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Newly Independent States: Caucasus

By Robyn Angley

GEORGIA

Clinton to Moscow, Vershbow to Tbilisi

US Assistant Secretary of Defense and former Ambassador to Russia Alexander Vershbow visited Tbilisi this week under the framework of the Georgian-US Charter on Strategic Partnership. While in Georgia, Vershbow reiterated American support for Georgia; unfortunately Vershbow's visit followed closely on the heels of a journey to Moscow by US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton in which Georgian issues largely were swept to the side, in favor of an emphasis on Russian-American cooperation.

Vershbow expressed support for Georgia's continued NATO aspirations, though couched in such vague terms that it was clear the United States supported Georgia's desire to join rather than its actual accession. "The intensification of Georgia's integration into NATO is an important process. We are going to elaborate a plan in order to strengthen Georgia's aspiration to the North Atlantic bloc." (1)

The Assistant Secretary also denied that Georgia would be a site for a future missile defense placement under Washington's recently revised missile defense shield project. Vershbow stated, "We are not going to station any anti-missile facilities on the territory of the states that are not NATO member[s]." (2)

Vershbow went on to affirm US support for Georgia's sovereignty and territorial integrity (3) and, refreshingly, stated forthrightly that Russia is not complying with

the ceasefire agreement negotiated after the South Ossetian conflict in August 2008. (4)

Vershbow's public statements differ from those made by Secretary of State Hillary Clinton during her recent visit to Moscow. Clinton affirmed that Washington and Moscow "would not see eye-to-eye on Georgia," but stopped short of reiterating US support for Georgia's territorial integrity or NATO aspirations, saying only, "We have made it clear that we will not recognize South Ossetia and Abkhazia." (5) While both Georgia's sovereignty and NATO aspirations have received devastating blows in the last eighteen months, Washington's decision to drop even rhetorical support for them in Moscow does not bode well for Tbilisi. Unfortunately for Georgia, what Clinton left unspoken more accurately reflects the policy of Georgia's American "ally" than anything Vershbow said or did.

Saakashvili endorses direct election of mayors in Tbilisi

President Mikheil Saakashvili announced during a speech to the United Nations General Assembly that Georgia has "committed to the direct election of mayors next year," (6) although whether the new process will apply to cities other than Tbilisi has not been clarified yet. The electoral change will allow non-parliamentary opposition parties, most of whom have renounced the few mandates they won in the 2008 elections, a fresh opportunity to challenge Saakashvili for popular support.

Irakli Alasania, head of the Alliance for Georgia party and former ambassador to the United Nations, has advocated that the opposition hold primaries in order to select a single candidate to compete against the as yet unnamed United National Movement choice. (7) Alasania already has stated his intention to enter the mayoral race. (8)

It remains unclear how the opposition will approach the 2010 local elections, although several opposition parties met on 15 October to determine a course of action, their efforts were unsuccessful. Previous incarnations of the non-parliamentary opposition groups fielded a joint candidate for the 2008 presidential elections, but since have become divided by inherent differences in their platforms, approaches and political ideologies. Whether even the most like-minded of the opposition party leaders can manage to overcome personal rivalries and other obstacles to pursue a united course of action is uncertain.

Converting the Tbilisi mayoralty into a directly elected position raises the possibility that an ambitious opposition leader, such as Alasania, could use it as a steppingstone to the presidency in the same way that Saakashvili did. As an opposition politician with a fledgling political party, Saakashvili won a seat on the Tbilisi City Council and, after making a deal with the Labor Party, secured the City Council Chairmanship. From that position, Saakashvili was able to pursue the imperative task (in Georgia) of winning support in the capital. He even broadcast a speech from his City Council office inviting citizens to demonstrate for the purpose of ousting former President Eduard Shevardnadze.

Based on his own experience, Saakashvili must be well aware of the possible power of popularly elected positions in the capital, one of two conclusions is possible. The president could be committed to promoting further democratic reforms, beginning with these changes to the election of municipal leaders, or he could be setting the opposition up to compete in an election it cannot win, either because it lacks public support or because there are plans to manipulate the vote. Either way, the 2010 local elections will indicate quite a bit about the direction of Georgia's government and the viability of the non-parliamentary opposition.

