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Russian Federation: Executive Branch

By Susan Cavan

PRESIDENCY

Yel'tsin weighing options in Primorsky Krai

Naming the local FSB chief as presidential representative in Primorye has apparently not led to a resolution of Kremlin disputes with the local governor, Yevgeni Nazdratenko. President Yel'tsin dispatched First Deputy Prime Minister Boris Nemtsov to the region to assess the situation and report back. In the wake of his visit, several options have been floated by members of the administration.

Nemtsov held a meeting with Nazdratenko during which he suggested that both the governor and his main local rival, the mayor of Vladivostok Viktor Cherepkov, step down and hold new elections for their posts to allow "other people" to replace them. (RTR, 15 Jun 97) Nazdratenko later responded by agreeing with the idea of early elections and announcing his intention to stand as a candidate. (RTR, 16 Jun 97)

While Yel'tsin has expressed support for early elections, his legal aide, Mikhail Krasnov, has also found constitutional justification for the president unilaterally to remove a governor from office. Citing Article 77's provision for a "unified system of executive power," Krasnov ignores the article's earlier statement that "The system of bodies of state power...is established ...independently in accordance with the fundamentals of the constitutional system of the Russian Federation...." Krasnov also referred to Article 80, which names the president as guarantor of the constitution. (RFE/RL Newline, 16 Jun 97) At the heart of this dispute is whether the president gave up his right to dismiss governors when he stopped appointing them and allowed for their election to office.

Other governors have entered the debate on this presidential right of dismissal. Konstantin Titov, governor of the Samara Oblast and leading member of Chernomyrdin's Our Home is Russia, has supported the administration's constitutional claims of a presidential prerogative to dismiss a governor. Eduard Rossel, governor of Sverdlovsk Oblast, has announced his firm opposition.

Despite the importance of the constitutional issue at stake in this tug-of-war between the Kremlin and Primorsky governor, there are elements of personality and animosity that reveal a more intimate character to this matter. As Anatoli Chubais recently stated, Nazdratenko should be compelled to bear "personal responsibility" for problems in the krai. (Monitor, 16 Jun 97)

APPARAT

Advisory councils axed in budget crunch

In apparent response to fiscal constraints, eight organs of the presidential apparat have been abolished or trimmed. Following the recommendations of a working group on reorganization established in September 1996, President Yel'tsin has issued an edict dissolving the following consultative organs: The Expert and Analysis Council; The Council for the Russian Language; the Coordinating Committee for Physical Culture, Sport and Tourism (once headed by presidential friend and tennis coach Shamil Tarpishchev); the Council of Heads of the Administration; the Council for Cossack Affairs; the Council for Scientific and Technical Policy; and the Expert Legal Council. In addition to the financial concerns cited for their dissolution, the duplication of authority among the many councils, long a feature of the Yel'tsin apparat, was also a factor in the reorganization. Without full text of the decree, it is difficult to determine whether this most recent restructuring has broader implications for the central members of the administration. (Rossiyskiye vesti, 27 May 97)

SECURITY SERVICES

New FSB structure decreed

The internal departmental structure of the Federal Security Service has been reorganized and ratified by presidential decree. While it is unclear who initiated this reorganization, media commentaries have suggested that the current leadership of the FSB was unaware of the effort until handed the decree. It is likely that former Moscow FSB chief and current deputy chief of the president's administration for personnel, Yevgeni Savostyanov, had some involvement in drafting the edict. The new departmental structure of the FSB is as follows:

Counterintelligence Department; Anti-terrorism Department; Analysis, Forecasting, and Strategic Planning Department; Organizational and Personnel Work Department; Support Services Department; Investigation and Curtailment of Criminal Organization Activity Directorate; Investigations Directorate; Operational Search Directorate; Operational Technical Measures Directorate; Personal Security Directorate of Affairs; Detention Center; and the Scientific Research Center. (Rosssiyskaya gazeta, 29 May 97)

GOVERNMENT

Khrenov fired, magazine dissolved

Yuri Khrenov, editor of the state-funded magazine Rossiyskaya federatsiya was fired in May after complaining about interference and rebukes from First Deputy Prime Minister Anatoli Chubais. While Khrenov claimed that Chubais' actions threatened a free press, Chubais retorted that Khrenov's removal had "nothing to do with freedom of the press." Chubais added however, "it is impossible to understand...a person who receives his salary from the government criticizing [the executive] in his publication." (RFE/RL Newslines, 12 Jun 97)

Khrenov would not have had much job security however, even if he had retained his post. In a government decision last week, the magazine ceased publication. Financial constraints were cited as the cause for the government's action.

