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Russian Federation: Executive Branch

By Susan Cavan

Stability, predictability and transitions

Compared to the Yel'tsin era, "political stability" does indeed seem to be the hallmark of the Putin era...at least for the majority of the business, political and bureaucratic elites. The problem of stability is that it relies on inertia: But a situation is only stable until it isn't any more, and change can result from any one of a vast array of possibilities. Putin's stability rests upon one of the institutions that was not utterly destroyed in the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Security Services. However, the FSB alone cannot provide support for a modern state. Russia is driven by economic necessities and a deep (if not broad) business class that motivates a range of policy initiatives, both domestic and foreign. It is the clash between the conservatism of Putin's KGB base and the dynamism of the government's economic flow that represents the primary schism in the Putin administration (traditionally identified as siloviki versus liberal).

Two crucial differences distinguish Putin's stability from Yel'tsin's chaos: the back end of the learning curve and the price of oil. Yel'tsin, his advisers and associates were flying by the seats of their "short pants." From the machinations to dissolve the Soviet Union to the establishment of federal relations to the relationships with western institutions, there was no rulebook for Yel'tsin's crew. They learned on the go, and, unfortunately, some of their decisions, policy choices and fiascoes demonstrated their inexperience, at times even their malfeasance.

The players of the Putin era have the advantage of watching the films on the Yel'tsin team: the strengths and weaknesses studied, they make fewer errors

and learn more effective methods of working with international institutions (financial or political). Clearly, they still make their fair share of miscalculations, but the result of their experience is a sense that Russia presents itself better (more forcefully, more independently) in its dealings with the international community.

The domestic response is more difficult to gauge. The sense of stability contrasted with the chaos of Yel'tsin's rule is evident, but, and here analysis is hampered by the lack of free media, the upheavals of Nord-Ost, Beslan, Nalchik, of military disasters, such as the Kursk, and of the state's initiative to monetize benefits surely have a significant impact on the internal sense of security.

While the high price of oil has provided a buffer for the executive to act both domestically and internationally, an over reliance on petrodollars and the Russian economy's developing "Dutch disease" creates an impression of a window closing on the opportunities of the Putin era.

All of which leads directly to the initial stages of the succession struggle. The siloviki vs. liberal clash in Putin's administration initially was marked not by a clear ideological difference, but by an issue of loyalty: the liberal faction was seeped in the transition economics of the Yel'tsin era—some were considered culpable in the "sell-offs" and scandal auctions of the nineties, and all of them have a definite stake in the "path to market;" preventing a reversal of the economic decisions of the Yel'tsin years, indeed making a reversal impossible, is both an idealistic and deeply pragmatic goal of the liberals. The siloviki were distinctly separate and apart from the processes that extracted Russia from the command economy (and politics) and pushed it by fits and starts into a new international market, community and status. Their loyalty lies not in the process of radical transformation, but the maintenance of traditions and holding close to that which they consider good about the Soviet state. In some ways, the siloviki have a natural, albeit tenuous, alliance with conservative Russian nationalism.

Halfway through Putin's second term however, it has become clear that the chosen siloviki have developed a powerful stake in the status quo. The quiet placement of Putin insiders on the boards of Russia's largest and most influential companies (an egregious conflict of interest, for which Yel'tsin-era apparatchiki were lambasted), has resulted in a vast intertwining of Kremlin offices with the boardrooms of companies throughout the energy sector, in metals, media holdings, and etc. The exploits of "Kremlin, Inc." have been widely reported, and current Kremlin denizens do not seem to fear the revelations as previous officials who served during the "kompromat" wars did. (1)

Perhaps what Putin's apparatchiki do fear is an overt leadership struggle. Just as the "Yel'tsin Family" needed a mechanism to ensure that the President's exit from power would carry guarantees for their safety, retention of their monetary benefits, and the solidification (rather than reversal) of economic reforms (to prevent the spectacle of economic show trials), the current insiders need their own guarantees.

Putin's path to the Russian presidency was crafted carefully, and resulted in the retention of a large number of Yel'tsin-era government workers (and a continuity of Yel'tsin era state policies); the Kremlin however, became a haven for the siloviki faction. Putin may have set a precedent for the next Kremlin occupant – leave the overall economic direction of the state at the White House, but put your own imprint on its implementation with your own staff ensconced in the Kremlin.

While the Putin era may carry the flag of political stability, it is predictability more than stability that is needed from it. While successive regimes strive to protect their legacies, lives and loot in economic transition, it is the solidification and normalization of the political process and procedures that would produce a more tangible benefit. Ensconcing standards of conduct by political officeholders and

a framework of political transition with a uniformly applied legal code would work wonders for both the stability and predictability of the Russian political process.

Instead, the central issue of the post-Putin succession, which already is so heated, once again involves the redivision of state assets. Will Putin's siloviki turned apparatchiki transform once again into private sector businessmen and women, or will the Chairman of the Board of Gazprom be an honorific attached to the post of the Kremlin Chief of Staff, ex officio?

On the President's schedule

On 7 November, President Putin replaced his plenipotentiary representative to the Constitutional Court, Mikhail Mityukov, with Mikhail Krotov. (2) Krotov is remarkably well-connected: he was at law school in St. Petersburg with Dmitri Kozak, previously worked with Kremlin Chief of Staff Dmitri Medvedev, was Senior Deputy General Director of Gazprom-Media and specializes in civil and commercial law. (3)

Obviously, there can be many reasons to change a Presidential representative to the Constitutional Court, but it is interesting that Putin met with the Chairman of the Constitutional Court, Valeri Zorkin, along with the heads of the Supreme Court and High Arbitration Tribunal within two days of this announcement. (4) Also of note, this change in the president's Constitutional Court representative comes just one week before the court is to consider a complaint regarding the abolition of gubernatorial elections. (5)

Putin on MVD staffing

President Putin issued a decree setting a maximum level for staffing at Russian internal affairs agencies. According to the decree, announced 3 November, the President sets, as of the first of the year, "the maximum staff numbers in the Internal Affairs agencies of the Russian Federation (without the staff guarding and servicing buildings), which are funded from the federal budget, at the level of

821,268 people, which includes 661,275 employees of the Internal Affairs agencies...and 159, 993 federal state civil servants and workers." (6)

Left to the imagination is whether this figure represents an increase, decrease or no change to staffing levels.

Source Notes:

(1) "Kremlin, Inc has performed Well," Nezavisimaya gazeta, 26 Jul 05; What the Papers Say (WPS) via ISI Emerging Markets; "Entourage of President Controls Companies Worth \$222 Billion," newsru.com, 27 Jul 05; WPS via ISI Emerging Markets; "Winners and Losers in Kremlin's Grab for Oil," Financial Times, 6 Nov 05 via ISI Emerging Markets are just a few examples of the many stories on the Kremlin's business connections.

(2) <http://president.kremlin.ru/eng/text/news/2005/11/96774.shtml>.

(3) Kommersant, 8 Nov 05; WPS via Lexis-Nexis.

(4) Itar-Tass, 9 Nov 05 via Johnson's Russia List (JRL) #9290.

(5) Kommersant, Ibid.

(6) Interfax, 3 Nov 05; FBIS Translated Text via World News Connection (WNC).

Russian Federation: Security Services

By John Kafer

Where's the coordination among Siloviki?

With Federal Security Service (FSB) men in charge of Russia's main power ministries, one would expect a higher degree of cooperation and coordination among their respective organizations, a problem that historically has plagued their effectiveness. Yet, with Nikolai Patrushev leading the FSB, Sergei Ivanov the Defense Ministry (MOD), and Rashid Nurgaliyev the Interior Ministry (MVD), coordination and effectiveness of the security forces under their control seems to

have worsened, not improved. The poorly coordinated response to the Nalchik militant attack on 13 October is a prime example of their lack of progress in the anti-terrorism arena, despite stated efforts to improve.

Attempts and failures

The well-publicized Vostok 2005 command staff exercise this past July by the Far East Military District is likely the best example of integration, or at least unity of effort, between the security agencies. The exercise's primary objectives included coordinating actions between the MOD and other militarized agencies using 5,000 servicemen and 14,000 representatives from the MVD and FSB. (1) This exercise, however, was in the far east, not in the location of most of Russia's anti-terrorist activities, the Caucasus; and it was a pre-planned, preemptive exercise against terrorist threats versus an actual, no-notice attack that would rely on time-tested coordination of command and communication elements.

In late June, Russia's President, Vladimir Putin, criticized the security ministries for failure to establish a centralized, joint logistics system that military experts estimated would save 6 billion rubles. A joint system would have been a remarkable first step to increase coordination among the security ministries. The MOD led the effort to establish the joint logistics system and realized some initial successes, but the plan fell apart due to bureaucratic infighting regarding loss of control and leadership of each ministry's logistical efforts. (2)

Recurring terrorist attacks throughout the Caucasus routinely demonstrate the lack of coordination among the FSB, MOD, and MVD forces deployed throughout the region. The response to the 2004 Beslan school hostage crisis was marred with coordination failures among security agencies. Less than one month before the attack at Nalchik, the North Caucasus Military District held a large scale exercise designed to create a joint group of forces to increase cooperation between military, internal troops, and border guards. (3) Clearly, the Siloviki did

not learn from Beslan and the touted exercise was not effective in establishing lasting communications networks and cooperation between the security ministries.

Room for Improvement at Nalchik

Following the death of separatist leader Aslan Maskhadov in March of 2005, the new separatist leader, Abdul-Khalim Sadulayev, announced he would establish a new “Caucasus Front” to spread the war well beyond the borders of Chechnya. Russian security officials responded to his threat with a massive increase in troops (MVD regiments and divisions would replace brigades and battalions) throughout the southern republics, specifically in Nalchik and three other southern Caucasus cities. (4) Despite the increased troop strength and specific intelligence five days prior that militants would attack Nalchik, the security forces were unable to prevent the attack on 13 October. (5)

The coordination and cooperation of security elements during the conduct of the attack were similarly disjointed. The attack actually began with a raid in the outskirts of the city at 3:00 am, but the police involved did not pass along the information to warn other agencies, providing militants six hours additional time to plan the subsequent attack just after 9:00 am. (6) During the attack at the airport, MOD officials closed the airport without telling their MVD or FSB counterparts, breeding further resentment among the ministries. (7) The lack of coordination during the first several hours of the attack resulted in chaos among responding forces. Army units from the outskirts of the city were too slow to respond due to the fear of ambush because security forces were unable to secure the roadways. (8) Russian President, Vladimir Putin, hailed the effectiveness of the security forces’ response at Nalchik, but given the security ministries’ preparation and advance notice, the fact the attack occurred represents failure given the slow, disjointed, and uncoordinated response.

