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**THE ISCIP ANALYST**  
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## Russian Federation: Executive Branch

by Susan Cavan

### **Personnel Matters**

If there is anything more likely to set political wags' tongues, well, wagging, than a grand-scale shake-up of major political players, it is the quieter reshuffling of little-known, but remarkably influential bureaucrats. When a new policy direction is announced to great fanfare, a certain minister or presidential adviser may get credit for the initiative, but it is inevitably the staffers behind the scenes who put the time and effort into creating the working plan supporting the trumpeted "reform". They make their boss look good, or bad, and their status within the bureaucracy is often a reflection of their superior's standing within the administration. When one of these silent power players falls however, theories abound as to its significance in the factional battles for influence. Such is the case of Igor Shuvalov.

Shuvalov was, until 28 May, the Government Cabinet's Chief of Staff. He was not, apparently, a member of Prime Minister Kasayanov's personal Secretariat, but rather the head of a large bureaucratic support structure for the Council of Ministers. The nearly irresistible urge to align Shuvalov with the Oligarchs, "Family", or Petersburgers, has spurred a wave of often contradictory analyses (See, for example, VREMYA, 30 May 03 and VERSIYA, 6-15 Jun 03; both from What the Papers Say (Russia) via Lexis-Nexis).

Whether Shuvalov was a scapegoat for the power interplay of rival factions, or, more likely, as Chief of Staff fell victim to the Government's main political nemesis, the Kremlin Apparatus, the fact remains that President Putin removed him from his Government post and transferred him into the Presidential

Administration as an Aide for Administrative Reform: a highly unusual move for a staffer given the animosity between the two powerful apparat structures. (This animosity, of course, dates back to the early years of the Yel'tsin regime and its apparat turf wars). Shuvalov now has basically become a political "hack" prisoner in the enemy camp.

There are those who choose to put a rosier spin on this bureaucratic maneuvering: Georgi Satarov, Head of the INDEM Foundation is quoted in *Nezavisimaya gazeta* (02 Jun 03 via Lexis-Nexis) as finding "a point" to the move in the President's new determination for administrative reform. "[R]eforming the government from within is not a very promising endeavor, but in his new position [Shuvalov] will have some degree of independence from the Cabinet...."

Perhaps Satarov is correct, although even he questions the chance for a "successful result." It seems more plausible however, that some corner of the Kremlin Apparatus will soon tackle whatever issue had been Shuvalov's pet project in the Government, and Shuvalov himself will have no part in the Kremlin's own policy process. Notoriety (perhaps of Kasayanov) brought attention to Shuvalov; his issue was co-opted by the Kremlin Administration, and Shuvalov himself was folded neatly into the Kremlin bureaucracy. It probably has little to do with reform: While President Putin continues

Yel'tsin's habit of creating institutions that duplicate the work of existing structures, turf wars become more likely, and when political fad turns toward administrative reform, the apparatchiks get even more sensitive and protective of their perceived territory.

Not so super regions

While administrative reform may be all the rage in Moscow, the once vaunted super regions and their special Kremlin representatives seem to be losing their

luster. At one time, Putin's Kremlin threw its weight behind a streamlined regional structure with the creation of special regional units of administration, the leaders of which held high-level meetings with the President and, often, the heads of the power organs in the Kremlin. These days however, the powerful presidential district envoys seem to be drifting away to other work. Viktor Cherkesov, once famous for hounding dissidents in the Soviet era, has been re-assigned from his supervision of the North-West District and has been tasked with running the State Committee on Drug Control. (ITAR-TASS, 07 Jun 03 via Lexis-Nexis). For the time being, the Committee will draw its personnel from the Interior Ministry and the Tax Police. According to Cherkesov, some 40,000 persons will now be involved in Russia's struggle to stem the purchase, sale, and trafficking in narcotics. The new Committee, created by presidential decree, comes into force on 1 July. It may bear watching what Cherkesov will make of this new agency and its broad array of personnel spreading throughout the regions.

Come into my web

We have seen, many, many times before that some appointments seem to be made simply to ensure that an inconvenient political figure disappears down a bureaucratic black hole, but with dignity! Could that be the case with the newest member of the Government, a certain Vladimir Yakovlev, former Mayor of St. Petersburg and later Governor of the St. Petersburg region? Putin's displeasure with Yakovlev is believed to have developed after Yakovlev replaced Anatoli Sobchak as St. Petersburg Mayor in a 1996 election. The dear, departed Sobchak, (in current lore, Putin's beloved democratic mentor), was then hounded out of the country by corruption probes and ill health, and eventually succumbed to heart disease.

With the pomp and ceremony of a State Council meeting as background, President Putin awarded Vladimir Yakovlev the Class IV Order of Merit to the Fatherland on Monday, and then announced his appointment as a Deputy Prime

Minister for housing and the municipal sector. (ITAR-TASS, 16 Jun 03 via Lexis-Nexis) While the appointment may, technically, be seen as a promotion, Yakovlev has lost the (shall we politely call it) "personal autonomy" that comes with control of such an urbane metropolis as St.Petersburg and all its financial, industrial, and tourist ventures. Perhaps he got a car and special driving privileges in Moscow in exchange. Whatever the cost, Putin seems to have neutralized a dull political ache, and for some reason, Yakovlev seems to have accepted the invitation from the spider to the fly.

Yakovlev's presence in St. Petersburg may have felt like a thorn in Putin's side, but the appointment of a powerful super regional representative was meant to ease that pain. With the above-mentioned Viktor Cherkesov moving along from his St. Petersburg watch tower, his successor, Valentina Matviyenko, apparently has her gaze set on the now vacant St. Petersburg Governor's seat, in addition to her Presidential envoy role. (Unless she knows something we don't yet about the fate of the Regional Representatives....)

## Russian Federation: Foreign Relations

By Scott Dullea

Moscow demonstrates uncertainty over the Bushehr project

Amid the excitement of the St. Petersburg celebration and the G-8 Summit in Evian, France — the first gathering of world leaders since the souring of relations over Iraq — the subject of Iran was a much-anticipated topic of discussion. Despite expectations, very little has resulted from those talks except for mixed signals from the Kremlin regarding its intention to continue the nuclear power

station project at Bushehr. Moscow's dance of the seven veils concerning Iran may be a byproduct of conflicting pressures from the Russian nuclear industry sector (AGENCE FRANCE PRESS, 4 June 2003 via Johnson's Russia List #7210, 07 Jun 03) and the competing necessities of Russia's foreign relations. Moscow had committed itself to cease nuclear assistance to Iran under the Gore-Chernomyrdin agreement, but announced suddenly that it was no longer bound by that deal.