Russian Federation: Foreign Relations

By Chandler Rosenberger

Will the U.S. send peacekeepers to protect Caspian pipeline? Russia objects

The Journal of Commerce reported on 5 June that the Clinton administration is considering sending troops to ensure the peace between Armenia and Azerbaijan. The report drew criticism from Moscow.

Under the reported plan, troops from the United States would join European and Russian forces in overseeing a settlement over the Armenian enclave of Nagorno-Karabakh. The enclave is on Azeri territory but has been occupied by Armenian forces.

A peace settlement in the enclave is crucial to successful construction of a pipeline for Caspian oil across Azerbaijan to Georgian ports on the Mediterranean Sea. The United States favors the route over an alternative through Russian territory. (Journal of Commerce, 5 Jun 97).

Russian security expert Colonel Aleksey Gordeychuk objected that the insertion of U.S. troops would reduce Russia's influence in the region. (ITAR-TASS, 6 Jun 97)

Primakov condemns plans to keep NATO as basis of European security

A NATO-based security system would "not suit Russia," according to Foreign Minister Yevgeni Primakov. Russia would rather see a new organization to be built upon the NATO-Russia accord, a Foreign Ministry spokesman quoting Primakov said.

The comments came on 10 June as Primakov was attending a conference in Montreux, Switzerland.

The ideal security system, Primakov was quoted as saying, would be one in which "NATO, Russia, the United States and so on will all be playing a role and at the same time there will be none of that NATO- centrism." (Interfax, 10 Jun 97)

A week later, British Prime Minister Tony Blair declared himself in favor of preserving NATO's leading role on the European continent. (Newshour, BBC World Service, 16 Jun 97).

Nemtsov concludes visit to Japan; Tokyo supports WTO entry for Russia

Russian Deputy Prime Minister Boris Nemtsov completed a three-day visit to Japan, during which the two nations agreed to pursue a number of economic projects.

The Russian and Japanese governments signed agreements on the extraction of oil and gas from the Sakhalin shelf and on the revival of the trans-Siberian railroad. The Japanese also agreed to back Russia's membership in the Paris Creditors' Club. (Rossiyskiye vesti, 11 Jun 97).

Nemtsov's Japanese hosts did not raise the issue of Russia's continued occupation of the Kuril Islands. Russia captured the islands at the end of World War II and has thus far refused to discuss returning them to Japan, despite significant pressure from Tokyo. Some Russian commentators feared that Tokyo would wait until the G-7 summit in Denver, to be held in July, before raising the issue. (Rossiyskiye vesti, 10 Jun 97)

A week before Nemtsov's visit, Japanese foreign ministry officials announced that Tokyo would support Russia's application to join the World Trade Organization. Japan's support, however, would come only provided Russia opened up its market further to international trade. (ITAR-TASS, 3 Jun 97)

Comment

Threats and bluffs over Caspian oil

Now that Russia has secured concessions from the West on NATO expansion, securing a favorable Caspian oil route has risen to the top of Moscow's foreign policy agenda. Countries that must be destabilized are subject to new threats, while troublesome republics, such as Chechnya and Ingushetia, are wooed.

Russia has, for example, attempted to disrupt peace talks between Georgian and Abkhaz leaders. Just as Georgian authorities were meeting anti-Russian Abkhaz leaders in Tbilisi, Moscow sponsored a "peace conference" that featured leaders of the pro-Russian, anti-Georgian forces in Abkhazia. As Pravda might have said, it is "no accident" that the two conferences fell on the same two days.

A week later, Russian Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin signed a memorandum with Chechen president Aslan Maskhadov to ensure the safe passage of Caspian oil through Chechnya on its way to the Russian port of Novorossiisk. The seriousness of Russian interest in the region can be measured by the recent promotion of Boris Agapov, the former Vice President of Ingushetia, to the post of Security Council Deputy Secretary. Agapov, according to Council Secretary Ivan Rybkin, will handle "emergency situations."