Analysis

The infighting among Russia's power ministries has a long historical record. After the breakup of the Soviet Union, Russia divided the KGB into the FSB, the SVR and the border troops, but left the MOD and MVD virtually untouched, failing to accomplish serious reform based on new security threats. Instead, each ministry independently fights its own war in Chechnya, and now throughout all the southern Caucasus republics, as if they were engaged in coalition warfare without a supreme commander. President Putin, the only logical "supreme commander" who could intervene, instead sits silently on the sidelines during times of crisis while the security ministries, whose competence is already challenged by gross corruption, struggle to accomplish basic coordination on security matters.

The confusion over which ministry is in charge of anti-terrorism efforts is a prime example of Putin's murky guidance. Earlier this spring, Putin agreed with his envoy to the Southern Federal District, Dmitri Kozak, to place the FSB in charge of anti-terrorism operations in his region in order to improve "integration and coordination between different agencies." (9) Then, in July 2005, Putin emphasized the need for better anti-terrorism measures stating that the "Interior Ministry remains the leading agency in dealing with terrorism" throughout the Caucasus. (10) Without some level of coordination between the ministries, the FSB, MOD, and MVD can each be in charge. This is the de-facto situation that seems to have developed in the southern Caucasus republics.

One could also ask "is anyone in charge?" Ivanov, a former member of the FSB who military officers hold in little esteem, can only yield so much influence within the military. Likewise, there are reports that Nurgaliyev's six deputy chiefs within the MVD, all career MVD employees, severely weaken Nurgaliyev's position. (11) Animosity regarding each minister's relative weakness have devolved to the point where opposing siloviki representatives spend more time with positional games than real work. (12) The lack of cooperation at the highest levels of the security agencies may simply be a result of their lack of power to do otherwise.

In any case, it has an impact on not only the effectiveness of their Caucasus operations, but certainly has a negative impact on the morale and prestige of forces throughout their ranks as well. The current state of affairs may explain why the bust of “Iron Felix,” Felix Dzerzhinsky, the founder of the secret police at a time when the word police meant terror, was recently re-erected outside the Interior Ministry headquarters. (13) Perhaps not all that much has changed within Russia’s security apparatus after all.

Source Notes:

(1) Nezavisimoye voyennoye obozreniye, 1 Aug 05, FBIS Translated Text via World News Connection (WNC).

(2) “The Security Ministries Attack the Defense Ministry” by Alexander Babakin, What the Papers Say (WPS) Defense and Security, 14 Sep 05 via ISI Emerging Markets.

(3) “Antiterrorism Exercise Planned in Five Russian Republics of North Caucasus” Agentstvo voyennykh novostey, 12 Sep 05, FBIS Translated Text via WNC.

(4) “Moscow and Insurgents Take Steps to Militarize the North Caucasus” by Andrei Smirnov, Eurasia Daily Monitor, Vol 2, Issue 57, 11 Aug 05.

(5) “Basayev Claims Responsibility for Nalchik Raid” Russia Reform Monitor No. 1316, 21 Oct 05.

(6) “Background, Possible Motives for Nalchik Terrorist Attack Explored” by Igor Naydenov, Exvestia, 21 Oct 05 via JRL.

(7) “Nalchik Battle Shows Moscow’s Weakness, Militants’ Strength” by Paul Goble, Window on Eurasia, 17 Oct 05 via JRL.

(8) “Nalchik Under Attack: Moscow Unable to Respond” by Andrei Smirnov, Eurasia Daily Monitor, Vol 2, Issue 191, 14 Oct 05.

(9) “The FSB Will Be Placed In Charge” by Natalia Gorodetskaya, Kommersant, 24 Feb 05; What the Papers Say via ISI Emerging Markets.

(10) “Firing the First Shot” by Alexei Nikolsky, Vedomosti, 28 Jul 05, What the Papers Say via ISI Emerging Markets.

(11) “Siloviki Continue Interior Struggle” CCPR-Russia Federal Politics, 4 Oct 05 via ISI Emerging Markets.

(12) Ibid.

(13) “Soviet Spy Chief is Back—On a Pedestal” by Kim Murphy, Los Angeles Times, 10 Nov 05 via JRL.

Russian Federation: Foreign Relations

By Marisa Payne

Lavrov, Gref prepare for APEC summit

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov and Economic Development Minister German Gref arrived in Busan, South Korea on November 15 in preparation for the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) summit that will be held November 18-19 and attended by 21 world leaders including Russian President Vladimir Putin and US President George Bush. (1)

At the top of the Kremlin’s agenda at APEC, and in general, is to “collectively confirm the support to Russia’s joining the World Trade Organization (WTO),” said Lavrov the night before the opening of the ministerial meeting. (2) After a meeting with Japanese Minister of Economy, Trade and Industry Toshihiro Nikai, Gref said, “Russia will join WTO, maybe, in the middle of the next year 2006, but the end of the next year is a more realistic scenario.” (3) That statement differs from Russia’s original plan of hoping to end bilateral accession talks this December and join the WTO by January 2006.

Russia also proposed an APEC sea security center, which is meant to enhance navigation security, according to Lavrov. The intentions and extent of Russia’s sea security center have not been elaborated. After the meeting with APEC

foreign ministers however, Lavrov did say, “Particular attention was paid to important issues in the fight against international terrorism, including measures to bolster regional trade and transport security.” (4)

Gref reported on November 15 that Russia and South Korea drafted a joint-action plan to be signed by each country’s president during the APEC summit. The plan includes provisions to improve mutual investment, to allow South Korean companies to enter the Russian market and to liberalize and expand bilateral trade. (5)

“We now perceive South Korea as our strategic partner in the region and political relations between our countries are very favorable,” Gref said. (6)

Lavrov met with his Chinese counterpart Li Zhaoxing to discuss the situation on the Korean peninsula, relations with Syria, the Middle East settlement and Iranian nuclear ambitions, according to a highly connected source in the Russian delegation. (7) A meeting summary or transcript is not available, but it is known that Russia and China want Bush to offer security assurances to North Korea regardless of North Korea’s nuclear weapons aspirations. (8)

A “warning” for CIS democracies

A popular Russian newspaper recently called comments made by Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov “a warning” to CIS countries that have deviated from Russia politically. (9)

In an October 19 interview, sponsored by Rossiya TV Channel and Radio Russia, host Sergei Brilyov asked about reports that Lavrov, in closed hearings at the Federation Council, said that economic sanctions would be imposed “against countries that are not too loyal to Russia or are not disposed to strengthen relations with Russia.” (10)

Lavrov first responded, “I would not like to introduce sanctions against our partners in the CIS.” But after the host probed further on the issue, Lavrov responded, “This will not happen immediately.” When specifically asked about Georgia, in light of the recent political rifts over Georgian demands that Russia remove their peacekeeping troops from the regions of South Ossetia and Abkhazia, Lavrov reiterated that he would not favor introducing sanctions anytime soon, but spoke sharply of Georgia’s recent actions. (11)

“Naturally, the development of our relations with Georgia on the basis of natural economic interests, closer interaction in the economic and other spheres have certainly been impeded by the political atmosphere as some representatives of the Georgian leadership have constantly tried to stir up tension in our relations...” Lavrov said. (12)

On November 10, Rossiiskie Vesti called Lavrov’s comments “a warning” not only for Georgia, but for Moldova and Ukraine, as well. Vehemently supportive of Lavrov, the article’s only criticism of the comments questioned the timing of the remarks: “If Moscow had issued its ‘fundamental’ statements earlier, in many cases it would have been possible to avert developments which are unfavorable for Russia.” (13)

Thus far, Georgia, Ukraine and Moldova have not chosen to respond to Lavrov’s comments.

Ongoing issues: Abkhazia and Transdniester

The status of Russian “peacekeepers” in Abkhazia is proving to be a very divisive issue. On November 15, roughly 50 students and young political activists picketed outside the Russian embassy in Tbilisi. The protesters demanded the immediate withdrawal of a Russian peacekeeping force in the Ghali region of Abkhazia because they said the peacekeepers did not fulfill their duty of keeping the local population safe. Furthermore, the picketers stated that the

peacekeeping troops actually have worsened the situation by encouraging Abkhazian separatists. (14) [For more on this issue, see Armed Forces: External and the Caucasus region report below.]

In an interview with a Romanian newspaper on November 11, Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov promised a “transparent” process regarding the status of the region of Transdniester in Moldova. Yet, he admitted that the process will only be transparent “because discussions on issues related to a solution to the Transdniestrian conflict proceed in parallel with the creation of prerequisites for stability and security in this area of mutual interests.” (15)

Lavrov said the job of the mediators, which include Russia, Ukraine and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), will be to create an environment of trust in which Moldovan and Transdniestrian officials can settle their disagreements. (16)

Source Notes:

(1) ITAR-TASS, 15 Nov 05 via Lexis-Nexis

(2) Ibid.

(3) BBC Monitoring, 17 Nov 05 via ISI Emerging Markets

(4) ITAR-TASS, 15 Nov 05 via Lexis-Nexis

(5) RIA-Novosti. 15 Nov 05 via Lexis-Nexis.

(6) Ibid.

(7) Itar-Tass, 15 Nov 05 via Lexis-Nexis.

(8) CNN, 15 Nov 05 via Lexis-Nexis.

(9) Rossiiskie Vesti, 10 Oct. 05; What the Papers Say (WPS), 14 Nov 05 via ISI Emerging Markets.

(10) Radio Interview with Sergei Lavrov, Radio Rossiya, 19 Oct. 05 via Lexis-Nexis.

(11) Ibid.