The Bushehr nuclear power station project was first launched by Germany approximately two decades ago but was later abandoned under pressure from the United States. In 1994, Iran negotiated completion of the power station with Russia for nearly 800 million US dollars. The project is scheduled to be completed, and the station should be connected to the power grid, in 2005. Nearly 1,500 Russians are currently in Iran working on the construction of the plant, but when, or whether, it will be finished remains unclear. Additionally, Russian economic forecasts from 2001 and 2002 include the construction of five other nuclear power sites in Iran as well as arms sales with the Islamic country that are worth over \$300 million per year.

The Russians defend their nuclear deal with Iran by claiming that the technology they are providing to Tehran would not assist in the production of nuclear weapons. The US's concerns derive, in part, from recent discoveries by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) that Iran has developed specific technology, which makes it one of only ten nations capable of producing centrifuges (a crucial device in the uranium enrichment process). Iran also has several undeclared nuclear sites that, for now, are not required to be inspected under the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty.

According to Aleksandr Rumyantsev, Russia's Minister of Atomic Energy, the United States fears that Russia's activities are helping to promote Iran's scientific and technical potential — a worry he claims that "isn't serious." Furthermore,

Rumyantsev emphasizes that "Russia is cooperating with Iran only on the construction of [Bushehr]... There is no other cooperation in the nuclear sphere between Russia and Iran." (EKHO MOSKVY RADIO, 29 May 2003; BBC Monitoring via ISI Emerging Markets Database)

There are yet two unsigned documents between Iran and Russia, which may play a key role in determining the fate of their nuclear relationship. The first is an agreement for Iran to re-export its spent nuclear fuel to Russia. This agreement, which Iran reportedly is ready to sign, has been delayed for what Russia refers to as technical, environmental reasons. The second and more contentious document is a protocol on inspections by the IAEA of Iran's undeclared nuclear facilities. This agreement, which Iran has refused until now to sign, has been a point of some confusion — does Russia consider it a prerequisite to further work on the project or is it merely a request put to the Iranians?

The lack of clarity in these negotiations comes from the flurry of sometimes contradictory statements from Kremlin officials since the St. Petersburg celebration. On 1 June, Putin stated Moscow's opposition to nuclear proliferation and stressed the closeness of Russian and US positions on the Iran issue. On 2 June, British Prime Minister Tony Blair told reporters that Putin had promised at the G-8 Summit to halt all exports of nuclear material to Iran until Tehran agreed to sign the protocol. (EKHO MOSKVY RADIO, 3 June 2003; BBC Monitoring via ISI Emerging Markets Database) The next day, Russian Foreign Minister, Igor Ivanov, emphasized that there was no connection between the signing of the protocol and Russia's continued work on the Bushehr project, although he did urge Iran to sign it. He even made an offer to the US to work together on the project so that American concerns over its dangers would be relieved — an invitation the US refused.

On 3 June, Putin reaffirmed his commitment to continue construction in Bushehr, but reiterated the importance of nonproliferation, and restated Russia's insistence

that the entire Iranian nuclear program be placed under the control of the IAEA. (REUTERS, 3 June 2003 via Johnson's Russia List # 7207, 03 Jun 03) The following day, Russia's top representative to the G-8 Summit seemed to reaffirm this new stance by suggesting that Russia would not continue its nuclear construction in Iran until the IAEA gave its approval.

That green light may come in the form of the IAEA's next report on Iran's nuclear capabilities, which is due on 16 June. However, even here, Russia's signals are blurred as Rummyantsev told ITAR-TASS on 9 June (FBIS-SOV-2003-0609 via World News Connection) that he expected the report to contain "hardly anything new." Despite downplaying this new IAEA report, Moscow may indeed be concerned, as it was reported that the Kremlin has told Iranian officials, that they need to provide answers to certain questions about their nuclear program. (VREMYA NOVOSTEI, 29 May 03 Johnson's Russia List, 03 Jun 03) In a radio interview the former secretary of the Russian Security Council, Andrei Kokoshin, stated that there is evidence that Iran has reached a dangerous level in its nuclear technology development and that a suspension of cooperation may be a wise step. (EKHO MOSKVY, 03 Jun 03; BBC Monitoring via Johnson's Russia List, 03 Jun 03)

What is going on inside Iran is only half of Russia's dilemma — discerning America's strategy constitutes the other half. Deep suspicion is being voiced in Russia regarding the US's real intentions concerning Iran. Alexei Malashchenko of the Moscow Carnegie Center's Scientific Council believes that "Iran is part of a general American strategy aimed at reconstructing the entire Islamic world." (INTERFAX, 02 Jun 03 via Johnson's Russia List #7208, 04 Jun 03) Others attribute the US moves to the fluctuating demands of domestic American politics. (VREMYA NOVOSTEI, 29 May 03; What the Papers Say via Johnson's Russia List #7200, 29 May 03).

An article in Nezavisimaya gazeta (30 May 03; BBC Monitoring via ISI Emerging Markets Database) added to the suspicions about US intentions by arguing that US troop deployments in Azerbaijan and Georgia are part of an anti-Iran campaign, which might provoke Iran to conduct a devastating preemptive strike on its two smaller neighbors. Such concerns, the paper concluded, could prompt Baku and Tbilisi to join NATO. This type of reporting may promote further concerns over the situation, as was pointed out during an interview with the Russian Director in charge of construction of the Bushehr power station, who highlighted the potential danger in the proximity of US military forces to the Bushehr plant. (RTR TV, 08 Jun 03; BBC Monitoring Service via Johnson's Russia List, 08 Jun 03)

Why all the obscurity and confusion surrounding Russia's direction in Iran? An uncertain international environment, and questions over the American role in the region fuel Russia's domestic policy disputes. One argument for continuing to deal with Iran is the economic benefits. Iran, where Russian companies have billions of dollars invested, is a major importer of Russian high-tech products, machinery and military hardware, making the relationship very costly to abandon. Additionally, the nuclear energy lobby in Russia is extremely powerful, (AGENCE FRANCE PRESS, 04 Jun 03 via Johnson's Russia List #7210, 04 Jun 03) and with elections looming, the Kremlin may need to consider all the ramifications of a decision which might please or disrupt this powerful lobby.

Russia may also be concerned about the influence that Iran wields in the Islamic world. Iran has the ability to affect the spread of Islamic fundamentalism and influence some Muslim organizations' behavior within Russia. Foregoing this nuclear project might result in a lack of access and influence for Moscow in Islamic regions at this important juncture in the war on terror and in the reshaping of the world's political and economic relationships.