The overtly imperial manner with which Russia pursues its national interests in the Caucasus makes White House plans to send in peacekeepers seem naive in the extreme. If, as the Journal of Commerce reported, the Clinton administration is seriously considering a joint Russian, European and American military engagement for the region, one must feel sorry for the U.S. troops to be dispatched. Their mission will be yet another hunt for historical ghosts, all too much like the American quelling of Balkan "ancient ethnic hatreds." The Russians, on the other hand, will have real, live human targets and a clear agenda.

Russian Federation: Political Parties, Legislative Branch, and Media

By Michael Thurman

FEDERAL ASSEMBLY

Federation Council speaker calls the Russia-NATO agreement "a diplomatic form"

The main questions for Russia are the non-deployment of nuclear weapons in new member-countries and a guarantee that bases even for conventional weapons will not be deployed there. "If this is what was agreed upon at the Wednesday talks, Russia can join NATO itself and work in the alliance," Stroyev said. Does this mean eternal peace in Europe or a Russian veto in a security organization of which it is not a member? (Interfax, 14 May 97)

Yel'tsin supports increased power of Federation Council

Criticizing the Duma's legislative activity, the president expressed the view that the situation can be altered by enhancing the role of the Federation Council and its active participation in introducing order into lawmaking activities. The president believes the Federation Council should "make more exacting demands on laws coming from the State Duma." (ITAR-TASS, 14 May 97)

This argument is not a new one, but fundamental constitutional changes would be required. It is unclear, and rather doubtful, if the Duma would sanction an institutional diminution of its already meager power. But playing inter-cameral favorites might help Yel'tsin prevent both houses of the Federal Assembly from ganging up on him.

Presidential edict requires public officials to report their incomes

A draft decree prepared on the initiative of First Deputy Prime Minister Boris Nemtsov states that all persons taking official positions, including the president, members of the Cabinet, the Federation Council and the State Duma, officials in federal, regional and local self-government authorities agree to provide information about their incomes and property.

Under the draft decree, the president must be handed summarized information about the declarations by 1 July. All state officials will bear accountability, going as far as facing dismissal, for failing to respect the deadline or turning in false information about their incomes and property.

Income includes movables and real estate, including planes, helicopters, cutters or other sea or river transport vehicles. No word is made on limiting evasion or other creative accounting methods for public officials. (Interfax, 9 May 97).

MEDIA

Russian nationalities minister calls for more use of media

Minister Vyacheslav Mikhailov said that, "the image of Russia and the history of our once common history presented in numerous CIS member states, in particular by their mass media, is distorted... If this goes on, Russia may find itself surrounded by hostile...countries." The solution is the creation of "balance" by broadcasting Russian opinion into the homes of CIS countries. It seems clear that the minister feels that local media are not capable of unbiased reporting.

"Television programs should be exchanged on equal terms and a federal channel should be created on the basis of regional and zonal blocs. It could later become a CIS interstate channel," said Minister Mikhailov. (Interfax, 13 May 97)

Russian Federation: Armed Forces

By Lt. Col. Cathy Dreher and CDR John G. Steele

Government directive on nuclear power safety talks signed with Iran

A government directive was signed in May stating that talks would be held between the Russian Federal Inspectorate for Nuclear and Radiation Safety and the Iranian Nuclear energy organization on cooperation in the field of safety regulation in the process of the peaceful use of nuclear power in the Islamic Republic of Iran. (Rossiyskaya gazeta, 10 Jun 97)

Sergeyev on planned military reform

Defense Minister Sergeyev is actively promoting his concept of military reform. Several interviews pieced together give a picture of what he is trying to do:

(1) He believes "the most important thing is to remove shortcomings in budget financing of the armed forces." How does he intend to accomplish his goals? Personnel optimization is essential for reform, and having done so, "the burden to the budget of maintaining personnel will be eased," he said. At the moment the burden is unthinkable, the minister said. Over 60% of the money earmarked for the armed forces is spent on allowances, food and salaries.

