Community Party, the Russian Supreme Soviet (1991-1993), and the Duma (1993-1995). Rybkin was also in charge of Russian affairs in Chechnya (ITAR-TASS, 2058 GMT, 2 Mar 98; FBIS-SOV-98-061, and NTV, 1600 GMT, 28 Feb 98; FBIS-SOV-98-060). The move is seen as a way of backing up Yel'tsin's claim that 1998 is the "Year of the CIS" or, perhaps more accurately, the year of the re-integration of the CIS. Rybkin is seen as a man who can get things done and his appointment signals the ever-increasing priority the NIS has in Russia's policy hierarchy.

Rumblings in the Duma

Anyone who believes that the Russian Duma is interested in treating members of the NIS as independent, sovereign nations should take note of the following incident. While debating the ratification of the Russian-Ukrainian Friendship and Cooperation Treaty (signed by the presidents and ratified by Ukraine), Georgiy Tikhonov, the head of the Duma's committee on CIS affairs, hurled four-letter words and insults at the Ukrainian lawmakers present. Tikhonov threatened to throw the leader of the Ukrainian delegation out of the room and tried to present him with a demand to hold referenda in Russia, Belarus and Ukraine simultaneously "on the unification of these countries into a single state." He also

said that Ukraine was not a real state and objected to the signing of the cooperation treaty because it would solidify national borders and accept the dissolution of the Soviet Union (Infobank, 3 Mar 98; FBIS-SOV-98-062). With Duma heads like this...

Newly Independent States: Western Region

By Tracy Gerstle

MOLDOVA

Moldovans go to the polls

Moldova successfully held its parliamentary elections on Sunday, 22 March. International observers proclaimed the elections fair and over 67 percent of the electorate turned out to vote.

Despite the predictions of many opinion polls over the past few weeks, it appears that the Communist Party will not control the new Moldovan parliament. Of the nine parties, six political blocs and 67 independent candidates registered for the elections, only four groups jumped the four percent electoral threshold to gain seats. (Interfax, 1657 Mar 98; FBIS-SOV-98-079) As expected, the Communist Party (CP) won the largest percentage of the vote and, therefore, the most seats in parliament at 30 percent and 41 seats, respectively. However, the three remaining parties--the Democratic Convention (19 percent and 26 seats), the Movement for a Democratic and Prosperous Moldova (18 percent and 24 seats) and the Party of Democratic Forces (9 percent and 10 seats)--obtained enough seats among them to form a coalition government, with 60 seats, effectively overruling the CP. It remains to be seen if these three parties will be able to form a workable coalition, though they all have confirmed their "refusal" to form an alliance with the CP. (Jamestown Monitor, 24 Mar 98)

In related news, inhabitants of the Gagauz-Yeri autonomous region may have been surprised to find that their ballots did not contain a provision on a constitution for the region. As reported in the last issue of the digest, the region's assembly had voted to organize a referendum on a constitution simultaneously with Moldova's parliamentary elections. On 17 March, just five days before elections, the Supreme Court ruled against the assembly's vote. Shortly thereafter the Central Electoral Commission (CEC) canceled the referendum. Ion Busuleac, a CEC representative, said that some of the constitution's provisions were "contrary to Moldova's constitution," and that the Gagauz assembly had failed to harmonize the two documents in time for the vote. Mr. Busuleac added that the referendum was in violation of Moldovan law, since the constitution was only made available to the public 15 days before the elections and it was published in Russian. (Infotag, 1700 GMT, 17 Mar 98; FBIS-SOV-076)

Border squabbles between Moldova and Ukraine

On 10 March, Moldovan Prime Minister Ion Ciubic protested Ukraine's decision to build fences around a site in the Danube estuary, effectively pushing the Moldovan border back 100 meters. After visiting the site, Mr. Ciubic said the action "ran contrary to international law." This fence prevents Moldova from accessing the Danube and an oil terminal it is building with aid from the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development. (ITAR-TASS, 2151 GMT, 10 Mar 98; FBIS-SOV-98-070) The area is one of several in dispute during ongoing border talks between the two countries.