Also important to Russia at this point in time is its relationship with the United States. President Putin appears to be attempting to balance all of Russia's interests, hoping to find a way to satisfy them all, but appeasing the US when it may bring added profit. There is speculation that President Bush may have offered Moscow incentives for its support on the Iran issue, such as access to oil fields in Iraq (EKHO MOSKVY, 03 Jun 03; BBC Monitoring via Johnson's Russia List #7208, 04 Jun 03), compensation for Russia's financial losses if it were to give up the Bushehr project, recognition of Iraq's debts to Russia, and ensuring the validity of Iraqi contracts signed with Russian companies. (ARGUMENTY I FAKTY, 03 Jun 03; BBC Monitoring via Johnson's Russia List #7210, 04 Jun 03)

While Russia makes up its mind concerning Iran, it appears to have thrown a bone to Tehran in the form of two interesting agreements. The first of these is a protocol signed 4 June by the Russian Minister of Energy on cooperation in the coal industry between Russia and Iran. (EKHO MOSKVY, 06 Jun 03; BBC Monitoring via ISI Emerging Markets Database) The second document, which ITAR-TASS reported on 6 June, was an agreement signed by the Russian oil firm Tafneft with Iran's national oil research institute to conduct a search for new sources of fresh water in Iran, using nuclear magnetic resonance imaging. (ITAR-TASS, 06 Jun 03; BBC Monitoring via ISI Emerging Markets Database) These agreements are likely intended to demonstrate Russia's continued interest in its business relationship with Tehran despite the current pause.

If the report threatens to be scathing, Iran may sign the protocol in order to forestall further international pressure. This would enable the Russians to continue their construction project and keep all of their economic deals intact, as well as to maintain their relationship with this key member of the Islamic world, all without offending their Iranian business partners by demanding the signature themselves. Moreover, the signing of the protocol would be enough, the Kremlin hopes, to ease US concerns that Russia is proliferating nuclear weapons technology.

## **Domestic Issues and Legislative Branch**

### POLITICAL PARTIES

Boris, we hardly knew ye?

Russian politics often concerns personality more than ideology, and that does not appear to be changing any time soon. Indeed, attempts by democratic forces to merge have been stymied again and again by the inability of YABLOKO leader Grigory Yavlinsky and Union of Right Forces (SPS) leader Boris Nemtsov to consider even a power-sharing agreement. For a while, Nemtsov seemed to be the calmer and more reasonable of the two, but recent events indicate that such a perception might require an adjustment. As Nemtsov alienates an increasing number of party members, will voter support diminish?

This spring, the SPS appeared to be maintaining its function as a voice of opposition to administration human rights policies. As part of the All-Russia Democratic Assembly, on 17 March SPS (along with several other "democratic" groups) condemned the Russian government's attempt to hold a referendum on Chechnya. "The holding of any referenda in the present Chechnyan conditions — 'the mop-up operations, road blocks and settlements by troops, the virtually functioning of a curfew' — all this is categorically prohibited, and for good reason, by international norms and Russian law today," the assembly statement read. Opponents warned of long-term implications such an "ill-timed and unprepared referendum" could have, particularly on the citizens of Chechnya who, forced to flee during the war, would be ineligible to participate.

(WWW.ENG.YABLOKO.RU) Notably absent from the list of signatories were YABLOKO, the Russian Joint Social-Democratic Party and the Republican Party. (YABLOKO Deputy Chairman Igor Artemev explained that, "In general we

support the adopted statement, but we think that a peaceful conference must be chaired by the President of Russia, as this is the only way to guarantee that the decisions adopted at the conference are real and will be implemented.")

Not quite so notable in his absence from the list of signatories, but missing nonetheless, was Boris Nemtsov. SPS did sign the agreement, but Alexei Kara-Murza and Alexander Kotyusov, not its chairman, represented the party. To be sure, politicians cannot be everywhere, and the absence of Nemtsov's signature could have meant nothing more than conflicting engagements. However, a more startling statement by the party leader puts that assumption in doubt.

Last month Nemtsov came out in support of Colonel General Gennady Troshev, a Grozny-born officer who had commanded Russian forces in Chechnya, as a candidate for Chechen president. (WWW.CHECHENPRESS.COM, 25 May 03 via RFE/RL) Last year, Troshev made headlines for refusing to accept a transfer from the North Caucasus Military District to the Siberian Military District; he subsequently was assigned to coordinate relations between the presidential envoys and the Cossacks. (WWW.GAZETA.RU, 26 Feb 03 via America On-line)

Some have seen Troshev as "[Russia's] last well-known, public and popular general" and "one of the greatest heroes of the second Chechen war." (Jamestown Foundation, RUSSIA AND EURASIA REVIEW, 04 Feb 03) Others are more skeptical, given Troshev's statements on the manner in which the war should be conducted. Despite his connections to Chechnya's capital, he declared that the razed city should never be rebuilt, in order to serve as a warning for Russia's other ethnic minorities who might consider secessionist activity. He also demanded the public execution of captured "terrorists." (IRISH TIMES, 15 Jan 03 via Johnson's Russia List) He had a similar punishment in mind for warlords: "I would do this. Gather people in the square, string up the bandit, and let him hang, and let everyone see," he said. (PRAVDA, 5 Jun 01 via english.pravda.ru) How, then, could he warrant the support from Russia's democratic camp?

In fact, the answer is not evident. In another article, during the same month in which Nemtsov purportedly offered his support to Troshev, the SPS leader refused to be drawn into a discussion as to who should lead Chechnya. "That's for the president to decide. Any name I might suggest now would hurt that person's chances," Nemtsov said. (NEW TIMES, May 03 via [www.newtimes.ru](http://www.newtimes.ru)) Indeed, in the same interview Nemtsov reiterated the liberal ideas most have associated with the party. "I believe that a combination of a market economy and civil rights is just what Russia needs...If one of them is absent, democracy is deficient and liberal economy is deficient. It's bad for the country," he explained.

He clearly has not lost his footing in terms of ideology. Thus, the motivation behind his purported support of the general is murky. Adages about strange bedfellows aside, the juxtaposition of the liberal politician and this particular military man do not fit. Nemtsov has made some stands that cause other liberal politicians to shudder, but those stands — in support of some government measures, which invariably align with SPS' pro-market philosophy--are not as out-of-character as this move is. Indeed, the two generally can be found on separate sides of the issue. Troshev often is touted as the prime example of the military establishment (even his refusal to disobey an order for a transfer to Siberia has been perceived as a power play of the military against the civilians in the defense ministry). Nemtsov, on the other hand, is a proponent of military reform, and has claimed that President Putin supports military reform but has been held "hostage to the secret service and the military bureaucracy." (GAZETA.RU, 7 May 03; BBC Monitoring via Global NewsBank)

If Nemtsov has "turned," what other options are there for voters interested in seeing Russia's political system change? The multitude of democratic parties has diminished since the heyday of the early 1990s, through a combination of inter- (and intra-) party squabbling, voter disaffection with the hardships generated by the reform, disillusionment with the reformers themselves (and, often, with the

oligarchs who funded parties for their own reasons), governmental regulation and the occasional murder of leading personalities. Democratic Russia, already floundering before the assassination of co-chair Galina Starovoitova in November 1998, and Russia's Democratic Choice, unable to pass the five-percent hurdle to obtain seats in the last parliamentary elections, voted to disband in May 2001, thereby allowing the former SPS coalition to dissolve; most members (with some notable exceptions) joined the SPS party.