(2) He said it is extremely important to free resources and redirect them to research and design work so that the country will have models for a new generation of weapons and start serial production of them in five or seven years. Spending on control systems and officers assigned to monitor defense contracts at companies will be cut. He said that, at 40% of plants delivering equipment to the rocket forces, there are two such officials: one representing the Rocket Forces and the other the Space Forces. Such overlapping is unjustified, the minister said.

(3) Another important task, he said, is to keep the combat-ready units which have an infrastructure, reliable equipment, and arms. On the basis of such units, Russia could have the military units of the future by 1998. To accomplish this he said optimization of the Strategic Rocket Forces and the Space Forces, a more

rational organization of the command, should increase deterrence efficiency by 10-15%, as determined by independent experts. Optimization is not just sweeping personnel cuts.

His overall plans call for restructuring the services from their current five down to three services. Not naming the future structures, Sergeyev reported that the planned defense reform will focus "on two components -- strategic forces of deterrence and general purpose troops." At present, Russia's armed forces comprise five services: strategic missile troops, ground troops, the navy, ABM, and air force.

Meanwhile, Russian military experts have explained to Interfax that in the future Russia's armed forces will consist of air defense troops (ABM and air force included) general purpose troops (infantry and naval units included) and aerospace troops (strategic missile and some ABM and air force elements included). (Interfax, 9,11,12 Jun 97)

Ukraine moves towards NATO bid

Ukraine appears to be moving slowly towards a bid for NATO membership. (Monitor, 9 Jun 97)

Comment

The Belarus/Russia "Union" treaty, as well as sovereignty issues in the Crimea, seem to be pushing Ukraine towards the West. NATO membership is perceived (by some Europeans) as a guarantee that the collapse of the Soviet Union is irreversible. Ukrainian membership in NATO would not be looked upon favorably by the Russians, but the Ukrainians may see it as the only long-term option to maintain their independence.

Sergeyev's reform proposals earn presidential backing

Yel'tsin has given his blessing to early reform plans of General Igor Sergeev. The plans (as yet rather vague) involve reorganization and some infrastructure reduction. They also include plans for four (ill-defined) "rapid-response/combined arms" formations ("units of the future") -- one to be stationed in the Far East, one in the north Caucasus and two near Moscow. (Monitor, 10 Jun 97; Reuters, 11 Jun 97)

Comment

Actual cuts in force structure have proven politically difficult in the past. Any substantive decisions are bound to be political minefields. The location of these new units is interesting in that half this leading edge force will be stationed around Moscow, hundreds of miles from the nearest frontier (and threat, one would suppose).

Suicide rate in services more than doubles

The suicide rate in the Russian armed forces has more than doubled, from 15 per 100,000 in 1991 to 36 per 100,000 now. (RFE/RL Newswire, Jun 97)

Comment

This is a very damning statistic, and it's not just hazed conscripts. Lately several officers have committed suicide, allegedly in protest over non-payment of wages and lack of career prospects.

Newly Independent States: CIS

By Mark Jones

Interparliamentary Assembly meets in St. Petersburg

A plenary session of the CIS Interparliamentary Assembly was held in St. Petersburg on 8 June 1997. The session was attended by delegations from all CIS member states except Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan-- the only CIS state

which has not joined the Assembly. Ukrainian delegates participated as observers. The meeting was led by CIS Assembly Chairman and Head of the Council of Federation of Russia's Federal Assembly, Yegor Stroyev, and worked to sign some 15 documents concerning "important problems." According to ITAR-TASS (8 Jun 97), the most heated debates were over three bills: on border troops, on state borders and on military training.

CIS assembly, European Council's PACE sign agreement

In a related story, Interfax reported on 9 June 1997 that a cooperation agreement was concluded between the CIS Interparliamentary Assembly and its European Council's counterpart PACE (Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe). According to the document, the assemblies "will exchange ... documents including reports and other official papers so that they are fully updated on each other's activities." Yegor Stroyev was beaming about this agreement because he feels it provides a certain level of international legitimacy to the assembly. In his view a European organization is finally treating the commonwealth as an equal. Unfortunately for Mr. Stroyev, other events, including the signing of the Russia-Belarus charter and other bilateral agreements as well as the progressive fractionalization of the CIS, continue to undermine the legitimacy of the commonwealth in international affairs.