Odessa talks fail to produce any real breakthroughs in the Dniestr conflict

Any hopes that talks between Moldovan President Petru Lucinschi and Dniestr's leader Igor Smirnov, facilitated by Ukrainian President Leonid Kuchma and Russian Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin, might give a fresh impetus to the settlement of the Dniestr conflict were quickly dashed. The Moldovan and Dniestr leaders only succeeded in signing an agreement "on measures of trust and development of contacts between" the two sides. The meeting seemed more a

confirmation of the joint role that Ukraine and Russia intend to play in the breakaway region and Moldova. Indeed President Lucinschi thanked President Kuchma and Prime Minister Chernomyrdin for their efforts as "guarantors of a settlement" in the conflict. (ITAR-TASS, 2131 GMT, 18 Mar 98; FBIS-SOV-98-077) Following the meeting, Russian Defense Minister Igor Sergeev confirmed that "Russia's military presence in the Dniestr region would last... [I]ts duration will depend upon progress in the conflict settlement." He "emphasized" all remaining Russian armaments in the region are in the possession of the Russian armed forces. (ITAR-TASS, 1253 GMT, 20 Mar 98; FBIS-SOV-98-079)

UKRAINE

Ukraine reneges on Bushehr turbine deal with Russia and Iraq

After weeks of pressure from the United States and Russia and seemingly endless vacillation, Ukrainian Foreign Minister Hennady Udovenko announced the cancellation of a deal to supply Russia with turbines for a nuclear power plant it is building in Iran. Udovenko's statement followed a visit to Kyiv by US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright at which the two sides signed a thirty-year nuclear cooperation agreement. A few days later, Ukraine's ambassador to the US, Yuri Shcherbak, stressed that his country's withdrawal from the Iranian deal should not be seen as a concession to the US. He said that Ukraine withdrew from the deal on economic grounds since it "opens wide possibilities for increased investments... by western countries... into Ukrainian nuclear power engineering." (ITAR-TASS, 0355 GMT, 13 Mar 98; FBIS-SOV-98-072)

Shcherbak hoped that Ukraine's reneging on its deal with Russia would not hinder "dynamically developing relations with Moscow." Both he and President Kuchma in a subsequent interview emphasized the importance of relations between Russia and Ukraine, especially in light of the status as each other's primary trading partners.

Comment

This announcement comes in light of grumbles within both Ukraine and Russia as to Kyiv's orientation to the East and West. President Kuchma is walking a high wire delicately balancing relations between the two sides, with seemingly great success. On 1 March, an economic cooperation agreement between Ukraine and the European Union went into effect. (RFE/RL, 2 Mar 1998) It followed the ten-year economic cooperation treaty that Kuchma signed with Russian President Boris Yel'tsin in late February, as well as Russia's cancellation of VAT on goods imported from Ukraine. However, Mr. Kuchma will have to watch his back, since both of these agreements have been greatly criticized within Ukraine as a sign of his overzealousness to make concessions. In the two weeks leading up to Ukraine's parliamentary elections on 29 March, he will have a tongue-lashing from Communist forces who see him as toadying to the West.

BELARUS

Belarusian ruble takes a nosedive

On 13 March, the Belarusian ruble, known in Belarus as the zaichik, began to fall rapidly in value to the dollar, until it had lost 25 percent of its previous value. In the ensuing panic, President Alyaksandr Lukashenka immediately ordered his chief of staff, the national bank and the KGB to investigate the causes of the collapse and come up with measures to stabilize the market. Disregarding its own economic policies as an indicator as to the cause of the crisis, the government has blamed speculators, in the Russian Federation, for the drop. (ITAR-TASS, 1430 GMT, 18 Mar 98; FBIS-SOV-98-077)

As a response to the devaluation, the government has yet to implement any sound policies to shore up the zaichik, instead continuing its search for villains. On 18 March, fifty-eight high-ranking officials were arrested on charges of embezzlement and abuse of power. (Belapan, 1459 GMT, 18 Mar 98; FBIS-SOV-98-077) At a 17 March news conference Lukashenka said he did not know how many more would be implicated, although he assured the press that "all those guilty will be imprisoned." Mr. Lukashenka felt confident that Belarus would

weather the crisis better than most countries, since even though the country did not "have sufficient amounts of oil and gas... it did not have big swindlers who would plunder the economy."