SPS appears to be the most inclusive of the surviving factions, but the broad nature of that very inclusivity could spell the party's defeat. Begun in 1999 as a coalition, and re-formed as a party in May 2001, the Union of Right Forces has consistently garnered respectable, but not overwhelming, voter support, generally placing fourth in polls behind United Russia, the Communist Party, and YABLOKO (and sometimes tying, or barely beating, Zhirinovsky's so-called Liberal Democratic Party).

The issue likely will be who can lead the party. Like the SPS, Nemtsov's level of support regularly has been just adequate for survival. At the May 2001 congress at which the party was formed, five chairmen (Nemtsov, Anatoly Chubais, Sergei Kirienko, Yegor Gaidar and Irina Khakamada) were selected as part of the 32-person political council. The position of party leader went to Nemtsov only after Gaidar purportedly withdrew from the race; in the end, the vote of support was 237 (out of 403) — roughly 58 percent of the total. (THE NIS OBSERVED, 13 Jun 01)

In the past two years, keeping the party intact has been a struggle that has not always succeeded. As the party formed, it had to contend with the very public disapproval of two noted human rights activists, Sergei Kovalov and (the late) Sergei Yushenkov, who opposed the dissolution of their party, Russia's Democratic Choice, and the creation (as well as the program and direction) of SPS. (Jamestown Foundation, MONITOR, 21 May 01) Lately, the defections of

high-level officials has been seen, including the head of the party's executive council, Eldar Yanbukhtin, who quit the party to become the deputy secretary of United Russia's executive council. (The Moscow Times, 6 May 03 via [www.eng.yabloko.ru](http://www.eng.yabloko.ru) ) Moreover, Boris Titenko, the leader of the Rostov Oblast' branch of SPS, recently announced he was leaving the party, accusing Nemtsov of choosing personnel on the basis of personal loyalty rather than ability. Titenko, a co-founder of Russia's Democratic Choice, warned that "intrigues and score-settling, encouraged or directly inspired from the federal center, have replaced substantive political work in many regions." (WWW.REGIONS.RU, 25 May 03 via RFE/RL Newsline)

While Nemtsov is alienating members, few viable options remain. Most of the other leaders of SPS have lost voter support. Kirienko and Gaidar both suffered from holding the position of prime minister — Kirienko, during the rouble crisis, and Gaidar, after the reforms he instituted began to affect adversely the living standards of the citizenry. Chubais, long associated with the oligarchic frenzy that resulted from unchecked privatization, is seen chiefly as the leader of a small band of recently enriched liberals. (RODNAYA GAZETA, 30 May 03 via Johnson's Russia List) Still, Chubais remains connected with the party — and his influence may be increasing once more, given the recent appointment of his long-time ally, Alfred Kokh, to manage the SPS campaign for the December elections. (The Moscow Times, 6 May 03 via [www.eng.yabloko.ru](http://www.eng.yabloko.ru)) Gaidar remains a force as well. In an interview this spring he hinted that the party needs to focus less on big business, and work to attract small- and medium-sized business interests. (MOSCOW NEWS, 9 Apr 03 via Johnson's Russia List) Interestingly, that points to the party's expert on smaller businesses, Irina Khakamada.

Khakamada, who has been with the party since its inception, is being seen increasingly as the public face of SPS. Along with Nemtsov, she was kicked out of Belarus last fall (surely a badge of honor for a liberal democrat).

(BELARUSIAN TELEVISION, 1200 GMT, 23 Oct 02; BBC Monitoring via Global NewsBank) She has hammered out deals with YABLOKO representatives when the parties' leaders could not agree. (RTR, 7 Jul 02 via ISI Emerging Markets Database) She has also traveled to Kyiv to support Ukraine's leading opposition figure there, Victor Yushchenko. (INTERFAX, 22 Oct 02; FBIS-SOV-2002-1022 via World News Connection)

She certainly appears to be a pragmatic politician. In a recent interview she offered a realistic vision of the short- and long-term futures of the Russian political system. "Everyone is looking for ideal persons, but no one is looking for an ideal system. Much further political modernization is being discussed; I think that's a waste of time. Nothing will work better. Moreover, things will get worse, as we can see from the situation with the mass media and poor progress in the development of a civil society. I think in the next ten years we should make our political institutions more than just formal, that is, build a real democracy by stimulating ideal market legislation, an administrative reform, and a judicial reform so that it would be enforced to help citizens exercise and protect their rights. Then, in 10 or 15 years we would have a system, which could be called an advanced democracy, though perhaps not so perfect in comparison with old democracies." (NEW TIMES, May 03 via [www.newtimes.ru](http://www.newtimes.ru))

Such a long-term outlook does not present a rosy picture for SPS. "Theoretically, our Union must become an opposition party. But we have refrained from doing so and are trying to reach an agreement with the present government and help it accomplish urgent economic, legislative, judicial, and administrative reforms. We shall pay for what we are doing now because it is an ambiguous stand, it is impossible to clearly formulate our line. The ratings of our Union and its popularity among democrats will go down. The middle class is small at present, and we shall not win enough votes. This will come out in the elections," she added.

Clearly, with assessments such as these emanating from the party leadership, Kokh has his work cut out for him. But there is very little democratic choice left.

## Russian Federation: Security Services

By Maolmordha McGowan

Case closed?

On 30 April the Prosecutor-General's office announced it had completed its investigation into the September 1999 bombings of apartment buildings in Moscow and Volgodonsk. Investigators identified Achemez Gochiyaev, the FSB's long-standing prime suspect, as the leader of a band of Muslim terrorists whose attacks allegedly claimed 241 lives. Only two minor figures, Yusuf Krymshamkhalov and Adam Dekkushev, are in custody and will stand trial. Charges pending against them include participation in illegal armed units, terrorism, deliberate murder with aggravating circumstances, and illegal possession of arms. (ITAR-TASS, 30 Apr 03 via Lexis/Nexis) The two initially confessed their involvement, but later claimed those confessions were made under physical and psychological duress. During the interrogation, Dekkushev fingered Achemez Gochiyaev as the leader of the gang who set the explosives. Most of the other suspects, including Denis Saitakov, Ravil Akhmyarov, Timur and his brother Zaur Batchaev, have been killed in Chechnya. (RIA-NOVOSTI 30 Apr 03 via RFE/RL Newswire) Gochiyaev and Khakim Abayev remain at large, and may, by some accounts, be hiding in Georgia's Pankisi Gorge. According to Russian intelligence sources, the attacks were planned by Chechen rebel leader Shamil Basayev, along with Abu-Umar and Omar Ibn al Khattab who were killed during counter-terrorist operations in Chechnya in 2001 and 2002. (IZVESTIYA, 30 April 03 via Lexis/Nexis)