(12) Ibid.

(13) Rossiiskie Vesti, 10 Oct. 05; What the Papers Say (WPS), 14 Nov 05 via ISI Emerging Markets.

(14) Itar-Tass, 15 Nov 05 via Lexis-Nexis.

(15) Interfax, 11 Nov 05; FBIS Translated text via World News Connection (WNC).

(16) Ibid.

Russian Federation: Domestic Issues and Legislative Branch

By Robyn Angley

NGOs forced to reregister

A new bill in the State Duma will require Russia's NGOs to reregister before the next national elections. The bill effectively could outlaw foreign NGOs, as well as endangering the survival of those NGOs whose activities are watched by the state with a less than favorable eye. The bill is sponsored by members of all four Duma factions, giving it a broad band of support in the Duma, and is interpreted widely as an outgrowth of the Russian state's fears of a "Color Revolution" happening on its own soil.

In the view of many Russian authorities, the recent revolutions in other formerly Communist republics, particularly Ukraine, were the result of NGOs, sponsored (and heavily influenced) by Western foundations. The revolutions centered on invalid or forged elections as a means of inciting political protest. By ridding itself of NGOs that might take the lead in the case of similar protest in Russia, the state is illustrating how concerned it is about the possibility of a popular uprising.

The move to tighten regulations on NGOs is not unexpected. President Vladimir Putin stated publicly in July that he would not tolerate the foreign funding of Russian political activities and essentially accused Russian NGOs, which engaged in political activity, of being puppets in the hands of Western organizations and governments. The new bill is the first attempt to give legislative backing to Putin's statement.

The bill, "Amendments to Several Laws of the Russian Federation," would prevent foreign NGOs from maintaining branches in Russia unless they become financially independent organizations. As such, these entities would fall under the same guidelines as Russian NGOs, which depend primarily on grants for financial support. Russian NGOs are subject to the same tax guidelines as small businesses and receive no tax benefits because of their not-for-profit status. Consequently, the money they receive is treated as income, including even membership dues and charitable contributions. The short list of foreign foundations that are permitted to give tax-free grants in Russia is dependent on state approval.

The bill would give NGOs one year to reregister. It would also grant state organs further access to NGOs' financial records, in addition to those they already have through yearly and quarterly reports. The bill contains a proviso prohibiting the establishment of NGOs by persons with criminal records. This clause would have a negative impact on organizations such as those founded by imprisoned oligarch Mikhail Khodorkovsky. Moreover, the bill does not stipulate whether this clause applies only to the post-Soviet period or, in fact, includes the Soviet era. This could mean that Soviet-era dissidents who were convicted of crimes against the state could be disqualified from running NGOs and that NGOs affiliated with them could be targeted by the state.

In regard to foreign NGOs, the proposed legislation allows for the rejection or dissolution of any group "if [its] goals, tasks, and forms of activity by the founder" do not align with Russia's constitution and legal code. (1) If an organization is approved by the registration organs, but, in its annual review, is discovered to be engaging in activities outside its stated purpose, the state can issue a warning. The warning would be followed by a one month period during which the group can correct the problem. If this warning goes unheeded, the state can request that the organization be dissolved.

According to Duma Deputy Vladimir Pligin, the goal of the amendments is to prevent money laundering by NGOs and advance Russia's struggle against radicals and terrorists. (2) Many NGOs, however, including the human rights organizations Memorial and Moscow Helsinki Group, view the proposed legislation as an attempt to extend state control to the NGO sector. Memorial plans to launch a campaign against the Duma initiative.

While the bill follows up on Putin's comments in July about the foreign funding of NGOs, it also contains the sequel to his offer to fund NGOs, recognizing, as he stated, "That he who pays the piper calls the tune." The bill sets aside 500 million rubles (more than \$17 million) for the state funding of civil society. Most likely, these funds will be distributed by the recently formed Public Chamber.

All told, the Duma's new bill, which could be voted on as early as December, could help tighten the state's growing control on any form of dissent in Russia by strangling ties with Western organizations and filtering out groups that oppose the state.

As a side note, the US Congress, impervious to Putin's earlier statements about foreign funding, approved \$4 million on November 4 to support "programs for developing political parties in Russia." (3)

Source Notes:

(1) Ivan Rodin, "Civil Society Called to Order: The State Duma Adds Some Work To the Public Chamber" Nezavisimaya gazeta via Johnson's Russia List (JRL) #9293.

(2) Claire Bigg, "NGOs Denounce Proposed Status Changes As Move To Curb Their Activities," RFE/RL via JRL #9293.

(3) Andrei Zlobin, "The Price of Democracy," Vremya novostei, no. 206, Nov 2005 via JRL #9289.

Russian Federation: Armed Forces

By Marcel LeBlanc and Jeffrey Butler

INTERNAL

Iran and the nuclear issue

Russia is in the midst of a revealing undertaking in defense of what it calls Iran's right to civil nuclear power. Russia is Iran's most vocal supporter and stands in direct opposition to the wishes of the United States. Russia is steadfastly resisting Iran's referral to the UN Security Council and is unmoved by US overtures including an impromptu visit from the US Secretary of State. In addition, Russia's stance also is opposed by the European Union, in sharp contrast to Russia's alignment with the Europeans in criticism of the US invasion of Iraq. Russia is conferring with the EU-3 (consisting of England, France, and Germany) on the Iranian issue but has not backed away from its support of Iran. Even Iran's recent threats to share nuclear technology with other Muslim nations or to wipe Israel from the face of the earth have not deterred Russian support.

Russian diplomacy is now balancing its relationship with the West with a growing desire to be an indispensable force in Central Asia. Iran's insistence on owning the entire nuclear fuel cycle leaves little room for simple solutions with the West.

Iran does not want to be dependent on foreign sources for nuclear fuel while western observers are concerned that Iran covertly will develop weapons grade nuclear material if it is allowed a domestic capability to enrich uranium. Russia is uniquely poised to broker a compromise solution such as offering to perform uranium enrichment on behalf of Iran. (1) Russia will achieve a major foreign policy and national security victory if it is able to find a solution tolerable to the US without harming its expanding relationship with Iran.

Growing ties to Iran

Russia's support of Iran is based partially on their economic relationship. Trade between the two countries is well over \$2 billion per year and growing. Russian exports account for 90% of the trade, constituting a vital market for Russia's industrial complex as Iran purchases significant quantities of manufactured goods as opposed to the raw materials that currently buoy Russian global exports. (2) Russia's defense industry has specifically targeted Iran as an attractive arms export market while Iranian fears of potential US economic sanctions or invasion persist. (3) Russia and Iran also have engaged in joint projects throughout Central Asia, with more potential for cooperation in the future as evidenced by the joint venture to build power plants in Tajikistan and the agreement to build and launch Iran's first communications satellite. (4)

Nuclear power is one of the unique aspects of Russia and Iran's relationship. While Russia is not Iran's largest trading partner, Russia is Iran's primary nuclear partner. Beyond the Bushehr nuclear reactor, Iran's parliament passed a resolution calling for the construction of 20 nuclear power plants and Russia is envisaged as a key partner. (5) Iran's supposed pursuit of nuclear weapons has deterred most nuclear powers from supporting Iran's civilian nuclear power pursuits since the demise of the Shah in 1979. Russia's willingness to work with Iran allows it to operate with minimal competition from the West. The acquisition of external markets is viewed as essential for Russia's large nuclear industry,

which must find new projects to remain competitive given the declining scope of domestic Russian nuclear projects.

Follow the money

State ownership and profit are also telling aspects of the nuclear relationship between Iran and Russia. Just months prior to the Bushehr reactor agreement, the industrialist Kakha Bendukidze was forced to sell his controlling share in the state-owned company Atomstroieexport as a result of a government audit. (6) The sales price of \$25 million was well below market value, given the billions of dollars Atomstroieexport is expected to reap over the life of the Bushehr project. (7) The financial profit would be enhanced further if a compromise deal with Iran were to require Russia to provide enriched uranium and other services. This would not only generate additional income for Russia but strengthen Russia's leverage over Iran.

State involvement was not only instrumental in securing the Iran deal but is also pivotal for posturing the \$3.5 billion Russian nuclear industry to compete in the lucrative global market. (8) Global demand for nuclear energy is expected to rise dramatically in the next twenty years—especially in Asia. (9) Russia already is engaged in building reactors for Iran, India and China. Furthermore, China has announced plans to spend \$50 billion for 30 nuclear power plants in the next 15 years, and several countries, including Russia, are lining up to compete for contracts. (10) Russia's competitiveness in the cut-throat global nuclear energy market will be enhanced tremendously with success in Iran, particularly if it can show its well-paying customers its ability to obtain nuclear power without having to appease western demands or to be overly transparent with their programs.

Geopolitics

In addition to its trade and economic concerns, Russian geopolitical interests are intertwined in its support for Iran's nuclear program. Iran is an effective ally and advocate in the Muslim world where it frequently defends Russian interests and

has not supported Islamic extremists in Russia. (11) Iran also is an important partner for Russia in negotiations regarding the Caspian Sea and the distribution of the energy resources and other commerce from Central Asia to Europe. (12) Iran's geographical location and willingness to cooperate consistently are powerful benefits for Russia's efforts to increase its influence in Central Asia.

An interesting subplot in the nuclear debate is the response of the other central and south Asian nuclear powers. Despite the obvious discomfort associated with a nuclear armed Iran, none of the nuclear capable members or observers of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) has mounted significant protest. Of these countries, only India voted to support the IAEA resolution in September to consider referring Iran to the UN Security Council. (13) However, lobbying from Russia, Iran, and other SCO affiliates in conjunction with internal politics forced India to backtrack to a pro-Iranian position. (14) Hence, Russia's success to date in generating and maintaining unified Central Asian support for Iran could be an indication that its Asian counterbalancing strategy against the US is beginning to bear fruit.