Source Notes:

- (1) "USA supports Georgia's bid to join NATO – official," Imedi, 0700 gmt. 20 Oct 09; BBC Monitoring via Lexis-Nexis.
- (2) "Georgian, US officials discuss cooperation issues in Tbilisi," Imedi, 1000 gmt, 20 Oct 09; BBC Monitoring via Lexis-Nexis.
- (3) "USA supports Georgia's bid to join NATO – official," ibid.
- (4) "Georgian, US officials discuss cooperation issues in Tbilisi," ibid.
- (5) "Remarks With Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov," 13 Oct 09, US Department of State via <http://www.state.gov/secretary/rm/2009a/10/130505.htm>.
- (6) "Mikheil Saakashvili, President of Georgia, 64th Session of the United Nations General Assembly," 25 Sep 09, President of Georgia website via <http://www.president.gov.ge/?l=E&m=0&sm=1&id=3041>.
- (7) "Alasania Says Supports Primaries for Single Mayoral Candidate," 5 Oct 09, Civil Georgia via <http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=21534&search=mayor>.
- (8) "Alasania to Run for Tbilisi Mayoral Office," 23 Sep 09, Civil Georgia via <http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=21491&search=>.

Newly Independent States: Central Asia

By Monika Shepherd

KYRGYZSTAN

Kyrgyz president restructures government, gets new cabinet and PM

On October 20, Kyrgyzstan's President Kurmanbek Bakiev announced his plans to restructure the government by reducing his current administration staff by forty to fifty percent; cutting the number of government ministries, agencies and services, and abolishing all state committees; dissolving the Security Council and granting its functions to the state advisor on security and law enforcement, instead; abolishing the drug control agency and handing its duties over to the interior ministry; eliminating a number of cabinet positions; and replacing the presidential administration with an "Institute of the President," which will include both the foreign minister (1) and the state advisor in charge of security and law

enforcement, as well as the secretariat and the central agency for development and investment. Bakiev also proclaimed that from now on: “All strategic decisions on matters of domestic and foreign policy will be made taking into account the opinion of the Presidential Council.” This council will be comprised of the prime minister, speaker of parliament, foreign minister, and state adviser on security and law enforcement, among others, and when necessary, will perform the functions of the now defunct Security Council. (2)

In other words, in one fell swoop, President Bakiev has made himself virtually the sole arbiter on all decisions regarding domestic and foreign policy, as well as defense and security. The president’s justification for these drastic “reforms” was twofold. First of all, by cutting his administration staff in half and streamlining the government, he would save the state US\$11.5 million. Secondly, he stated that the government structure had become “cumbersome and incapable of timely responding to crises and swift changes in the situation,” necessitating the replacement of a number of ministries with agencies. (3)

Following the president’s announcement, both the cabinet and prime minister offered him their resignations, leaving parliament with the tasks of ratifying the president’s suggested reforms and approving his nominees for the new cabinet and prime minister. (4) The leadership of parliament’s ruling party, Ak Zhol (Bright Path), is responsible for proposing prime ministerial nominees to the president. (5) However, since Ak Zhol overwhelmingly supports the president and his policies, it was a virtual certainty that its leaders would select a nominee who enjoyed the president’s full approval. The process of the prime ministerial candidate’s nomination and approval happened at warp speed: the same day that Bakiev announced his government reform plan and accepted resignations of the current cabinet and prime minister, Ak Zhol’s leading members proposed the nomination of Daniyar Usenov (6) (head of the presidential administration and former mayor of Bishkek) as prime minister; the following day, October 21, parliament voted to approve Usenov’s candidacy, and just hours later, the

president signed a decree making Usenov's new position official. (7) Usenov's first duty as the new prime minister was to present Bakiev's reform plan to parliament and ask for its ratification. (8) This also was accomplished in record time – on October 22, Usenov appeared before the Jogorku Kenesh and the draft of the president's new government structure was approved by more than a 75% majority. (9)

Parliament's next task will be to change the constitution to conform to the changes in the government structure, a chore that no doubt also will be dispatched quite speedily, unless the opposition is able to stir up a sufficient public outcry to give the president's supporters pause. This seems highly unlikely – Kyrgyzstan's citizens seem to have wearied of anti-government demonstrations and with his newfound power over law enforcement, coupled with the support of law and order advocate Daniyar Usenov, President Bakiev has gained an unprecedented ability to squelch even the hint of any sort of uprising.