However, Lukashenka faces the gravest allegations. On the eve of the crisis, Alyaksandr Pupeyka, a Belarusian entrepreneur, sought asylum in Poland, fleeing charges of nonpayment on a \$500,000 credit from a Belarusian bank. He brought with him a tale of the president's financial dealings. Mr. Pupeyka alleges that Lukashenka earned substantial sums in arms sales and by smuggling liquor and cigarettes to Russia from Germany. According to him, Lukashenka's "personal account is comparable to the Belarusian national budget, which is about \$500 million." (Zycie Warszawy, 6 Mar 98; FBIS-EEU-98-071) President Lukashenka responded that he would give access to his accounts to anyone who wished to see them. "It is hard to believe that, (since I am) hated in the West... I would keep my money in foreign banks. If I brought my money to Uneximbank, they would hold me by the throat and dictate their conditions.... I do not earn enough to store hard currency in foreign banks." (Interfax, 1401 GMT, 17 Mar 98; FBIS-SOV-98-076)

Opposition protests new constitution

On 15 March the opposition took to the streets of Minsk to commemorate the 1994 Constitution, which was radically amended in 1996 following President Lukashenka's dissolution of the parliament. Over 3,000 persons marched through the city, carrying anti-presidential slogans, to the Opera House where a rally was held. One speaker, Gennadi Karpenko, former deputy speaker of the parliament, urged the leaders of the opposition to "give up their personal ambitions and unite in a struggle against the dictator and his regime." (Interfax, 1331 GMT, 15 Mar 98; FBIS-SOV-98-074) The opposition planned to follow up this rally on 22 March, which marks the 80th anniversary of the People's Republic of Belarus.

Newly Independent States: Caucasus

By Miriam Lansky

ARMENIA

National unity and Kocharian's candidacy

The Armenian foreign minister, Vardan Oskanian, told journalists that failing to register Robert Kocharian's candidacy for president of Armenia would be tantamount to recognizing that Nagorno-Karabakh is a part of Azerbaijan (Interfax, 1240 GMT, 27 Feb 98; FBIS-SOV-98-058). The Central Electoral Commission (CEC) has registered Kocharian's candidacy despite the fact that he does not hold Armenian citizenship, which is a prerequisite for holding presidential office according to the Armenian constitution. Kocharian, a native of Nagorno-Karabakh--and hence an Azerbaijani citizen--has served as Armenia's prime minister since the Spring of 1997. The CEC was subject to highly aggressive "lobbying" on the issue from government representatives. According to the foreign minister, the choice was plain: Kocharian is registered and the unity of Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh, which was declared in a December 1989 resolution, is affirmed, or Kocharian is prevented from running and the 1989 declaration is abrogated.

Predictably, an opposition candidate, Vazgen Manukyan of the National Democratic Union, argued the reverse position. It would be wrong in his view to abandon the existing policy of pursuing a negotiated solution to the conflict. Acting in accordance with the 1989 declaration would be tantamount to abandoning the OSCE process. (Noyan Tapan, 1525 GMT, 27 Feb 98; FBIS-SOV-98-060)

Since establishing independence, Armenia has neither affirmed unity with Karabakh nor recognized the exclave's independence. However, in practice, a very high degree of unity between Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh has already been achieved: They use the same currency, there are no checkpoints or other

impediments to travel between them; and members of the Nagorno-Karabakh government participate in the sessions of the Armenian Security Council.

Security minister concedes: There are no threats to Karabakh security

National Security Minister Serzh Sarkisian told journalists that Nagorno-Karabakh is experiencing "convenient" conditions at the present time. Alluding to Armenia's military alliance with Russia, he stated that war will not be resumed in the region for at least two years because a "powerful army guarantees this." Furthermore, "[t]he level of Armenian defense is so high that nothing can threaten its security." (Interfax, 1656 GMT, 3 Mar 98; FBIS-SOV-98-062) In view of the security minister's assessment, Armenia's and Karabakh's demands for international security guarantees made in the context of the OSCE process seem superfluous.

Newly Independent States: Central Asia

By Monika Shepherd

TAJIKISTAN

UTO deputy leader finally returns to Dushanbe after five-year exile

On 27 February 1998 Haji Ali Akbar Turajonzoda, the deputy leader of the United Tajik Opposition (UTO), returned to Tajikistan after having spent five years in exile in Iran (Interfax, 1545 GMT, 27 Feb 98; FBIS-SOV-98-058). Turajonzoda had originally been scheduled to return home on 24 February with UTO Chairman Said Abdullo Nuri, who had traveled to Iran on a private visit, but his return was delayed twice by the Tajik government, at first for unspecified "technical reasons" (ITAR-TASS, 2152 GMT, 23 Feb 98; FBIS-SOV-98-054); then, the following day, Dushanbe authorities announced that, due to damage caused by the recent earthquake, the airport runway would not be able to sustain landings by planes over a certain size. Turajonzoda seemed to doubt this explanation, stating that Russian transport planes (which were larger than the Boeing 727 that had been designated for Turajonzoda's trip home) had been

regularly using the Dushanbe airport to fly humanitarian aid to Afghanistan (Voice of the Islamic Republic of Iran, 0300 GMT, 26 Feb 98; FBIS-SOV-98-057).