A weakened US position

Russian resistance to US influence is also strengthened by perceptions of US overreach and declining credibility in the region. The US struggle to maintain order and public support in Iraq and Afghanistan makes near-term military intervention in Iran highly unlikely. Moreover, US credibility on allegations of Iran's covert plans for WMD is undermined by the failure to produce evidence following similar assertions against Iraq. Russia and other countries point to a double standard given US silence on Pakistan's nuclear program, which is unabashedly dedicated to nuclear weapons and suspected of proliferation, while denouncing Iran, which at least makes a pretence of a peaceful nuclear power program. (15) The ouster of US forces from Uzbekistan plus growing SCO resistance to the presence of US troops also heightens the ability to coordinate and sustain opposition to the US in the region. Finally, the pivotal roles played

by Russia and China, as opposed to the US, in achieving diplomatic breakthrough with North Korea highlight the growing effectiveness and assertiveness of Asian powers in the region vis-à-vis the US.

Conclusion

Russia's response to the US-led challenge against Iran's nuclear program should provide new insight into the evolving nature of Central Asian relations. The complex web of current bilateral and multilateral arrangements constitutes a harbinger of future interactions in central and south Asia as world and regional powers pursue competing interests. Russia appears likely to gain economically and strategically by supporting Iran and brokering a compromise solution to the crisis.

Source Notes:

(1) "Russia sees role in resolving Iran nuclear crisis," Agence France-Presse, 11 Nov 05 via ISI Emerging Markets.

(2) "Iran and Russia Develop New Economic Plans," RIA Novosti, 16 Feb 05 via ISI Emerging Markets.

(3) "Russia reportedly woos Iran on arms," Agence France-Presse, 26 Sep 05 via ISI Emerging Markets.

(4) "Russia, Iran to build two separate power plants in Tajikistan," Avesta web site, Dushanbe, BBC Monitoring, 12 Jan 05 via ISI Emerging Markets; "Russia, Iran agree to build 1st Iranian communications satellite," Prime-TASS Business Newswire, 31 Jan 05 via ISI Emerging Markets.

(5) "Iran set to expand cooperation with Russia," RIA Novosti, 12 Sep 05 via ISI Emerging Markets.

(6) "Big Bucks From Bushehr," Moscow Times, 9 Mar 05 via ISI Emerging Markets.

(7) Ibid.

- 8) "Russian atomic energy chief advocates state-private partnership," ITAR-TASS news agency, 22 Sep 05, BBC Monitoring via ISI Emerging Markets.
- (9) "The shape of things to come? - Nuclear power," The Economist, 9 Jul 05 via Lexis-Nexis.
- (10) "Reactors? We'll Take Thirty, Please," Business Week, 3 Oct 05 via Lexis-Nexis.
- (11) "Iran And Russia Develop New Economic Plans," RIA Novosti, 16 Feb 05 via ISI Emerging Markets.
- (12) Ibid.
- (13) "India opposes referring Iran to Security Council over its nuclear program," Associated Press Worldstream, 7 Nov 05 via Lexis-Nexis.
- (14) Ibid.
- (15) "India's Vote In Favour Of Referral Of Iran Nuclear Issue To United Nations Security Council (IAEA Meeting September 05) Reviewed," South Asia Analysis Group Paper no. 1572, 11 Oct 05 via <http://www.saag.org>.

EXTERNAL

Russia's "peacekeepers" in Georgia

Russian peacekeeping forces in Abkhazia recently have been criticized for negligence in the case of Daniel Tsurtsumia, a Georgian resident of Abkhazia whom Abkhaz soldiers reportedly beat to death last week. (1) Although spokesmen for the Russian peacekeepers blamed Abkhaz forces for the 39-year-old's killing, Russian troops in Georgia's separatist territories of Abkhazia and South Ossetia face growing criticism concerning the nature of their mission. (2)

Russia recently has changed its military footprint everywhere in Georgia except in the two separatist republics, where it has tasked its military to fill a "peacekeeping" role. However, based on the actions of these forces over the last three months, Russia seems to have little interest in maintaining a neutral stance if that means risking the extension of both its Black Sea coastline and its Caucasus border.

Recent history

This past May, Russia's foreign minister Sergei Lavrov and Georgia's (then) foreign minister Salome Zourabichvili reportedly signed an agreement that detailed a major restructuring of Russia's military forces in Georgia. (3) By August, Russia seemed to be making good on this agreement as it evacuated Russian military hardware, staff personnel, and heavy equipment from the Georgian towns of Batumi and Akhalkalaki. On August 15, Russia's ground forces deputy commander-in-chief, Lt. General Valeri Yevnevich, triumphantly declared that Russia had kept its promise to remove combat hardware from Georgia in 2005. (4) Although much of the agreement remained to be fulfilled, Yevnevich's declaration was accurate up to a point, and it marked the completion of a significant transformation of Russia's military presence in Georgia.

Ironically, even as Lt. General Yevnevich commended Russia's force-withdrawal compliance, he also asserted, "Russia does not withdraw, it consolidates." (5) So, as the last combat vehicles drove north into Russia and the last T-72 tanks departed Batumi on ships of the Black Sea Fleet, Yevnevich expressed Russia's desire to solidify what remained of its forces in Georgia. Small in number but long in history, these forces had been serving as ostensible peacekeepers in the breakaway republics of Abkhazia and South Ossetia for more than a decade.

Abkhazia

Today, Russia's peacekeepers in troubled Abkhazia garner a lot of attention, not all of which is good. Georgia's leaders have complained that Russia's peacekeepers overtly support the Abkhaz armed forces, thereby lending legitimacy to the separatists' cause. Over the last three months, Russian forces seemed to validate these complaints by supporting Abkhazia in large-scale military exercises and by turning a blind eye to the Abkhaz practice of forcible conscription.

Beginning in August, as Russia's troops were removing their equipment from Georgia, the Abkhaz military participated in its largest exercise in more than a decade. (6) Over the course of five days, more than 6,000 Abkhaz troops employed an extensive array of Russian military hardware – including Su-25 attack aircraft – in mock battles that culminated in a live-fire phase at a target range near the Abkhaz town of Ochamchira. In addition to arming the Abkhaz forces for this exercise, Russia supplied military personnel to fill the Abkhaz leadership roles of defense minister and chief of staff. (7) Of special note was the fact that, under the Russian peacekeepers' watchful eye, Abkhazia conducted its live-fire practice inside a supposedly demilitarized zone. In response to questions from Georgia about this apparent violation, Russia's peacekeeping command argued that the 12 kilometer-wide demilitarized zone had been drawn incorrectly on maps and that, when drawn correctly, the zone stopped just short of where the Abkhaz target practice took place. As further "concession," Russia offered to allow Georgia to conduct its own military exercises within a demilitarized zone located just outside of Abkhazia. (8)

Officials in Georgia also complained that Russian peacekeepers lent support to Abkhaz forces in less overt yet equally insidious ways. They cited the death last week of Abkhazia resident and ethnic Georgian Daniel Tsurtsunia as a prime example. In that incident, as reported by Georgian media, Mr. Tsurtsunia was forcibly conscripted into the Abkhaz army and subsequently died of injuries he received after refusing to pledge allegiance to Abkhazia. (9) Georgian officials claim that Russian peacekeepers turn a blind eye to the forcible conscription of Georgians in Abkhazia. Consequently, say the officials, Russia's troops fail to prevent tragedies like Mr. Tsurtsunia's. (10)

South Ossetia

Russia's military presence in South Ossetia also has been controversial. Although the current dialogue regarding this breakaway republic seems less

caustic than that surrounding Abkhazia, there is still contention, and it is often focused on Russia's peacekeepers.

Georgia's accusations of peacekeeper involvement in smuggling have been a flashpoint. In August, at the South Ossetian checkpoint in Tkviavi, Georgian police impounded a Russian peacekeeping vehicle for carrying contraband. (11) Georgian officials commended the individuals who made this discovery while Russia's peacekeeping command made no comment. (12) This was one of the less confrontational incidents in which Georgian authorities had stopped peacekeepers. On the same day the Russians in Tkviavi were detained, Georgian troops and Russian peacekeepers had faced off over similar charges at a checkpoint in Abkhazia. That incident ended peacefully only after Georgian troops arrived with overwhelming force. (13)

Supplying separatists with arms is another charge leveled at Russia's peacekeepers. In September, Georgian officials arrested and charged Temur Grigalashvili with illegal arms trafficking. (14) These officials claimed that Grigalashvili was a senior officer in Russia's army, a claim the deputy commander of the Russian troops in the Transcaucasus denied. (15) Although Georgia turned over Grigalashvili to Russian authorities, the Georgians pointed to the situation as typical of the larger problem of militarization in South Ossetia. In an interview broadcast on Russian radio in October, Georgia's Minister of State Giorgi Khaindrava emphasized Georgia's belief that, "everyone knows perfectly well that arms are coming from Russia... [into] the conflict zone [of South Ossetia]." (16)

Will Russia's peacekeepers remain?

In an effort to supplant Russia's peacekeepers in their country, Georgian officials have appealed their case to the international community. In a recent letter to the UN Security Council (of which Russia is a member), Georgia's ambassador to the United Nations argued that Russia's peacekeepers in Georgia were

ineffective and claimed that their presence represented a Russian “military annexation of Georgian territory.” (17) Georgia’s appeal seemed to gain some traction when UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan subsequently expressed his concern about the situation in Abkhazia to the Security Council, although he did not address the peacekeeper issue specifically. (18)

Meanwhile, Georgia’s government has proposed a plan to alter the make-up of peacekeeping forces in South Ossetia. The US State Department tentatively supported the idea, calling on all sides “to embark on constructive dialogue” as a means to solve the conflict. (19) Regardless, officials at Russia’s Defense Ministry considered the replacement of Russia’s peacekeepers in Georgia “unlikely,” although they did acknowledge the possibility of some type of combined force. (20)

While parties to the conflict discuss Russia’s role in Georgia, the status of the force-withdrawal agreement signed last May by Ministers Lavrov and Zourabichvili looms large. The first signs of trouble occurred in October when committees from Russia’s State Duma questioned the document’s legality. (21) Since then, Russian diplomats have asserted that Russia never agreed to the document’s terms, saying, “there is no experience [in Russia] of initialing [the agreement].” (22) Officials in Georgia dispute this assertion and further argue that, because their respective heads of state tasked the signatories with reaching an agreement, the document is binding. (23) If Russia decides there is no legal basis for fulfilling the force-withdrawal requirement, it may choose to reconstitute its military forces throughout Georgia as a hedge against any reduction in its peacekeeping role.