Despite the fact that the accused planner and the accused executor of the Moscow bombings remain at large, Prosecutor-General Vladimir Ustinov insists that the case has been completely solved and all suspects have been identified. He also provided a motive, according to which the Gochiyaev group carried out the attacks under orders from Basayev to avenge "fallen comrades" from an engagement with Russian forces along the Chechen border. (IZVESTIYA, 30 April 03 via Lexis/Nexis)

The question remains whether closing the official investigation will also curb speculation that the FSB itself orchestrated the bombings to provide political cover for a renewed Russian campaign against Chechen separatists. (see THE NIS OBSERVED 21 Aug 02) Critics have argued that the government's investigation never seriously pursued this possibility. If nothing else, the timing of the announcement will raise further suspicion, as it came a mere 13 days after the murder of Duma Deputy Sergei Yushenkov, head of an unofficial inquiry into the FSB's possible involvement, (see THE NIS OBSERVED 07 May 03) and at the beginning of the long May Day weekend. Deputy Yushenkov had occasionally suggested to reporters off the record his personal belief that the security services were responsible for the murder of his colleague Vladimir Golovlyov, as well as for the Moscow bombings. (VREMYA MN, 19 Apr 03 via Lexis-Nexis) One might speculate that in order for the government to claim that the case has been solved according to long-standing FSB assertions, the silence of Yushenkov and his colleagues was required. However, with the official case closed, it seems certain that if Yushenkov and his allies were correct, the possibility for justice to be served in this fateful case may have been buried along with them.

An old Putin chum gets the nod... again

Yet another former colleague of President Vladimir Putin, Sergei Smirnov, was promoted to a high-level post as First Deputy of the St. Petersburg department of the FSB on 9 June. During his tenure in St. Petersburg, Smirnov became a close friend of Putin's, and not surprisingly, the President had a hand in promoting his former colleague, according to the newspaper, Kommersant. Smirnov previously served as deputy chief of the Security Service for the Protection of Public Officials, which is also indicative of the level of trust the President has for Smirnov. Smirnov's only official public appearance came in a November 2002 press conference where he surprised everyone (including the team actually working on the investigation) with the announcement that the case of murdered Duma Deputy Galina Starovoitova had been solved.

The post of chief of the St. Petersburg FSB office continues to be a springboard position, as Smirnov's predecessor, Victor Cherkesov, was appointed from there to presidential envoy in the North-West super region, eventually being named head of the committee for combating drug trafficking in March 2003. Smirnov's deputy, Major-General Alexander Bortnikov, will replace Smirnov as head of the St. Petersburg department. (KOMMERSANT, 09 Jun 03 via Lexis/Nexis)

Several shuffles at the MVD

The Ministry of Interior is preparing to undergo a major services consolidation, similar to the recent power build up in the FSB. Interior Minister, Boris Gryzlov, told President Putin on 13 May that the MVD's absorption of the Tax Police is proceeding as scheduled and should be completed by the scheduled 1 July deadline. The 14,000 employee Tax Police department will join with the Economic Crimes Department to form a new agency within the Ministry of Interior. (RTR RUSSIA TV via lexis/nexis)

Commander in Chief of Interior Troops, General Vyacheslav Tikhomirov, during a 4 June press conference with his counterpart in Kazakhstan, announced that the

ministry would procure new hardware for the Interior Troops consisting of non-lethal weapons. Tikhomirov mentioned further that the final decision on the transfer of control of counter-terrorist operations in Chechnya from the FSB to the MVD would be made at the end of this year. This is much later than September which had previously been the target date in official statements. (ITAR-TASS, 04 Jun 03 via WNC World News Connection)

## Russian Federation: Armed Forces

By Dan Rozelle

### Two Defense Industry Executives Killed on Same Day

The top executive of the Almaz-Antei defense consortium, Igor Klimov, was shot and killed on Friday, 6 June. That same day a top official of RATEP, (Radio-Technical Enterprise), a subsidiary of Almaz-Antei, was also murdered. The killings are unique, not only in their timing, but also because one of the victims was connected to President Putin's administration. The murder of Igor Klimov, who was closely tied to the Kremlin, has generated most of the media attention. Klimov, a former aide in the presidential administration, died outside of his apartment near the Interior Ministry after a supposed robbery attempt, although neither his briefcase nor any of his money was taken. (MOSCOW TIMES, 09 Jun 03 via Lexis-Nexis) The second man killed, Sergei Shchitko, according to various press reports, served as the finance manager and had just recently become the commercial director at RATEP.

Numerous theories exist as to why both men were murdered yet all agree that the murders are linked and were certainly contract killings. Klimov, a former Foreign Intelligence Service (FSB) officer, had been appointed to his position as acting general director of Almaz-Antei only last February and was to be permanently installed in the post as CEO on 26 June. Previously he was an

advisor to Viktor Ivanov, also an FSB officer who now serves as both deputy chief of administration for President Putin and chairman of the board for Almaz-Antei. (NEZAVISIMAYA GAZETA, 09 Jun 03; What the Papers Say via ISI Defense and Security Database) The most plausible motive for Klimov's murder stems from his attempts to prevent diversions of profits and other forms of embezzlement. In his short time as director, he ousted reputed representatives of criminal gangs and fired several plant managers, among them some from RATEP. Klimov also persuaded the General Prosecutor's Office to institute embezzlement proceedings against other authorities of the consortium. In the most flagrant example, \$73 million disappeared from an Antei contract with Greece for an air defense missile system. It was later discovered that authorities at Antei had placed \$45 million in an offshore account in Montenegro and another \$12 million in a Moscow bank. The remaining \$16 million has yet to be found. (MOSKOVSKY KOMSOMOLET, 09 Jun 03; What the Papers Say via ISI Defense and Security Database)

Arms sales are one of Russia's most profitable industries bringing in over \$4.8 billion last year. Although state-owned, many of Russia's weapons manufacturers have effectively become private ventures run by and for the profit of their managers. According to Pavel Felgenhauer, a Russian-based independent military analyst, arms industry executives have long been skimming illegal profits from arms sales to the point that little or none of the money goes to the government. The size of the industry, the inability of the government to recover the profits, and the secrecy with which the industry sometimes works, has clearly attracted the interest of organized crime networks. The creation of the government-run defense industry consortiums and the appointment of Klimov represented an attempt by Putin to exert Presidential control over the industry and make good on his promises of increased law and order. (THE ASSOCIATED PRESS, 09 Jun 03 via Lexis-Nexis)