However, on 27 February Turajonzoda and UTO Chairman Nuri were finally able to return to Dushanbe. Shortly after his arrival, Turajonzoda gave a brief news conference at which he stated his readiness to assume his post as first deputy prime minister and gave an outline of his vision for Tajikistan's future. He openly stated his desire to see the revival of Islam in Tajikistan, but once again denied any intentions on the part of the UTO to impose an Islamic state. He added that he supported the development of a market economy and various forms of private ownership. He also favored maintaining close but equal relationships between Tajikistan, Russia, Iran, and the other Central Asian republics (ITAR-TASS, 1709 GMT, 27 Feb 98; FBIS-SOV-98-058).

Turajonzoda also commented on the implementation of the inter-Tajik peace process thus far, criticizing its slow progress, and stating that once the terms of political protocol of the general peace agreement began to be met and more UTO members were integrated into the government, the implementation of the military protocol would probably progress more quickly. He strongly favored using negotiations to settle recent conflicts between armed groups affiliated with the UTO and Tajik government troops, stating that force should be used only as a last resort. Finally, Turajonzoda responded to President Rahmonov's demand that the UTO clearly state its position on what type of government it envisioned for Tajikistan, declaring that the UTO proposed replacing the phrase "secular state" in Article 100 of Tajikistan's Constitution with the phrase "people's state." However, he also stated that the UTO would not impose such a change unilaterally, but that this proposal should be voted on in a republic-wide referendum (Interfax, 1545 GMT, 27 Feb 98; FBIS-SOV-98-058).

Approximately two weeks after Turajonzoda's return to Tajikistan, President Rahmonov announced the UTO leader's official appointment to the position of first deputy prime minister in a decree which he read on Dushanbe's main radio

network (Radio Tajikistan First Channel Network, 1000 GMT, 10 Mar 98; FBIS-SOV-98-069).

Comment

Although Haji Ali Akbar Turajonzoda's return to Tajikistan is certainly a positive development which indicates that the Tajik government has not entirely abandoned its dedication to carrying out the terms of the peace process, the delays in his arrival and further delay in the official announcement of his appointment to the position of first deputy prime minister do not bode particularly well for the implementation of the peace agreement's political protocol. President Rahmonov has exhibited even greater reluctance over the issue of Turajonzoda's return and integration into the transition government than he did over Said Abdullo Nuri's return to Tajikistan last August, to assume the chairmanship of the National Reconciliation Commission (NRC), perhaps because, as Tajikistan's former Qozikalon (Muslim spiritual leader of Tajikistan), Turajonzoda still commands a considerable popular following. By 25 February a crowd had gathered to greet him at the airport, and the Tajik government responded by deploying OMON forces to keep a tight rein on the situation.

There has also been some conjecture that the obstacles which the Tajik government placed in the way of Turajonzoda's return have been designed to splinter the UTO's support base, and to put Nuri at odds with his own troops. At least one local UTO military commander had openly declared that his men would not disarm and register with the Tajik government until Turajonzoda had returned to Tajikistan. President Rahmonov has been pressuring Nuri to issue an ultimatum to these troops, complaining that they are violating the terms of the peace agreement. Nuri has thus far refused to take such action, opting instead for negotiations to resolve conflicts among his own supporters. Both Nuri and Turajonzoda have also quite clearly stated that they will not comply with all the terms of the peace agreement's military protocol until the Tajik government meets more of the terms of the political protocol. One of their main concerns has

been the issue of the legalization of all political opposition parties, which has yet to be carried out. The opposition parties must be granted full legal status well before the elections take place, in order to have sufficient time to organize and campaign. President Rahmonov seems to be in no hurry to implement this part of the political protocol, however, and until he does, the UTO will most likely keep at least a few of its units under arms in order to maintain some leverage.