Conclusion

Speculation about the future composition and designation of Russia’s forces in Georgia is just that. The fact is, whether or not they remain the sole peacekeepers in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, Russian forces will maintain a

presence somewhere in Georgia. As the parties to the conflicts in Georgia decide what to do, Russian peacekeepers undoubtedly will continue their de facto support for the Abkhaz and South Ossetian causes in furtherance of Russia's strategic goals.

Source Notes:

- (1) "Russian Peacekeeping Force Denies Negligence in Connection with Georgian's Death," LF, 9 Nov 05 via RFE/RL Volume 9, Number 210, Part I.
- (2) "Abkhaz Officials Deny Georgian Conscript Beaten to Death," LF, 9 Nov 05 via RFE/RL Vol. 9, No. 210, Part I.
- (3) "Russian Military Evacuating Combat Hardware from Georgia on Schedule," Rustavi-2 TV; Interfax; NTV Mir via Eurasia Daily Monitor, vol 2, Issue 160.
- (4) Ibid.
- (5) "'Peacekeepers' in Abkhazia are Otherwise Engaged," Prime-News; Rstavi-2; Interfax, 12 Aug 05; Eurasia Daily Monitor, Vol 2, Issue 160.
- (6) Ibid.
- (7) Ibid.
- (8) Ibid.
- (9) "Abkhaz Military Accused of Forcibly Drafting Ethnic Georgians," 08 Nov 05, Eurasia Daily Monitor (EDM), Vol. 2, Issue 208.
- (10) Ibid.
- (11) "'Peacekeepers' in Abkhazia are Otherwise Engaged," Prime-News; Rstavi-2; Interfax, 12 Aug 05; Eurasia Daily Monitor, Vol 2, Issue 160.
- (12) "Russian Peacekeepers Detained in Georgia Over Alleged Smuggling," Rustavi-2 TV; BBC Monitoring, 12 Aug 05 via ISI Emerging Markets.
- (13) 'Peacekeepers' in Abkhazia are Otherwise Engaged, WPS-Russian Political Monitor, 21 Oct 05 via ISI Emerging Markets.
- (14) "Georgia Claims Russian Officer Engaged in Arms Trafficking," LF, 20 Sep 05 via RFE/RL Vol. 9, No. 178, Part I.
- (15) Ibid.

- (16) "Georgia Parliament Official Says Base-Closure Agreement is Legal," LF, 20 Oct 05 via RFE/RL Vol. 9, No. 198, Part I.
- (17) "Georgia Asks UN for Full-Fledged Peacekeeping Force," LF, 27 Oct 05 via RFE/RL.
- (18) Ibid.
- (19) "US Expresses Support for Georgian Peace Initiative," LF, 28 Oct 05 via RFE/RL.
- (20) "Peacekeepers of the Second Plan," Nezavisimaya gazeta, 2 Nov 05 via JRL #9285 (#36).
- (21) "Georgian Minister Blames Russian Side for South Ossetian Conflict," Ekho Moskvyy radio via BBC Monitoring, 24 Oct 05 via ISI Emerging Markets.
- (22) "Speaking about Russian Bases," WPS-Defense and Security, 7 Nov 05 via ISI Emerging Markets.
- (23) "Georgia Parliament Official Says Base-Closure Agreement is Legal," LF, 20 Oct 05 via RFE/RL Vol. 9, No. 198, Part I.

Newly Independent States: Caucasus

By Kate Martin

AZERBAIJAN

Who knew that democracy could be this confusing?

Despite condemnation from the West, and rampant dissatisfaction among the electorate, Azerbaijan President Ilham Aliyev and his Russian counterpart announced how pleased they were that the recent elections to Azerbaijan's parliament, the Milli Majlis, went well. That the presidents were pleased should come as no surprise; after all, the pro-Aliyev party, Eni Azerbaijan, managed to retain its strong majority; preliminary counts put the ruling party into 63 out of the available 125 seats. (1) But what was surprising was the characterization of the elections as democratic.

Anything but democratic was the consensus of others. The number of observers from local and international organizations numbered around 60,000 persons, no small feat considering the fact that until the week before the election international observers were not going to be allowed in; the president's last-minute change of mind was a welcomed, but unexpected, move. (2)

The largest groups of observers were not favorably impressed by the polling, although many did note that there was an improvement over the presidential elections two years ago. The Election Monitoring Center, an alliance of non-governmental organizations and other groups, reported serious problems during the pre-election campaign, as well as during the actual voting, counting and tabulation of results. Such violations included officials attempting to influence and intimidate voters, inconsistencies with the voter lists, physical and verbal harassment of observers, ballot stuffing, and bribes of voters with money and goods. (3) The International Election Observation Mission—an undertaking of the Organization for the Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE), the European Parliament, and the NATO Parliamentary Assembly—issued a statement with similar findings, noting irregularities (at best) in a large percentage of precincts. (4) So, too, did the US State Department (5) and several smaller observer missions. Not surprisingly, the opposition coalition called for an annulment of the election results. (6)

And yet, Azerbaijani officials, commentators from Russia, Turkey, the CIS observer mission, and even some Westerners, refused to accept an indictment of the process, although all noted some “minor” difficulties with the process. (7) Former Missouri Governor Bob Holden, an independent election observer, reported that his visits to 52 polling stations did not turn up any serious violations.

(8) A similar report came from the US-based International Strategic Studies Association. (9) (Perhaps some Americans felt reluctant to drive Azerbaijan back into Moscow's arms.) Certainly, only a cynic would raise an eyebrow at the "convincing victory" enjoyed by Aliyev's wife, Mehriban Aliyeva, whose popularity was credited with gaining her 91.12% of the vote. (10)

Yet, with everyone agreeing on irregularities, there was a handful of scapegoats, particularly after the secretary of the Central Electoral Commission, Vidadi Mahmudlu, called for an emergency meeting of the commission, charging that results in at least 20 electoral districts were falsified. With that, CEC Chairman Mazahir Panahov admitted "some incidents" should be investigated. (11) Subsequently, results in two constituencies were annulled. (12) Prosecutors opened seven criminal cases and detained four chairmen of electoral commissions. (13)

These enforcement efforts seem to trivialize the Azerbaijan government's cavalier attitude toward democracy. Reports of violent, and nonviolent, suppression of political rallies before the election were rife. But officials apparently didn't limit themselves to flexing their muscles at mass demonstrations. Police officers searched the office of the leader of Democratic Party of Azerbaijan, Rasul Quliyev, just days before the election, and reportedly detained some party members. (14) Two days later, police detained Qabil Mammadzayev, the head of a People's Front of Azerbaijan Party, for several hours. (15) On election day, Azerbaijani journalists reported harassment by the authorities, including expulsion from polling areas and police detention. (16)

Nor did the situation calm down after the election: On 8 November, Interior Ministry forces seized control of the opposition coalition's headquarters in Baku, but according to a ministry spokesman, only for the bloc's own good. "These measures are meant to prevent interference from any third parties rather than to obstruct the bloc's work. ... The Interior Ministry is guarding strategic sites for the

election period, as well as sites where provocative action is likely,” he said. (17) That must have been reassuring to the individuals who were surrounded.

The opposition has tried to drum up voter outrage, with a series of rallies in the capital. Sometimes turnout is good – up to 20,000 individuals (according to the opposition), or 5,000 (according to police) have shown up. Opposition leaders repeatedly have called for a new election, but make it clear they intend to stay within the confines of constitutionally accepted activity. There have been no calls for revolution.

And that’s just fine with the president. Aliyev has repeatedly said that no colorful revolution, a la Ukraine and Georgia, will succeed on his turf, despite the opposition’s attempt to replicate the symbols of Ukraine’s orange revolution. “All attempts to fan tensions, in or outside Azerbaijan, will fail,” he warned before the election. (18)

Still, it might have gone either way: Tens of thousands of persons gathered in the capital of Baku during a three-day protest rally following the elections, and yet opposition leaders could not spark a revolution. (19) It’s unlikely that revolution will hit the streets of Baku, unless and until the opposition can generate some serious anger over defeated expectations of democracy. But in order to do that, there actually has to be an expectation that democracy can come to this country. And in the current climate created by government control over the process and most of the media, there can be no such expectation.

GEORGIA

South Ossetia gets confused

South Ossetian officials have expressed concern that some OSCE countries are “supplying armaments” to Georgia in moves that are “fraught with grave consequences for the peaceful settlement process.” Their reasoning? A letter sent to OSCE Chairman-in-Office, Slovenian Foreign Minister Dimitrij Rupel,

says that such deals run contrary to OSCE guidelines to refrain from arms supplies to conflict regions, according to Irinia Gagloyeva, chair of the South Ossetian information and press committee. (20) What Ms. Gagloyeva seems not to understand, clearly, is the difference between a conflict area, that is, where she is, and an independent state, that is, Georgia. South Ossetian leader Eduard Kokoiti's call for sanctions against Poland, Ukraine and Bulgaria were characterized as a "populist" move, "nothing more than provocation," by the deputy head of the Ukrainian Foreign Ministry, Dmytro Svystkov. (21)

Pressure to serve?

Arms deals are not the only problem in Georgia's breakaway regions. The draft has reared its ugly head. At issue are residents of the Gali district in Abkhazia, where conscription is occurring. Georgian media report that Georgians in Gali are being forcibly drafted into the Abkhaz military. (22) The Abkhaz interior ministry denied the media reports, (23) but the defense ministry subsequently announced plans to "draft about 20 people from the Gali district in the course of the ongoing autumn conscription campaign." However, continued Lt. Gen. Anatoli Zaitsev, chief of staff of the Abkhaz Armed Forces, "if a Gali resident does not wish to be drafted, he will not be drafted despite the fact that every Abkhaz citizen is to serve in the Armed Forces." (24)

Refuting that assurance was a subsequent report, again by Rustavi-2 Television, of a 21-year-old ethnic Georgian who lived in the Gali District. Daniel Tsurtsunia reportedly was taken from his home in order to enlist, and brutally beaten after refusing to take the oath. He died of his injuries. (25) (See Russia Federation Armed Forces: External, above, for more on this incident.)