Almaz-Antei, one of the defense holding companies formed by decree last year as part of Putin's restructuring, brings in between \$1 to 2 billion in annual revenues and is one of Russia's largest. (NIS OBSERVED, Vol.VII, No. 17, 30 October 02) The state-owned organization includes 46 different enterprises involved in development and production of all types of air defense systems. (VEDOMOSTI, 09 Jun 03 via Lexis-Nexis) One of its most profitable products is the S-300 medium-range surface-to-air missile system --Russia's equivalent of the US Patriot system. Difficulties have, however, surfaced in the formation of the weapons conglomerate. The individual companies Almaz and Antei were rivals before being forced together by presidential fiat, apparently their competition for control has continued as the merger progresses. A third company, Oboronitelnye Sistemy, oversaw contracts for selling Almaz's version of the S-300 system to China and is also involved in the dispute, though to a lesser degree. (MOSCOW TIMES, 09 Jun 03 via Lexis-Nexis)

Another factor in the possible motivation behind the Klimov murder is found in his attempt to win the right of independent export for Almaz-Antei. Currently Rosoboronexport, Russia's state run military arms export company, holds a monopoly on exporting weapons and military equipment. Established only two years ago, Rosoboronexport controlled 87% of military sales in 2001 and was positioning itself to control the remaining portion as well.

On 3 October of last year, however, President Putin met with the government's committee for military-technical cooperation and decided that military-industrial companies should be able to conduct foreign trade operations and export their products independently of one another. (NIS OBSERVED, Vol.VII, No. 17, 30 October 02) Rosoboronexport's loss of control over Almaz-Antei's foreign sales could potentially have an impact of approximately \$1 billion and jeopardize a \$4 billion contract with the United Arab Emirates. (MOSKOVSKY KOMSOMOLET, 09 Jun 03; What the Papers Say via ISI Defense and Security Database)

The motives behind the murder of Shchitko are somewhat more murky. The best explanation is that, as finance manager, he was somehow involved in Klimov's attempts to control corruption at RATEP. RATEP, which produces targeting systems for naval air defense systems, was recently awarded a \$700 million contract for sea-based air defense weaponry; its share in the profits was to be in the neighborhood of \$50 to \$70 million. If criminal organizations, tied into the company's management were anticipating a significant cut of those profits, and Klimov threatened their "earnings," it could certainly provide someone with a motive for murder. (VEDOMOSTI, 09 Jun 03 via Lexis-Nexis)

Klimov is perhaps the highest ranking official to be killed and represents the latest link in a bloody chain of murders of government officials. Sergei Yushenkov, a pro-democracy deputy in the State Duma was assassinated in April. He was the ninth deputy to be killed in as many years. His death was followed in May by the murders of the Mayor of Troitsk, a Moscow suburb, and a regional director for the Yukos oil company. Earlier this month the director of the Meyerhold theater center, a large cultural and commercial complex in Moscow, was gunned down. The killings show how little Putin has accomplished by way of reining in the criminal elements active throughout Russian business and political circles and now especially, evident in the very lucrative defense industry. (AGENCE FRANCE PRESSE, 09 Jun03 via Lexis-Nexis)

## Newly Independent States: Western Region

By Nadezda Kinsky

UKRAINE

Of one mind or two (or three or four)?

The leaders of the Ukrainian opposition have repeatedly stated their intention to field a single candidate in the presidential elections scheduled for 2004. Using the high points of the "Rise Up, Ukraine!" campaign, Yuliya Tymoshenko of her eponymous Bloc, Piotr Symonenko of the Communist Party, Alexandr Moroz of the Socialist Party, and Victor Yushchenko of the Our Ukraine Bloc, chose the opportunity for group appearances and promised, that in the name of a united opposition, they would cooperate in the next presidential race. Apparently, a single candidate for the whole opposition is to be chosen during the fall of this year. However, all observers both from within and without the opposition (and even Ukraine) doubt that the opposition grouping--so far apart in politics and outlook--will be able ever to decide on a single candidate, let alone fight a joint election campaign.

President Leonid Kuchma himself, in a statement on May 28th, has voiced doubts that the opposition forces will be able to field a candidate to oppose his candidate (he himself cannot run for re-election according to the constitution). He aimed his remarks primarily at Yushchenko, politically the strongest of the opposition figures, who decided to stay in the opposition in the Rada in 2002, a move which Kuchma suggests was a grave mistake (RFE/RL NEWSLINE, 29 May 03).

The opposition leaders themselves also have revealed their own doubts on whether this project will succeed. Symonenko has long declared his willingness to see his name appear on the ballot paper. Yuliya Tymoshenko also recently criticized the failure of the opposition to move forward on plans for a single candidate and announced her willingness to run for President if a common candidate is not put forward. She made her statements to the Kyiv weekly "Zerkalo nedeli" in its first June issue. As a reason for her frustration, she mentioned Yushchenko's hesitancy to sit down and actually discuss the concrete measures needed to establish a joint opposition campaign. Yushchenko, however, in an interview with Radio Free Europe on the occasion of its 50th

anniversary, dispelled such doubts and reiterated the plan for a common candidate. As the most popular politician in Ukraine at the moment, Yushchenko can, and presumably does, assume that he would be this joint candidate, although he vehemently denies this presumption by saying that, "We want to avoid the situation where a navel, or a bright sun, is placed in the center, and everybody else will have to join it." (RFE/RL Poland, Belarus, and Ukraine Report 10 Jun 03)

All of these preparations take place, of course, in the assumption that the presidential elections indeed will be held undisturbed in 2004. Kuchma has already announced that year as the next date for elections. However, shards of doubt hang over the election preparations because of the parliamentary reforms scheduled for the same time. Kuchma suggests that presidential and parliamentary elections should be held in the same year, which would extend his term until 2006. His main concern, after all, remains his ability to retain immunity from prosecution for as long as possible. Concern is growing among international groups that the upcoming presidential elections will not be held in a free and fair environment. Observers from the OSCE and other organizations are preparing to monitor the electoral preparations, but based on the conduct of the 2002 parliamentary elections and recent local elections, there is a real fear that there will be a continued decline in electoral standards evident since the previous presidential elections. In recent polls, over half of Ukrainians answered that they did not believe it possible to have free and fair elections in Ukraine.

## BELARUS

Sign here "For a Worthy Life"

President Alexandr Lukashenka is currently at an all time low in popularity with the Belarusian population, voices of dissent are growing, and several calls for

reform have been heard. At the same time, governmental crackdowns on what it considers its most dangerous enemies, the media and NGOs, are growing more intense. A group of Belarusian lawmakers is now trying to use a procedure provided for in the constitution to amend the electoral system in order to make the Belarusian legislature more effective.