Tajik, Uzbek, Kyrgyz foreign ministers view threat of Islamic extremism

On 3 March, Uzbek Foreign Minister Abdulaziz Kamilov and Kyrgyz Foreign Minister Muratbek Imanaliev met with Tajikistan's Foreign Minister Talbak Nazarov in Dushanbe to discuss such issues as the preservation of Tajikistan as a secular state and how to combat the problems of drug smuggling and Islamic extremism in Central Asia. At a press conference following the meeting, the Uzbek foreign minister expressed his concern at Islamic extremist activities throughout the region, and particularly in Uzbekistan, and stated that he and his two colleagues had agreed to work together to uncover and eradicate the sources of this extremism. He also implied that he and his colleagues already had knowledge about sources of foreign support for these extremist activities, stating that "certain countries support Islamic extremism in Central Asia," but not actually naming the countries (Interfax, 1603 GMT, 3 Mar 98; FBIS-SOV-98-062). The Uzbek foreign minister also met with Tajik President Emomali Rahmonov to discuss matters of regional security. Commenting on his meeting with the president, he stressed that "peace and stability in Tajikistan meet the interests of Uzbekistan and the entire Central Asian region" and that both he and President Rahmonov agreed that the democratic, legal, and secular nature of the Tajik state needed to be reinforced (ITAR-TASS, 0631 GMT, 4 March 98; FBIS-SOV-98-063).

Comment

Over the course of the past few months, the Uzbek government has been expressing a great deal of concern about the existence of foreign-trained and -

funded Islamic extremist/terrorist groups not only in Central Asia, but also in Dagestan. Uzbek authorities have accused Afghanistan and Pakistan of funding Wahhabi terrorist activities and have expressed the suspicion that there are terrorist training camps on Tajik and Kyrgyz territory. Kyrgyz authorities, while not responding to this accusation, have begun to support the Uzbek government's claims that there is a serious threat from Islamic terrorist groups (particularly from the Wahhabis) located in Tajikistan. Actual evidence of Islamic terrorism in Tajikistan or anywhere else in Central Asia has yet to be produced. The Uzbek and Kyrgyz governments have arrested persons suspected of being Wahhabi sympathizers, but aside from the attack on a Namangan (Uzbekistan) police station in early January, which Uzbek authorities have blamed on the Wahhabis, there have been no other violent incidents in either Uzbekistan or Kyrgyzstan. There are weekly skirmishes between Russian border troops and small groups attempting to cross from Afghanistan into Tajikistan, but these usually seem to be connected with the arms and narcotics trade, and not with any sort of international terrorism.

It is far more likely that the Uzbek and Kyrgyz foreign ministers' visit to Dushanbe corresponds to Haji Ali Akbar Turajonzoda's return to Tajikistan, and the Uzbek government's concern that his return might lead to the integration of more UTO representatives into the Tajik government (in line with the terms of the peace agreement's political protocol) and the gradual creation of a more democratic political atmosphere in Tajikistan. The Uzbek foreign minister's ostensible concern that the secularism and democracy of the current Tajik state are threatened seems entirely unfounded--both UTO chairman Said Abdullo Nuri and his deputy leader, Haji Ali Akbar Turajonzoda, have repeatedly stated that they have no intention of imposing Islamic law in Tajikistan, and that they support the creation of a popular democracy in Tajikistan. At present, the only force which seems to threaten the institution of such a popular democracy in Tajikistan is the Tajik government itself. President Rahmonov continues to balk at fulfilling the terms of the political protocol, including the establishment of a transitional

coalition government (with 30 percent of administrative and cabinet positions being ceded to UTO representatives), and the legalization of all opposition parties. Until these conditions are met and popular elections are held for the Tajik parliament and the presidency, there will be no popular democratic government in Tajikistan.

Russian border troops in Tajikistan reinforced

On 9 March, Interfax broadcast a report stating that, due to a substantial increase in drug smuggling activities across the Tajik-Afghan border (no figures were provided), Russian border troop units had been increased by 400 men in Panj (Pyanzh, in the Russian transliteration; it is located in southwestern Tajikistan), according to statements made by Commander Pavel' Tarasenko, who is in charge of the Russian border troops stationed in Tajikistan. At a news conference, Commander Tarasenko stated that the Khorog, Kalaikhumb (both located in southeastern Tajikistan, in the Gorno-Badakhshon Oblast'), and Moskovskii border units would also be reinforced within coming days. Troop reinforcements and additional weapons were to come first from local reserves, and if it became evident that these were insufficient, then further troops would be transferred to Tajikistan from other areas. Russian Border Service Director Nikolai Bordiuzha was expected to arrive in Tajikistan on a working visit at the end of March in order to examine the situation along the Tajik-Afghan border and to recommend measures on how to increase the effectiveness of the border troops' efforts to curb the narcotics trade (Interfax, 1603 GMT, 9 Mar 98; FBIS-TDD-98-068).