Peacekeeping proves fatal

"Peacekeeping" duty proved fatal for 23 Russian soldiers in Georgia during the first week of June. Interfax reported on 3 June 1997 that a Russian armored vehicle carrying 13 peacekeepers was destroyed by a remote-controlled bomb. The fact that a remote-controlled device was used shows the attack was premeditated and the deaths were not the result of a simple accident. It may also indicate that the Abkhazians are making good on their threats to attack any soldiers who attempt to increase the size of the CIS-patrolled and -controlled peacekeeping zone.

Interfax also reported that, on 2 June 1997, a Russian sergeant on duty in Abkhazia shot and killed 10 of his colleagues and wounded three others. No motive was given, but the incident does not reflect a high state of morale among the peacekeepers.

In a related story, Yusop Soslambekov, president of the Confederation of the Peoples of the Caucasus, said his organization is ready to send volunteers from the North Caucasus to the Georgian-Abkhaz conflict zone if the CIS peacekeeping force leaves. (Interfax, 10 Jun 97)

CIS border troop commanders sign 13 cooperation documents

CIS border troop commanders held a meeting chaired by the chief of the Russian Border Troops on 4 June 1997 and signed a number of cooperation documents. The key document was a draft agreement on cooperation among CIS border troops to "ensure efficient border controls with countries which are not CIS member states." The agreement will be presented for approval at the next Heads of State meeting.

Other documents signed concerned measures "to enhance border cooperation, carry out special border guard operations Rubezh (Border) '97 and create an information network linking all CIS border troops." (ITAR-TASS, 4 Jun 97)

CIS intelligence chiefs meet

The Tbilisi newspaper Svobodnaya gruziya reported on 6 May 1997 that a meeting of directors of the security authorities and intelligence services of the CIS countries occurred in Georgia. Lieutenant General Shota Kviriaia, minister of state security of Georgia, was elected to the office of chairman of the CIS Council of Secret Services. When asked what was discussed, LTG Kviriaia was evasive -- "Our discussion was strictly confidential, professional, and top-secret. I can say just one thing. The main item on the agenda was the question of international terrorism and the interaction of the security authorities in combating it." Without

noting further details of the top-secret meeting, it is interesting to point out that a Georgian was elected to chair an organization dedicated to CIS security matters.

Newly Independent States: Caucasus

By Miriam Lansky

ARMENIA

Oil pipeline to traverse Armenia? Armenian rights to Caspian reserves?

Turkey's ambassador to Georgia, Tewfik Okiauz, gave a favorable assessment of constructing a pipeline from Azerbaijan to the Turkish port Ceyhan across Armenian territory. "There are no reasons why the oil pipeline could not run via Armenia. This is the cheapest and shortest route to Ceyhan and one fine day it will happen," he told Armenian journalists. The possibility of a "friendship pipeline" that would constitute part of the settlement of the Nagorno-Karabkh dispute has been occasionally broached in the past. However the latest Armenian effort to gain inclusion into the lucrative oil trade no longer rests on the premise of a Karabakh settlement nor does it presuppose Azerbaijani ownership of Caspian deposits. Rather, the Armenian parliament has moved to ratify the 1982 UN Law of the Sea, under which, if the Caspian is a sea, "Armenia could demand of the coastal states transit for an outlet to it and could also seek to realize the right to joint exploitation of the natural marine resources as the common heritage of all humanity." (Interfaks-AiF, 19-25 May 97) At the same time, the foreign ministry is developing a proposal for inclusion in the group of maritime countries and participation in the oil development projects. Should Armenia become a participant in the group of five Caspian states, it will tip the balance in that group away from Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan and in favor of Armenia's allies -- Russia and Iran. If Armenia succeeds in its push for oil, it will have even fewer incentives to accommodate Azeri concerns in Nagorno-Karabakh.