In fact, thus far few of the opposition's most prominent leaders have reacted publicly to the president's latest and arguably, most dramatic, assertion of power. Azimbek Beknazarov accused the president of undertaking the reforms solely to increase his own power (10) and Temir Sariev, chair of the Ak-Shumkar party, exhorted the members of parliament not to ratify the president's plan until its proposals could be deemed to be in accordance with Kyrgyzstan's constitution, (11) an exhortation that clearly fell upon deaf ears.

Bakiev, aided and abetted by his lackeys in the Jogorku Kenesh, has granted himself the tools to become a dictator, in the finest tradition of his former and current Central Asian counterparts, Saparmurat Niazov (aka Turkmenbashi) and Islom Karimov. Based on his past attempts to rein in his opponents through the use of police harassment, arrests, and sundry other forms of political oppression, it seems inevitable that now he will use any means necessary to eradicate all opposition to his rule; by the next presidential election in Kyrgyzstan (should

Bakiev decide to participate in another such charade), he may well have succeeded in turning his country into a police state, with nothing but a whimper from his political opponents.

Source Notes:

- (1) "Kyrgyz ruling parliament faction to consider PM candidature," 21 Oct 09, ITAR-TASS via Lexis-Nexis Academic.
- (2) "Kyrgyz president extends power with overhaul of state structures," 20 Oct 09, RIA Novosti via Lexis-Nexis Academic.
- (3) Ibid.
- (4) "Kyrgyz government resigns over reform drive," 20 Oct 09, Agence France Presse via Lexis-Nexis Academic.
- (5) "Kyrgyz president signs decree to accept Cabinet's resignation," 20 Oct 09, ITAR-TASS via Lexis-Nexis Academic.
- (6) "Daniyar Usenov nominated candidate for Kyrgyzstan's PM," 20 Oct 09, ITAR-TASS via Lexis-Nexis Academic.
- (7) "Kyrgyz parliament approves president's ally as new premier," 21 Oct 09, RIA Novosti via Lexis-Nexis Academic.
- (8) "Daniyar Usenov appointed as Kyrgyz premier - presidential decree," 21 Oct 09, Central Asia General Newswire; Interfax via Lexis-Nexis Academic.
- (9) "Kyrgyz parliament approves new government structure," 22 Oct 09, AKIpress; BBC Worldwide Monitoring via Lexis-Nexis Academic.
- (10) Leila Saralayeva, "Kyrgyz opposition criticizes reform plans," 20 Oct 09, Associated Press Online via Lexis-Nexis Academic.
- (11) "Kyrgyz opposition leader says reforms should be in line with constitution," 20 Oct 09, 24.kg; BBC Worldwide Monitoring via Lexis-Nexis Academic.

Newly Independent States: Western Region

By Tammy Lynch

UKRAINE

In Ukraine, it's Artek and the election

On 19 October, Ukraine's presidential election campaign officially began. Instead of campaign flyers, advertisements and rallies during the first days of the campaign, voters witnessed ugly accusations of criminal behavior as allegations of sexual abuse have come to dominate the political discourse.

The week began with the blow-up of a scandal surrounding the state-run Artek children's health and recreation camp in Crimea. The back-story is complicated, sad, and confusing. But, the short version isn't much simpler.

In April, according to Ukraine's Prosecutor General Oleksandr Medvedko, the mother of two children accused the father of sexual abuse of their children while they stayed at the camp. (1) After a long battle with local law enforcement agencies to have her case taken seriously, an investigation was conducted and the father was arrested in mid-August. He is being held after being deemed a flight risk. (2)

This quickly has become far more than a case for the courts. Medvedko has charged that allegations dealing with the possible involvement of camp officials or workers were ignored. On 2 September, the PGO and Interior Ministry began examining these accusations. They also began looking into whether other children were targeted, as suggested by the victims. (3)

The Kyiv Post wrote: "[The children] said their adoptive father had accomplices, and that the assaults were videotaped. The police later confirmed this information, and also restored 32,000 pornographic photos and video clips" on the father's computer. (4) No officials or staff at the camp have been detained or arrested and all involved deny the charges.