Source Notes:

(1) ITAR-TASS, 7 Nov 05; FBIS Transcribed Text via WNC.

(2) See The Institute Analyst, 2 Nov 05.

- (3) Election Monitoring Center preliminary post-election report, 7 Nov 05.
- (4) www1.osce.org/documents/html/pdfypjtml/16889_en.pdf.html.
- (5) Izvestiya, 9 Nov 05; FBIS Translated Text via WNC.
- (6) Interfax, 6 Nov 05; FBIS Transcribed Text via WNC.
- (7) ITAR-TASS, 7 Nov 05, Interfax, 7 Nov 05, and Anatolia, 8 Nov 05; FBIS Transcribed Text via WNC.
- (8) ITAR-TASS, 6 Nov 05; FBIS Transcribed Text via WNC.
- (9) Interfax, 7 Nov 05; FBIS Transcribed Text via WNC.
- (10) ITAR-TASS, 7 Nov 05; FBIS Translated Excerpt via WNC.
- (11) Turan, 7 Nov 05; FBIS Translated Text via WNC.
- (12) ITAR-TASS, 8 Nov 05; FBIS Transcribed Text via WNC.
- (13) Interfax, 8 Nov 05 and ITAR-TASS, 9 Nov 05; FBIS Transcribed Text via WNC.
- (14) Turan, 3 Nov 05; FBIS Translated Text via WNC.
- (15) Turan, 5 Nov 05; FBIS Translated Text via WNC.
- (16) Turan, 9 Nov 05; FBIS Translated Text via WNC.
- (17) Interfax, 8 Nov 05; FBIS Transcribed Text via WNC.
- (18) Interfax, 30 Oct 05; FBIS Transcribed Text via WNC.
- (19) BBC News via news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/Europe/4432878.sym.
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- (21) Interfax-Ukraine, 2 Nov 05; FBIS Translated Text via WNC.
- (22) Rustavi-2 Television, 2 Nov 05; FBIS Translated Text via WNC.
- (23) Interfax, 1 Nov 05; FBIS Translated Text via WNC.
- (24) Agentstvo voyennykh novostey, 3 Nov 05; FBIS Transcribed Text via WNC.
- (25) Rustavi-2 Television, 5 Nov 05; FBIS Translated Text via WNC.

Newly Independent States: Central Asia

By Fabian Adami

Kazakh election update:

Has the government graduated to murder & kidnapping?

On 9 December, the Republic of Kazakhstan will hold Presidential elections. Although he is widely expected to win another seven-year term, President Nursultan Nazarbaev in recent months has been exhibiting ever-increasing paranoia regarding the possibility of "foreign interference" in the country. This fear is at the root of a systemic campaign against Kazakhstan's opposition forces which has been carried out over the last few months.

In April this year, Zharmakhan Tuyakbai, Presidential candidate for a newly created opposition grouping (For a Just Kazakhstan), gave an interview to Nezavisimaya gazeta, in which he claimed that Kazakhstan's opposition had strong ties to "the West" and to "international organizations." (1) In what must be viewed as a direct response to these claims, deputies loyal to the President introduced several anti-NGO bills to the Majlis in June. After passing both houses, the bills were sent to the Constitutional Council, which ruled that they were illegal. (2) Had the bills become law, NGOs in the country would have faced the possibility of being shut down at any moment, or of having their funding scrutinized in full by the government. Nazarbaev's attacks on NGOs continued despite this setback, with the President stating on several occasions that these organizations would be closely supervised, and would not be allowed to interfere in domestic affairs as they had done in other post-Soviet republics. (3)

As well as pursuing NGOs, Nazarbaev has conducted an overt harassment campaign against Tuyakbai. First, in mid-August, the latter received a visit from State Prosecutors warning him of "illegal" campaigning. Secondly, in an as-yet-unsolved arson attack, Tuyakbai's campaign headquarters were ravaged by fire late in September. Thirdly, on 12 October, heavily armed plain-clothes officers arrested Tolen Tokhasynov, Tuyakbai's campaign manager. (3) As yet, there is no indication that Tokhasynov has been released. Finally, on 26 October, a car transporting campaign materials for Tuyakbai between Semipalatinsk and Almaty

suffered a "puncture" and crashed. As a result of the "accident" 2.5 tons of campaign material were destroyed when the car caught fire. (4)

Kazakhstan's media also have been targeted by the regime. On 22 October, the Almaty Interdistrict Administrative Court ruled that the government could destroy all 10,000 printed copies of Svoboda Slova, a newspaper printed by 'For a Just Kazakhstan'. The action against the newspaper was initiated by Daulet Baygeldinov, head of the Almaty electoral commission, who claimed that the paper had insulted the "honor and dignity" of the President, and sought to affect the election outcome. (5) On 4 November, a second Almaty-based outlet, the Juma Times, was also shut down, allegedly because it had printed "deliberately false" information which harmed President Nazarbaev's reputation. (6) Neither outlet has been able to print or distribute in the last two weeks. It is likely that they will remain closed until after the election.

Each of these incidents, while disturbing in their own right, constitute nothing new in Kazakhstan's political climate. Since becoming President, Nazarbaev has a history of intimidating, exiling, or imprisoning opposition candidates—most notably former Prime Minister Azhekan Kazhegeldin. But in the last two weeks there have been two incidents which indicate that Nazarbaev's tactics may have become more hard-line.

On 2 November, Yelena Nikitna, a campaign official for Tuyakbai, reported her daughter Oksanna missing. Nikitna stated that she had been called and visited on several occasions by police officers, who demanded that she cooperate with authorities and pass on information regarding "campaign activities and planning." (7) Nikitna claims that she has video-taped proof of the police visits (which she presented to the Prosecutor General's Office), and that her daughter disappeared after she refused to accede to police demands. A spokesman for the Prosecutor General has denied both being informed of Oksanna Nikitna's disappearance,

and of being in receipt of the video-tapes. (8) At the time of writing no further news of this incident has emerged—Nikitna's daughter apparently is still missing.

Last weekend, Zamanbek Nurkadilov was found dead in his Almaty home. Nurkadilov's lawyer stated that his client had been shot twice in the chest, and once in the head. (9) Formerly a government minister and close ally of President Nazarbaev, Nurkadilov was fired last year after accusing the President of exhibiting authoritarian tendencies. More recently, Nurkadilov had been a vocal supporter of Tuyakbai's campaign. Police investigating the crime thus far have refused to comment, except to note that security cameras around Nurkadilov's home showed no signs of intruders. (10) This claim is laughable at best, since the wounds described by Nurkadilov's attorney would seem to rule out suicide. On the other hand, if Nurkadilov's death constituted a political assassination, police collusion in covering up the crime is to be expected.

If these two incidents are taken at face value, there is reason for deep concern. Individually or together, the apparent kidnapping of Nikitna's daughter and murder of Nurkadilov show that Nazarbaev is prepared to go to new lengths to maintain his grip on power. Clearly, he has learned from the perceived "mistakes" made by former Presidents Askar Akaev and Eduard Shevardnadze in Kyrgyzstan and Georgia, and is prepared to use any and all means at his disposal to secure his 'legacy', even if there is no realistic chance of a Tuyakbai election victory.

Kyrgyzstan: What a tangled web we weave

Three weeks ago, rioting erupted at several "strict regime" prisons near Bishkek, with inmates demanding improved conditions. President Kurmanbek Bakiev's initial response to the unrest was to dispatch Parliamentary Deputy Tynchbek Akmatbayev and Ikmatulla Polotov (Head of the Penitentiary Department) to Moldovankova prison in order to negotiate with the prisoners. Upon their arrival, the inmates overwhelmed the guards, and took the two men hostage.

Akmatbayev was shot and killed, while Polotov was seriously wounded, dying in a Bishkek hospital six days after Prime Minister Feliks Kulov had negotiated his release. (10)

Akmatbayev's death spawned a series of demonstrations in Bishkek, with participants claiming that Kulov was responsible for Akmatbayev's death, and calling for his resignation. The protests were led by Akmatbayev's brother Rysbek—allegedly one of Kyrgyzstan's most senior mafia bosses, who is at large due to a deal made with the new government in March. (11) According to reports on the situation, Rysbek was involved in a long-running blood feud with Aziz Batukaev, a Chechen inmate and Mafia boss incarcerated at Moldovankova.

Evidence has emerged since the rioting indicating that Batukaev effectively controlled the prison. On 1 November, Deputy Prosecutor General Abibulla Abdykparov claimed that Batukaev had taken over a whole floor of the facility—a total of 16 rooms, and possessed cell phones, machine guns, knives, huge sums of cash, internet-connected laptop computers, and a supply of narcotics. (12) Bizarrely, Batukaev apparently also kept 3 mares, 15 goats and a pack of fighting dogs at the prison. Both Rysbek Akmatbayev and Batukaev are extremely important personalities in relation to the current situation in Kyrgyzstan.

The murder of Akmatbayev was the second high-profile murder of a Parliamentary deputy in a period of two months. On September 21, Bayaman Erkinbayev, a Bakiev ally and Southern businessman, was shot and killed in Bishkek. (13) Bakiev's response to the murder was to claim that Erkinbayev's death had been made possible by the withdrawal of the latter's bodyguards, who had been arrested by the Interior Ministry. Given Prime Minister Kulov's relationship and history with the Kyrgyz security apparatus, Bakiev's allegations had to be viewed as a direct attack on the former, leading to the conclusion that the Kulov-Bakiev rapprochement might be coming to an end.

In a situation that was reminiscent of the immediate post-revolution scenario in the cities, the Kyrgyz government was able to restore order in the prisons only through the introduction of the Security Services. (14) Bakiev was likely 'reminded' in the current crisis that his position is guaranteed by Kulov. Indeed, at face value, his behavior supports this conclusion;- when rioting broke out, Bakiev ceased his attacks on the Security forces.