Supreme Court sentences six to death in assassination attempt

On 12 March, ITAR-TASS reported that the Tajik Supreme Court had handed down sentences for the men accused of conspiring to assassinate President Rahmonov during his visit to Khujand at the end of last April. Six of the men, including Abduhafiz Abdullojonov, the 47-year-old brother of former prime minister Abdumalik Abdullojonov (who now heads the National Revival Bloc, a

secular opposition party based in Khujand), have been sentenced to death, while the remaining fifteen have been sentenced to prison terms of varying length (anywhere from one to fourteen years). These sentences cannot be appealed; the men's only recourse is to appeal for a presidential pardon (ITAR-TASS World Service, 1155 GMT, 12 Mar 98; FBIS-SOV-98-071). Thus far, there has been no public reaction from any of the men's relatives in Khujand.

Newly Independent States: Baltic States

By Kate Martin

Militaries criticized from within and without

The state of Baltic militaries is far from optimal, according to various reports. Perhaps the least flattering was the report of Andris Rubins, chairman of the Saeima Foreign Affairs Commission. In a meeting with an unnamed aide to the US Secretary of Defense, Rubins said, he was told the Latvian Army command did not have ideas, brains, or a plan of action. (Radio Riga Network, 1300 GMT, 11 Mar 98; FBIS-SOV-98-070)

In Estonia criticism is coming from within the ranks of the military, as jurisdictional disputes over a joint fleet and over training continue. Four ministries with vessels which, under a government plan, would be joined to create one multipurpose state fleet, have refused to yield their ships or reach agreement on who should run the fleet. The main disagreement over command is between the defense ministry and the interior ministry. However, no vessel-owning ministry--not the defense ministry with the naval fleet, the interior ministry with its coast guard fleet, the transport and communications ministry and its fleet for maritime safety tasks, nor the environment ministry with a fleet for environmental monitoring and fighting pollution--has agreed to give up any vessels. The issue of creating a joint state fleet has been on the government's agenda for two years. (BNS Daily Report, 1700 GMT, 4 Mar 98).

Even if that debate were to be resolved, the question of training remains, and again jurisdiction lies at the crux. According to army chief Major General Johannes Kert, officer training is insufficient, and currently the forces face about a 50 percent vacancy rate for officer positions. (BNS Daily Report, 1600 GMT, 28 Feb 98) Training, currently at the National Defense Academy (under the jurisdiction of the interior ministry), would improve if placed under the defense ministry and made more specialized, he said. Kert and the board of the Estonian Reserve Officers Body agree that the present system--with joint training of civilian and military personnel--is at issue. In an appeal to the president, prime minister, defense minister and defense forces commander, the reserve officers requested a separation of training to allow for the introduction of military discipline. "In a civil society (...) it is impermissible to impose military order on a civilian institution," they said. However, the principal of the National Defense Academy, Eduard Raska, recently told the Eesti Paevaleht newspaper that only the academy is able to produce well-educated officers. (BNS Daily Report, 1700 GMT, 7 Mar 98, and BNS, 1400 GMT, 9 Mar 98). Nonetheless, the government has decided to set up a single military education establishment that should end this particular conflict between the defense ministry and the General Staff. (BNS, 1900 GMT, 10 Mar 98).

Comment

Military preparedness must become and remain a focal point if the Baltic states wish to keep alive their hopes of ever joining NATO. The countries have been hearing comments subtle and blatant for a number of years now about NATO concerns regarding the state of their militaries. Several countries, from Scandinavia to the US, have provided assistance in training, organization and logistics; however, that assistance will only go so far. The Baltic countries need to examine critically the status of their militaries in comparison with NATO standards, and to work actively toward reaching those standards. Latvia, in particular, with an abysmal percentage of its budget going into defense and the

military's sad state of health, must begin to heed these increasingly direct comments to improve the situation. Estonia, at least, is focusing on improving its armed forces, and may have some success once jurisdictional disputes are resolved.