Medvedko also confirmed that three parliamentary deputies are alleged to have been involved in criminal behavior at the camp, and also perhaps at an apartment in Kyiv. These allegations apparently originated with the father during an interrogation. (5) All three deputies fiercely deny the accusations.

The mother's attorney, Tetyana Montyan, a respected civil rights activist, told the media that the children identified the three deputies from photos. Medvedko confirmed the identifications, although the circumstances of these identifications are unclear. Medvedko made no mention of any photos or videos showing the MPs, but that does not exclude the possibility that they exist.

Two of the deputies say they have not been to the camp recently. One—former Minister of Economics Serhiy Teriokhin—railed against Montyan and law enforcement in an op-ed on Ukraine's *Ukrayinska Pravda* website. (6) He questioned why the investigation was made public before any findings were prepared in relation to the deputies' involvement (in fact, at the start of the investigation). He also offered to take a polygraph test live on television to prove his innocence, and demanded the children's mother take one, too.

The three accused are members of Prime Minister Yulia Tymoshenko's parliamentary bloc. Tymoshenko is running for president against opposition leader Viktor Yanukovich, who pushed for an investigation of this case, and President Viktor Yushchenko, who appointed the Prosecutor-General.

Medvedko also said that he did not receive any allegations regarding the three deputies' involvement until 13 October, five months after the first complaint and two months after the father's arrest. (7) President Yushchenko reportedly received an appeal for assistance on 7 October. (8)

The PGO announced that two deputies were questioned earlier in the week and the third was scheduled to be questioned shortly. Medvedko committed his office

to a complete investigation of the alleged events, in conjunction with the Interior Ministry, headed by Tymoshenko ally Yuriy Lutsenko.

Given that the investigation is ongoing, it is impossible to truly understand what is happening now and what really occurred at Artek. However, two things appear clear. At least two children were sexually abused at Artek, and their pain has now become fodder for a bitter election campaign. The first presidential election campaign since 2004's Orange Revolution has opened with a vitriolic political battle in Ukraine's parliament over the Artek situation, instead of a productive debate on a myriad of major issues facing the country.

A poll of 1,000 Ukrainians by the Gorshenin Institute of Management Problems found that 51.1% of respondents thought the claims of MPs' involvement in the Artek case were "sleazy political games." Thirty-five percent had no opinion. Approximately 80% also said the case would have no effect on their views of either Yanukovich's party or Tymoshenko's bloc. (9)

These responses are not surprising, given the already abysmal levels of voter trust in Ukraine's parliament. Repeated scandals, often involving alleged (and generally unproven) criminal activity, have severely undermined the body's public support. This is particularly true since a number of MPs implicated in the massive electoral fraud of 2004 continue to serve in parliament, as do MPs who have been accused of physical assaults, bribery, and other interesting charges.

Perhaps understanding that this case may not be providing the political lift anticipated, Ukraine's opposition shifted tactics almost immediately after hearing Medvedko's report, voting to raise pensions and wages with much fanfare.

It's doubtful that the Artek topic will go away for long, however. The election won't be held for another 90 days.

Source Notes:

- (1) “Child molestation, rape claims mark Ukraine vote campaign,” Reuters, 21 Oct 09; via Google News.
- (2) “Medvedko and Lutsenko Report About Sexual Abuse: Transcript,” Ukrayinska Pravda, 1911 CET, 20 Oct 09; via www.pravda.com.ua [in Ukrainian].
- (3) Ibid.
- (4) “Parliamentarians, others implicated in escalating child sex abuse scandal,” Kyiv Post, 15 Oct 09; via www.kyivpost.com.
- (5) “3 MPs in Controversial Child Molestation Case,” Ukrainiana, 19 Oct 09; via <http://tap-the-talent.blogspot.com/>.
- (6) Serhiy Teriokhin, Ukrayinska Pravda, 19 Oct 09; via www.pravda.com.ua
- (7) “Medvedko and Lutsenko Report About Sexual Abuse: Transcript,” Ukrayinska Pravda, 1911 CET, 20 Oct 09; via www.pravda.com.ua [in Ukrainian].
- (8) “Parliamentarians, others implicated in escalating child sex abuse scandal,” Kyiv Post, 15 Oct 09; via www.kyivpost.com.
- (9) “Scandal around Artek sleazy political games – poll,” Interfax, 20 Oct 09; via email.

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