The recently established political group, "For a Worthy Life," organized and supported largely by the Respublika group of parliamentary opposition politicians together with some other well-known figures in Belarus, are soliciting 450,000 signatories for their petition to introduce several amendments to the electoral process. According to the tenuous legislation, if a considerable contingent of the population appeals, in writing, to the government in order to make changes such as promised by "For a Worthy Life," lawmakers are obliged to amend the law. However, it is highly unlikely that even if the group manages to find the necessary number of signatories to the petition among a highly apathetic population, the president and the government will so easily accept this mode of amending legislation. A vote in parliament is most likely to be lost by the Respublika group, which has only 12 deputies in the parliament with 110 seats.

The amendments proposed by "For a Worthy Life" all are suggestions that are bound to displease Lukashenka deeply. For one, they recommend giving more powers and freedom to the international election observers who so far have all found Belarusian elections to be undemocratic and unfair. Given Lukashenka's problems with the OSCE missions in particular, the chance that he would accept such a change in official Belarusian legislature is highly unlikely. The OSCE itself has already stated its support of the move by the Belarusian lawmakers (RFE/RL Newslines 29 May 03). Other amendments proposed also strengthen the opposition and weaken the power of Lukashenka and his cadres. According to "For a Worthy Life," election candidates should have the right to finance their own election campaigns; and it also holds that the Central Election Committee, responsible for running elections and referenda in the country, should undergo a

large-scale reorganization particularly of the appointment procedure for its members, which so far has been carried out solely by the president and the upper house of parliament. As IWPR's Belarusian Reporting Service points out however, the problem lies not only in the adoption of these changes to the legislation, but more importantly, in the implementation of the law: "Our electoral code is not one bit less democratic than most equivalent documents in Europe. If there are any problems, they are in the area of implementation," said Central Election Committee secretary Nikolai Lozovik to the service (IWPR's Belarus Reporting Service 30 May 03).

## Newly Independent States: Caucasus

By Miriam Lansky

### GEORGIA

#### Parliament speaker visits DC

Speaking at the National Democratic Institute on 10 June, Nino Burjanadze, the Chairperson of Georgia's parliament called on the US government to "emphasize all the time that we should have free and fair elections." According to Burjanadze, "if Georgia loses its democratic image, it will lose legitimacy internally and internationally." Burjanadze was speaking a week after the Georgian opposition staged a mass rally in Tbilisi calling for implementation of the law governing the composition of the Central Electoral Commission (CEC) which was passed in 2002. According to the law, every party represented in parliament should also be represented in the CEC. (Press Release of New Rights Party, 03 Jun 03) The government, however, refuses to give up control of the CEC, particularly of the district commissions which count the votes.

The June 3rd rally alarmed many observers when some of the participants started calling on President Eduard Shevardnadze to step down. Burjanadze,

who supports the demands of the opposition with regard to the CEC composition, took pains to distance herself from this radical demand. She said that Shevardnadze should not step down and voiced support for his international orientation. In particular, she pointed out that Russia's policies in Abkhazia and South Osetia (such as breaking Georgia's transportation blockade and issuing passports to residents of the two separatist Georgian regions) constitute grounds for Georgia to sever relations with Russia. Moreover, increased US involvement in settling the Abkhaz crisis would be in order because Moscow has had a monopoly on security issues in the South Caucasus for a long time and yet has not managed to bring about peace or stability.

## CHECHNYA

### Independent newspaper resumes publication

Grozninskii rabochii was founded in 1917 and published consistently until 2002, except for the years of the deportations, 1944 to 1956. It became an independent newspaper in 1991 and was sponsored by the Soros Foundation. During the first two years of the present war, the paper was printed in Ingushetia, but in the summer of 2001 editor Musa Muradov started receiving threats and ceased publication in 2002. After a year of false starts, the paper resumed publication in March 2003. Now Grozninskii rabochii is being printed at the Izvestia publishing house in Moscow and has a circulation of 10,000 copies.

The content is an indicator of how many restrictions there are on a paper which focuses on and circulates in Chechnya. Unlike the liberal Moscow press such as Moskovskie novosti, Kommersant or Novaya gazeta, Groznenskii rabochii charts a very cautious course. For instance, the first issue for March 11, published the full text of the new constitution and pretended that the normalization of conditions in Chechnya is imminent.

Nevertheless, the paper presents authentic Chechen voices and discusses tough social issues from the perspective of the victim. The March 11 issue also contained a long article about psychological trauma among Chechen children and cited a study by the World Health Organization which found that 86 percent of the children surveyed in Chechnya had some kind of deviation from the norm. This compares with a 60 percent rate for children in the Chernobyl disaster zone.

The April 11 issue reported on the catastrophic infection rate of tuberculosis. The disease is spreading rapidly as men who became infected in detention are released without treatment, and then transmit tuberculosis to their families. Another article in the April issue describes how a woman is trying to reclaim her apartment in one of only three buildings in Grozny that have been restored. The building was privately owned by the tenants who had themselves worked on the construction of the site in the 1980s. The building was destroyed in two wars, but was recently rebuilt to attract refugees from Ingushetia. Now, a police cordon prevents the owners from reclaiming their apartments because other refugees were settled there arbitrarily. Another article contains excerpts of letters from recent immigrants which give a glimpse into the complexities and travails of obtaining a foreign passport for travel outside Russia, foreign visas, and political asylum in various European states.

## AZERBAIJAN

### Confusion as Election Looms

Presidential elections in Azerbaijan will be held on 15 October, with several registration deadlines fast approaching. Candidates must be registered between July 1 and August 16; by 17 July the Central Electoral Commission must be formed; and by 5 September the district electoral commissions should be in place. The official campaigns may begin on 16 August. (Zerkalo, 13 June 03)  
The political elite is still deciding whether to back the current president Heyder

Aliev or his son Ilham. The opposition also remains fractured among several potential candidates.