LATVIA

Latvia, Russia cry 'wolf' over rally

The furor resulting from a forcibly ended rally in front of Riga City Hall has calmed somewhat, after signals came from the West that no one was accepting polemics from either the Russians or the Latvians about the situation. Both sides agree that, on 3 March, nearly 2,000 protesters, primarily Russian-speaking pensioners, gathered in the city center to protest increased costs of living and decreased standards of living. There is further agreement that one of the city's main highways was blocked for approximately one hour, forcing emergency vehicles to detour around the city, thereby delaying significantly response times, and that the crowd did not respond to requests--first in Latvian and then in Russian--to clear the road. Nor does any side dispute that some level of force was used by the police to disperse the crowd. (BALTIC NEWS SERVICE Daily Report, 1700 GMT, 3 Mar 98, and NTV, 1900 GMT, 3 Mar 98; FBIS-SOV-98-063) No one was injured. At issue for over a week, with rhetoric spouted by various government officials, was the motivation behind everyone's actions. Russian Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin expressed indignation over the demonstration's dispersal, which he termed a "flagrant violation of basic human rights." (ITAR-TASS, 1310 GMT, 4 Mar 98; FBIS-SOV-98-063) In response, the Latvian foreign ministry noted its surprise that Russian officials would view the situation through a political lens, since the focus should have been on the lack of proper permits and the public hazard created by the unauthorized gathering. (Radio Riga Network, 1800 GMT, 4 Mar 98; FBIS-SOV-98-063) Russian presidential spokesman Sergei Yastrzhembsky warned of possible economic sanctions against Latvia, which he considered would be a just response since--due to Latvia's reliance on Russian energy supplies--the Baltic state should be

"more loyal with regard to Russia's interests." (BNS Daily Report, 1700 GMT, 7 Mar 98).

Everyone seemed to calm down, however, after a report indicating that the US Department of State had no intention of allowing the latest ash in the smoldering pile of Russian-Latvian relations to be fanned into a full-fledged flame. According to the Baltic News Service, an unnamed State Department official declared that the US accepted that the pensioners had a right to demonstrate, yet there was no evidence to back up Russian charges of rights violations or Latvian charges of Russian provocation. (BNS Daily Report, 1100 GMT, 10 Mar 98). The interests of Russia and Latvia would be served best by improving relations between the two countries, the official said.

Comment

While it is way past time for officials in both Latvia and Russia to focus on improving relations, thus far few have seemed willing to ignore the temptation to slip into what are now comfortable, well-worn roles. Better relations will not result from continual scab picking of previous real and imagined injuries, and constant repetition of charges of "provocation" and "rights violation" will serve only to disengage public interest. Moreover, both countries are frittering away the goodwill of the international community in vain attempts to foster sympathy for their "trials," especially in light of both sides' apparent unwillingness to cut the other country any slack. With both Russia and Latvia putting the worst spin possible on every interaction, only the nationalist causes are winning, with continued rhetoric spewing forth. What is needed is at least the appearance of a willingness to get along, and an end to the polemics.

No double standard of living noted

The standard of living in Latvia reportedly is decreasing for citizen and non-citizen alike. A recent poll indicated that most residents would describe the country's human rights situation as poor, especially in terms of the elderly,

citizenship, education, children, and justice. (BNS Daily Report, 1700 GMT, 26 Feb 98) Also at issue was the government's rate of response to these issues. That perception was validated concerning the situation of children in Latvia. Late last year a report published by the Nordic Council had painted a dismal view of the life of many children in the country, stating that there were at least 3,000 children living on the streets of Riga alone, often facing drug abuse and prostitution. (Berlingske Tidende, 12 Nov 97; FBIS-WEU-97-232) Government officials denied that the situation was as extreme as reported, intimating that the motivation behind the reports of nongovernmental agencies may have been a search for increased funding. (BNS Daily Report, 1400 GMT, 2 Dec 97) However, the government apparently has not been interested in actively investigating the situation. The development of a report to the United Nations containing an analysis of how Latvia has implemented UN conventions of children's rights was promised in April 1997, but the report has not yet arrived. (BNS Daily Report, 1400 GMT, 27 Feb 98) Moreover, a recent report by the Latvian branch of the Save the Children organization warns of increased child involvement in crime, alcoholism and prostitution. In addition, tens of thousands of persons, including families with children, are facing eviction over unpaid utility bills, the report stated. (BNS Daily Report, 1100 GMT, 4 Mar 98)

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