The President has been at pains on multiple occasions, to voice his support for Kulov. First, on 26 October, he stated that he fully trusted the Prime Minister and endorsed his service. (15) Then, on two further occasions, he denied any "discord" (16) between himself and Kulov, and stated he would continue to fulfill "all of our agreements reached while creating this tandem." (17)

On November 1, Topchubek Turngaliev, leader of Erkindik (a political party that supports Bakiev but not Kulov), alleged that Kulov had ties to Batukaev. Specifically, Turngaliev stated that Kulov (imprisoned by former President Askar Akaev) had served some of his sentence at Moldovankova, where he established close ties with "people originated from the Caucasus," and that he had been able to secure the release of Akmatbayev due to his friendship with the Chechen. (18) This allegation becomes significant when viewed through the lens of Bakiev's anti-corruption campaign. (19)

President Bakiev's anti-corruption rhetoric has intensified since the prison riots—in fact, he has specifically argued that the violence was made possible by the "wave of corruption that has swept the state," and which had "existed in our country for a long time." (20) Bakiev has initiated an investigation into the prison riots and deaths, the results of which are to be known later this year. It is possible that Bakiev is using Turngaliev as a proxy to attack Kulov (since he cannot do afford to do so himself), painting him as corrupt. If this is the case, the

investigation will likely "prove" Kulov's ties to the Chechen Mafia, making it 'easy' to remove the Prime Minister on criminal grounds.

For the purposes of impartiality, it should be noted that equal suspicion vis-à-vis corruption should fall on Bakiev, and that Kulov and those close to him have also been targeted. Firstly, it has been alleged that underground funding was central in bringing Bakiev's supporters to the streets of Osh and Jalal-Abad during the March revolution. (21) Secondly, Turngaliev is related by marriage to Rysbek Akmatbayev (Tynchbek Akmatbayev having been his son-in-law), making his allegations questionable at best. (22) Finally, Bakiev is tainted by having met with Rysbek, an alleged criminal kingpin awaiting trial on multiple charges of murder, embezzlement and drug smuggling, in order to stop the anti-Kulov protests.

On 31 October, Arslan Buteshev, Kulov's former driver and member of his Ar-Namys Party was the victim of a kidnapping attempt. Walking home in broad daylight, he was bundled into a car by three armed men and driven into the countryside. Batushev succeeded in escaping his captors, although he was shot and wounded in the process of doing so. (23) It is not known at this time who was behind the kidnapping attempt. But given Kulov's enemies, it is likely—although he has denied involvement (24), that Rysbek Akmatbayev ordered the abduction.

It seems safe to conclude that Kulov and Bakiev have the support of rival mafia groups, and that politics and crime in Kyrgyzstan are so intertwined as to be indistinguishable. The assassinations of Erkinbayev and Akmatbayev, and the Buteshev kidnap attempt must therefore be viewed as the opening salvos of a Mafia struggle for power which reaches the very highest levels, but in which Bakiev is significantly disadvantaged by Kulov's connections with the Secret Services.

Source Notes:

(1) See ISCIP Analyst, Volume XI, Number 1 (20 Oct 05).

- (2) Ibid.
- (3) Ibid.
- (4) Media Monitoring Report, 28 Oct 05; Press-Club Kazakhstan via ISI Emerging Markets Database.
- (5) Interfax-Kazakhstan, 22 Oct 05; FBIS Translated Excerpt via World News Connection.
- (6) "Kazakh Authorities Seize Another Opposition Newspaper," 03 Nov 05, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Features Article, www.rferl.org/featuresarticle/2005/11/AD740F89-155A-4593-8207-DF9BDBDD913C.html.
- (7) Weekday Magazine-Kazakhstan, 2 Nov 05; Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty via ISI Emerging Markets Database.
- (8) Ibid.
- (9) "Kazakh Leader's Critic Found Dead," 13 Nov 05, BBC News, www.news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/4433114.stm.
- (10) See ISCIP Analyst, Volume XI, Number 2 (03 Nov 05).
- (11) Ibid.
- (12) TCA-Kyrgyzstan, 5 Nov 05; The Times of Central Asia via ISI Emerging Markets Database.
- (13) See ISCIP Analyst, Volume XI, Number 2 (03 Nov 05).
- (14) See NIS Observed, Volume X, Number 4 (25 Mar 05).
- (15) See ISCIP Analyst, Volume XI, Number 2 (03 Nov 05).
- (16) ITAR-TASS News Agency, Moscow, in Russian, 2 Nov 05; BBC Monitoring via ISI Emerging Markets Database.
- (17) TCA-Kyrgyzstan, 5 Nov 05; The Times of Central Asia via ISI Emerging Markets Database.
- (18) Weekday Magazine—Kyrgyzstan, 2 Nov 05; Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty via ISI Emerging Markets Database.
- (19) See ISCIP Analyst, Volume XI, Number 2 (3 Nov 05)
- (20) TCA-Kyrgyzstan, 2 November 05; The Times of Central Asia via ISI Emerging Markets Database.

(21) See ISCIP Analyst, Volume XI, Number 2 (3 Nov 05).

(22) Weekday Magazine—Kyrgyzstan, 2 Nov 05| Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty via ISI Emerging Markets Database.

(23) AKIpress news agency website, Bishkek, in Russian, 31 Oct 05; BBC Monitoring via ISI Emerging Markets Database.

(24) Kabar-Daily News, 1 Nov 05; Kabar Information Agency via ISI Emerging Markets Database.

Newly Independent States: Western Region

By Tammy Lynch

UKRAINE

Political parties to the starting line!

In slightly over one week, the political campaign officially begins for Ukraine's parliamentary elections to be held on 26 March 2006. In preparation, all major parties are completing negotiations to form campaign coalitions and blocs, as they attempt to increase their potential success. A strong showing by parties in this election is more important than ever, since it is the first election when all MPs will be chosen from party lists, following the elimination of individual mandates.

Further, on 1 January 2006, constitutional changes will come into effect altering the country from a (semi) presidential to a parliamentary-presidential system. As a result, the parliament will have far greater input into the formation of the government – in particular, the choice of prime minister. The parliament also may be able to force the president to relinquish many of the powers that have gradually been absorbed by his office throughout the years, even though they are legally vested in the parliament or prime minister.

Current polls suggest that six parties have a good chance to enter parliament, while several others are on the cusp of the 3 percent threshold. The top three

contenders generally are separated by about 5 percentage points, but the party finishing first will have the mandate to lead the formation of a majority coalition and the government. Depending on how a majority is created, it may also have a large voice in determining how many important questions facing Ukraine in 2006 will be answered – from the pace and form of Western integration, to domestic reform of the judiciary and economic fields, to Ukraine’s status as a regional peacemaker, and to the level of its cooperation with Russia.

The most recent reliable poll results came from the Socio-Vymir Center for Sociological and Political Studies, which surveyed 2,400 respondents from 15-25 October in all regions of Ukraine. The Center provided both a national and regional breakdown of results. (1)

If the election were held today, the “Bloc of Viktor Yanukovich,” which is now in the process of being formed, would receive 20.7 percent. The “Bloc of Yulia Tymoshenko” (BYuT) comes in at 17.7 percent, while the “Bloc of Viktor Yushchenko” would receive 17.2 percent. The “Bloc of [Parliamentary Speaker] Volodymyr Lytvyn” (6.7 percent), the Communist Party (4.4 percent) and the Socialist Party (4.3 percent) round out the forces that would enter parliament.

A note should be made, however, about the inclusion of the “Bloc of Viktor Yushchenko” in the survey since it does not exist (at least currently). Today, Viktor Yushchenko is honorary chairman of the People’s Union Our Ukraine (NSOU) party, an earlier incarnation of which he founded and represented in parliament from 2002-2004. NSOU, in surveys without the benefit of Yushchenko’s name, has polled from 7-15 percent, depending on date and survey. NSOU leaders clearly are striving to attach Yushchenko’s name to their party, but the number of pitfalls associated with such a move has made the president reluctant to agree.

It is the status and potential success or failure of the NSOU that is the biggest wildcard in the parliamentary elections. The party has so far been unable to define itself, and unable to find the allies it anticipated.

A preliminary agreement for a bloc that would include the NSOU, the Congress of Ukrainian Nationalists, the People's Rukh of Ukraine, and the Party of Industrialists and Entrepreneurs (PPPU) was signed on 9 November, but these parties provide limited votes, and the first three have long been associated with Our Ukraine. (2) The PPPU, meanwhile, has proven to be a spotty ally at best, and finds little electoral support.

The party, therefore, continues to search for its direction just days before the official start of the campaign, while the blocs of Tymoshenko and Yanukovich appear to be well situated to begin the campaign.

A more detailed look at each of these three forces follows.

What to do with NSOU?

On 12 November, the People's Union Our Ukraine (NSOU) party, with its honorary chairman President Viktor Yushchenko, held a party congress that had been designed to announce the makeup of the party's election bloc, discuss its electoral list and confirm the members of the party's ruling political council.

Viktor Yushchenko also was expected to announce whether he would agree to the party's request that he lead the electoral list – thus making him a candidate for parliament and providing the party with the benefit of his shrinking but still significant popularity.

As usual for politics in Ukraine, nothing went as planned. Yushchenko did not announce his decision, although he implied that he would not lead the party's list, the list itself was not finalized, nor were any election coalitions or blocs, and the confirmation of the party's political council resulted in a portion of the congress'

members chanting “shame!” after the vote. Following the debacle, the Ukrainian online daily Ukrayinska Pravda wrote, with considerable understatement, “Saturday’s events have not in any way improved the perception of [People’s Union] ‘Our Ukraine’ among Ukrainians.” (3)

Clearly, going into the party’s congress, Yushchenko had hoped to give his party a rhetorical shove that would create some momentum for the campaign. His speech to open the congress was typical Yushchenko, long on hopes and dreams, and filled promises of openness, honesty and justice for all.