## Newly Independent States: Central Asia

By Joel Hafvenstein

### TURKMENISTAN

Time nearly up for ethnic Russians

Ten years ago, the Turkmen and Russian governments signed a protocol agreeing to give ethnic Russians in Turkmenistan dual citizenship — a measure which, at the time, seemed to be in Turkmenistan's interest, as it checked the exodus of educated, politically experienced citizens across the Caspian, and gained Russian approval as well. On 22 April, however, the autocratic Turkmen President, Saparmurat Niyazov, declared the era of dual citizenship over. Dual citizenship holders were given a mere two months to decide between keeping their Russian or Turkmen passports. Niyazov justified this policy by denouncing "scoundrels" and organized criminal elements who had taken advantage of dual citizenship to flee Turkmenistan or launder money through Russia. (INTERFAX, 23 Apr 03 via [www.times.kg](http://www.times.kg))

This unilateral repudiation of the 1993 citizenship agreement has disrupted an unusually constructive period in Russian-Turkmen relations. In early April, the two countries negotiated a 25-year deal on the purchase of huge quantities of Turkmen natural gas, at a price which would allow Russia to maintain low gas rates for domestic consumers while preserving its own, more expensive reserves for export to Europe. Niyazov apparently extracted Putin's consent to a revocation of dual citizenship — a process Putin seems to have assumed would take place gradually, during the negotiation process. Niyazov's deadline and rush

to proceed with the approval of his rubber-stamp parliament has left many Russians (in both Moscow and Turkmenistan) stunned and furious. Dmitri Rogozin, Foreign Affairs Chair of the Russian Duma, has accused the Turkmen President of planning a "mass deportation" of Russians, and darkly alluded to Turkmenistan's formerly cordial relations with the Taliban as further reason to sanction Niyazov's regime. (EURASIANET, 05 Jun 03 via [www.times.kg](http://www.times.kg))

As the 22 June deadline approaches, the Russian consulate in Ashgabat has been swamped by ethnic Russians frantically seeking exit visas. (ITAR-TASS, 1248 GMT, 09 Jun 03; FBIS-SOV-2003-0609 via World News Connection) Turkmenistan has a population of 4.7 million, of which an estimated 6.7 percent or 315,000 is ethnic Russian (WORLD FACTBOOK 2002 via [www.cia.gov](http://www.cia.gov)); nearly 100,000 of these Russians hold dual citizenship. This group is disproportionately represented among Turkmenistan's business, bureaucratic, and technical elites. They now face the dilemma of either renouncing their Turkmen citizenship and probably losing their jobs and assets, or renouncing their Russian citizenship, along with their "exit privileges," and being irrevocably isolated from the outside world.

Despite Turkmen assurances that the interests of former Russian citizens "will not be infringed" after 22 June, Russia is resisting the end of dual citizenship. It has declared that it will continue to "regard Russians living in Turkmenistan as its citizens and give them legal support until national procedures related to the renouncement protocol are complete." (INTERFAX, 1003 GMT, 09 Jun 03; FBIS-SOV-2003-0609 via World News Connection) Meanwhile, Rogozin has met pointedly with Turkmen opposition figures to confer on the "problems" of Turkmenistan and Russia's interests in the region. (INTERFAX, 0912 GMT, 09 Jun 03; FBIS-SOV-2003-0609 via World News Connection)

Niyazov's motives for repudiating the dual citizenship law and antagonizing Russia are not entirely clear. He laid the blame for an assassination attempt on

his life in November on a number of opposition leaders in exile, several of whom enjoy dual citizenship. (See NIS OBSERVED, 04 Dec 02) This may be yet another attempt to cripple that opposition. It might also merely be another stage in Niyazov's general efforts to isolate his country from any outside influences, leaving only his bizarre and ever-expanding cult of personality to fill the void. Former Russian citizens might, for example console themselves by reading yet another recently published volume of the President's verse, which inveighs against the three great social vices of "satiety, bragging, and internal disputes." (INTERFAX, 1507 GMT, 30 May 03; FBIS-SOV-2003-0530 via World News Connection) Niyazov, by his awkward and rushed handling of the issue has ensured that both internal and external disputes over dual citizenship will linger well after 22 June.

Both expansion and repression accelerate

The violent Islamic movements of Central Asia were physically and organizationally devastated by the 2001 American invasion of Afghanistan. Last summer, the seasonal attacks of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) into the Fergana Valley were notably absent, and 2003 has seen few signs of the group's revival. The states in the region are trying to take this opportunity to crush the purportedly non-violent but equally radical Hizb ut-Tahrir (HT), an Islamist organization that tirelessly propagandizes against the existing regimes in favor of a new trans-national Caliphate. Unlike the IMU, however, HT has flourished in the wake of American intervention. The prisons of Central Asia contain exponentially more HT members than they ever contained IMU guerrillas or al-Qaeda terrorists.

On 5 June, Tajikistan sentenced an HT activist to 14 years in a penal colony for anti-state activity, including distributing "Wahhabi" literature and "actively advocat[ing] the idea of turning the Central Asian countries into an Islamic state" — the twenty-third such arrest this year. (INTERFAX, 1106 GMT, 05 Jun 03;

FBIS-SOV-2003-0609; INTERFAX, 1106 GMT, 05 Jun 03; FBIS-SOV-2003-0606 via World News Connection) On June 6, Russian security forces detained 55 alleged members of an HT cell in Moscow, complete with explosives, detonators, and grenades. (ITAR-TASS, 1723 GMT, 09 Jun 03; FBIS-SOV-2003-0609 via World News Connection) Meanwhile, Kyrgyz security officials warned that HT was expanding rapidly throughout their country — not just the Fergana Valley as before, but into the north. (INTERFAX, 1130 GMT, 24 May 03; FBIS-SOV-2003-0524 via World News Connection)

It remains an open question — one of the most important in the region — whether this ever-expanding movement has resorted to violence as a means of bringing about its utopian Caliphate. The Russian discovery of a heavily-armed cell would suggest so; the FSB security services see this as evidence that HT seeks to implement "gradual Islamisation by using such methods as forcible introduction of shari'a forms of government, initially in Uzbekistan and neighbouring countries, and then in Russian regions populated mainly by Moslems." (ITAR-TASS, 1723 GMT, 09 Jun 03; FBIS-SOV-2003-0609 via World News Connection) It is curious, however, that in Central Asia there is still no clear evidence of HT embracing "forcible" means of introducing shari'a. Ideologically, HT professes the idea that only a Caliph could authorize militant jihad. Strategically, HT has sought to advance its cause by widespread dissemination of propaganda rather than violence. (See Jihad, by Ahmed Rashid, 2001) It has kept its distance from jihadi groups with which it has some areas of sympathy, such as the IMU and the Chechen rebels.

A Kyrgyz official recently repeated the long-standing government claim that "numerous facts suggested connections between the fanatic extremists and terrorists," in particular the discovery of Hizb ut-Tahrir leaflets in illegal arms caches. However, he admitted that "no explicit evidence of this group's involvement in terrorist acts committed in Kyrgyzstan has been obtained." (ITAR-TASS, 1257 GMT, 10 Jun 03; FBIS-SOV-2003-0610 via World News

Connection) Overall, despite a turn toward anti-Americanism since the war in Iraq began (see NIS OBSERVED, 23 Apr 03), and despite a clear ideological affinity with certain violent groups, there is still little evidence that Hizb ut-Tahrir has turned to violence as the means of its opposition to the present state structures. As such, the governments of Russia and Central Asia should consider whether repression of HT is really advisable: there is a significant danger of creating a self-fulfilling definition of HT as a terrorist organization.

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