In particular, the president seemed to suggest the need to remove several members of the party leadership who have been accused of using their positions in government to enrich themselves. “If there is a problem in the [political] council of the party,” Yushchenko said, “[we must] bring this question to the attention of the congress, vote and inform the media that in the party there was a problem, but it was immediately solved.” Further, “Now is the moment of truth. We should be fair and frank, and speak about the problems that exist in the party. ... We shall vote and finish.” (4)

As Yushchenko left the congress after his speech, most observers said it appeared that the congress would then vote to eliminate six members from the ranks of the technically supervisory political council: former National Security and Defense Council head Petro Poroshenko, former Emergencies Minister David Zhvania, former presidential aide Oleksandr Tretiakov, former Transportation Minister Yevhen Chervonenko, NSOU parliamentary faction head Mykola Martynenko, and former Justice Minister Roman Zvarich. A report by RIA Novosti suggested that “some party members” at the congress privately called these men “a disgrace to the party’s reputation.” (5)

The first five have been accused of varying levels of corruption, which are being examined by a special parliamentary commission. Zvarich was accused in

March of falsifying his resume, but more likely was targeted because of his position as Poroshenko's attorney.

All six have significant negative ratings in public opinion polls, with Poroshenko being consistently ranked as the least trusted active politician in the country (when surveys are expanded to include "retired" politicians, former President Kuchma overtakes Poroshenko for this title). Understanding that removing the six from NSOU's political council would improve the image of the party, Prime Minister Yuriy Yekhanurov, along with the NSOU campaign head and the campaign manager, were said to support the move.

But Petro Poroshenko, who has been one of the party's biggest financial supporters, would not go quietly. "I am ready to leave all supervisory posts," he declared, "but I will not leave the party. I always will be with the president!" He reminded his fellow party members that without his participation on the political council, the party could be doomed. "Do not destroy the party," he implored. "Do not destroy our unity."

Later, Poroshenko and several party leaders gathered in a closed room. Minutes later, a decision had been made; there would be no votes for individual members. The council would be voted upon in one group, and would consist of 177 persons chosen behind closed doors, including the infamous six. The council was approved shortly thereafter, to chants of "shame" from some members.

From this vote, it became clear that the NSOU party was not under the control of President Yushchenko or Prime Minister Yekhanurov, or managers Roman Bezsmertniy and Mykola Katerinchuk – all of whom privately had stated their support for a "cleansing" of the council of the party. The very long political council list is heavily weighted in favor of business interests and potential financial backers. It also includes a number of regional governors and mayors,

as well as the president's brother and nephew (who is Deputy Governor of the Kharkiv region). (6)

Given the public perception that NSOU as a party of special interests, this list will provide significant fodder for the party's opponents. The activities at the congress unfortunately will highlight also the seeming inability of the president to affect or mediate the actions of Poroshenko and company. It is clear from the president's speech that he believed, and perhaps had instructed, that the political council of the party would change. As he left, a vote was being prepared to do just that. Minutes later, the agenda was altered.

Unfortunately for Poroshenko, by not stepping down off the council, by clinging stubbornly to a title, by possibly forcing Yushchenko to hold the stigmatized party at arm's length, he may have removed any chance his party had for victory in March.

The party will examine the situation again on 18 November, when its management "renews" the members of the council's Presidium. It is these 13-19 members who will have the most input into party decisions, and Poroshenko, as well as the five others involved in the party congress' debate, are currently on the Presidium. Prime Minister Yekhanurov stated clearly on 16 November that these individuals should be removed. (7) Should that happen, the party will receive a clear boost.

The party also will have access to significant media time, thanks to the regular attention given to the prime minister and president. Additionally, although centralized use of "administrative resources" is unlikely on any large scale, in true Soviet and post-Soviet tradition, the party may be afforded special "privileges" by regional and local bureaucrats eager to prove their loyalty. This is especially true given the high number of governors on the party's political council.

Is ByuT Rising?

One of the most difficult items to measure in Ukraine appears to be the support for the Bloc of Yulia Tymoshenko. While there is a general sense that her bloc is running close to the Bloc of Viktor Yanukovich, large discrepancies exist among polls measuring support for BYuT. Findings generally range between 13 and 19 percent. All, however, place her ahead of NSOU.

This difficulty is historical – most polls suggested that Tymoshenko’s bloc would not pass, or only barely pass, the threshold to enter parliament in 2002, but it ended the race with over 7 percent of the vote.

Regardless, Tymoshenko seems to have a solid leadership team in place, strong support in Kyiv and Lviv, and a well-defined message. Although her regional party branches are only forming now (and management of these branches has been a problem in the past), her local supporters have generally been eager and energetic, and she will likely receive grassroots backing from numerous civic groups that participated in the revolution’s protests.

While NSOU continues to bicker over true leadership of their party, BYuT (based primarily on Tymoshenko’s Batkivshchina party) has a clear structure; Yulia Tymoshenko is the leader, former Security Services head and longtime Tymoshenko ally Oleksandr Turchinov will serve as campaign manager. Mykola Tomenko, the former Vice Prime Minister and current deputy head of the Reforms and Order party (previously an Our Ukraine member) will advise and serve as an alternative spokesperson. Oleksandr Zinchenko, Yushchenko’s former chief of staff and the man who first publicly accused Poroshenko of corruption, will also advise and handle logistics related to regional offices. His new position as head of the Patriotic Party may also provide access to the party’s members – retired and/or reservist military, even if their number is relatively small.

The leadership is a very capable and potentially contentious group. The bloc must accommodate each of the above individuals – all of whom are already well-known and most of whom are ambitious and independent. When several additional members of Reforms and Order are added to the mix, it looks to be an interesting campaign. It is not an entirely unique position for Tymoshenko, however, whose bloc has always accommodated nationalist groupings led by well-known personalities.

All of the above individuals seem to be united in their goals for the country, and in the types of reforms they want to implement. There appear to be few differences on policy. Tymoshenko continues to push for reprivatization of what she considers to be assets stolen during the Kuchma administration. All other major parties, including NSOU, oppose this idea, and it looks to be one of Tymoshenko's most important campaign points.

Since the NSOU and Yanukovich parties are now both painted with accusations of corruption, Tymoshenko also will key in on this point. Should Yushchenko actively support NSOU, he risks receiving collateral damage from this issue. Tymoshenko also may benefit from a backlash against the president's decision to dismiss her from her job as prime minister – a decision she repeatedly has blamed on Poroshenko and other members of NSOU.

BYuT also will continue to support publicly entry into Western structures, but tends toward higher regulation of the economy than these structures would like.

What Tymoshenko does not have is the support (whether moral or otherwise) provided to Yushchenko by Western officials and businesses. These officials are frightened by Tymoshenko's often-uncompromising rhetoric, and many of them publicly called for her dismissal as prime minister almost from the day she was nominated. Should Westerners provide significant assistance to NSOU on behalf

of Yushchenko, but provide no assistance to Tymoshenko, she likely will not hesitate to attack the negative influence of “Western billionaires.”

Should the revolutionary, ultra-reform sentiment continue to prevail in March, these policies should do well for BYuT. But should the public be looking for simple stability and gradual change, and should voters negatively assess her months as prime minister, Tymoshenko and her allies likely will have to settle for second place.

Can Yanukovich win?

In a word, yes, and it is a distinct possibility. With Yushchenko and Tymoshenko fighting, former Prime Minister Viktor Yanukovich sits unbothered and unquestioned, slowly building his support as the leader of the Regions of Ukraine party.

Yanukovich, who as prime minister supported former President Leonid Kuchma’s attempts to bring Ukraine into NATO, now opposes the idea. He also opposes the country’s entry into the EU and the WTO, preferring instead closer ties to Russia through the Common Economic Space.

After months of near pariah status, Yanukovich was rehabilitated by the dismissal of the Tymoshenko government, which he said proved that the leaders of the Orange Revolution were incapable of running the country. Additionally, in one of the greatest ironies possible, he accused both Tymoshenko and Yushchenko of running a lawless government. His September “Memorandum of Understanding” with Yushchenko provided him with a further platform, even as it simultaneously caused a backlash against Yushchenko. The trajectory of support for his party, as well as for him personally, has gone only upward since then.

The former prime minister, and the man accused of complicity in the massive vote rigging of 2004 has said that he would like to form a bloc in his name, and

has joined forces with the small New Democracy party led by former Kharkiv Governor Yevhen Kushnarov. This coalition should be useful in politically divided Kharkiv, especially given the high number of NSOU members working within the local administration.

However, it is unclear what significance a coalition really would have for Yanukovich, whose party has a strong and stable base of between 20 and 25 percent of the electorate. Nevertheless, unlike NSOU and BYuT, Yanukovich faces a ceiling on potential support, and it is unlikely that over 25 percent of Ukraine's electorate would vote for his party. If NSOU and BYuT concentrate on each other, it is distinctly possible that Yanukovich could slip past both parties into first place. Should this happen, the West may be dealing with a very different Ukrainian government in 2006.

The Grand Coalition

In order to avoid a Yanukovich-led government, even if his party places first, Yushchenko and Tymoshenko would need to put aside their differences and form a coalition after the election. Even doing so, given current polls, they could be unable to form a coalition alone. However, the rest of the parliament would be fragmented, thus placing their coalition in control.

Tymoshenko has said she is ready to do this, but demands that she be given the prime minister's chair again in exchange. At this point, the concession seems unlikely to be made; nevertheless, Tymoshenko is famous for fulfilling difficult personal goals. It will be important for both Yushchenko and Tymoshenko to maintain a level of civility during the campaign that will allow them the possibility to govern together in April, should the need present itself.

Source Notes:

- (1) “None of the political forces have become an all-national party – poll,” UNIAN News Agency, 1540 CET, 31 Oct 05.
- (2) Ukrainian News Agency, 1254 CET, 11 Nov 05, and “Our Ukraine hopes to complete talks on election bloc by Nov 20,” ITAR-TASS, 12 Nov 05 via Lexis-Nexis.
- (3) “Scandal in Yushchenko’s Party: The congress has not eaten Poroshenko and friends,” Ukrayinska Pravda, 13:24 CET, 14 Nov 05.
- (4) Ibid.
- (5) “People’s Union Our Ukraine urges changes in political council,” RIA Novosti, 1539 CET, 12 Nov 05.
- (6) For the list, see Ukrainian News Agency, 13 November 05.
- (7) “Ukraine PM calls for renewal of pro-president party presidium,” ITAR-TASS, 0648 EST, 16 Nov 05; via Lexis-Nexis.

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