No progress in OSCE negotiations

The latest initiative on Nagorno-Karabakh presented by three OSCE Minsk group co-chairmen Valentin Lozinsky (Russia), Strobe Talbott (US), and Jacques Bleau (France) was rejected in Yerevan and Stepanakert. The Armenians rejected the principle of territorial integrity, as stated in reference to Nagorno-Karabakh at the OSCE Lisbon conference in the Fall of 1996. They continue to oppose any subordination of Nagorno-Karabkh to Azerbaijan. The details of the proposal were kept confidential. (ITAR- TASS, 31 May 97)

Parliament passes Defense Law

On 25 May a Defense Law that explicitly allows the stationing of foreign troops on Armenian territory was adopted by the Armenian parliament. (Interfax, 29 May 97) Armenia already accommodates a Russian military base and, unlike Georgia, has given legitimacy to their presence.

AZERBAIJAN

IBRD studies cost of Baku port reconstruction

The International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD) has estimated that the cost of modernizing Baku's dilapidated port facilities will be in the neighborhood of \$52 million. It was announced that the terms and exact magnitude of the loan from the IBRD would be the subject of subsequent negotiations. One outstanding issue holding up the project is obtaining an accurate projection of the sea level in the Caspian. The Caspian has been subject to a great deal of dumping from coastal states and from military waste from the Volga river and has seen a steady rise in its sea level. A Danish firm has estimated that it will rise two meters over the next fifty years, which would flood the proposed port buildings and nearby facilities. Azerbaijani scientists believe that it will not rise by more than one meter. (Zerkalo, 7 Jun 97) Environmental factors such as the possibility of radioactive materials in some oil wells, the rise of the sea level, and the erosion of the sturgeon population pose environmental dilemmas and obstruct the oil projects already underway.

Aliev and Nazarbaev sign two memoranda on oil

On June 11 President Heydar Aliev of Azerbaijan and President Nursultan Nazarbaev of Kazakhstan signed memoranda on cooperation in oil equipment construction and oil transport to world markets. According to the agreement Kazakh oil will travel by tanker to Baku, from there it will travel to Georgia's Black Sea coast and then to Bulgaria, Turkey and Ukraine. Eventually a pipeline under the Caspian can replace the tanker traffic there and connect to the other proposed pipeline routes. (Turan, 11 Jun 97)

Kazakhstan has relied on Russia's Novorossiisk line, which besides its low capacity has sustained breaks, leaks and a general state of decay. This line has proven insufficient to deliver even half of the oil produced at Kazakhstan's Tengiz oil field to the market. The proposed route to Turkey, Ukraine and Bulgaria should alleviate the bottleneck at the Novorossiisk line.

GEORGIA

Russians signal willingness to pull out of Abkhazia

Yel'tsin's press secretary Sergei Yastrezhembzky has stated that Russia may comply with Georgian demands to remove its peacekeepers. While commenting on Georgia's parliamentary resolution calling for the withdrawal of peacekeepers in August if they continue to fail to enforce their mandate, Yastrezhembzky said that the Georgian resolution "forces us to evaluate the utility of the continued presence of the peacekeepers in the conflict zone" (Nezavisimaya gazeta, 4 Jun 97)

This comment came on the heels of two fatal incidents in the conflict zone. On 1 June a Russian peacekeeper killed ten of his colleagues and himself. On the following day a Russian APC was destroyed by a remote-controlled bomb, killing one and seriously wounding one of the 13 peacekeepers on board.

Tension in the conflict zone has been rising steadily over the last two months as the Abkhaz have opposed the implementation of the expanded peacekeeping mandate. Vladislav Ardzinba's visit to Moscow in early June, when he met with Yevgeni Primakov, did not bring about any evolution of Abkhazia's stand: On 9 June Ardzinba proposed that Georgia and Abkhazia sign a peace treaty similar to the Chechen-Russian treaty, but refused to discuss particulars of the settlement until the economic sanctions imposed by the CIS against Abkhazia are eased. (Ekho Moskvyy, 9 Jun 97) As a result, President Shevardnadze's recent conciliatory proposals (see last Digest) have not been met by similar Abkhaz moves.

Recent statements from both sides contribute to the impression that a new wave of violence may be imminent if the peacekeepers withdraw. An Abkhaz representative has suggested that "peacekeepers" from the Confederation of the Peoples of the North Caucasus take over for the Russian presence. (Nezavisimaya gazeta, 5 Jun 97) This shadowy group was instrumental in delivering arms and mercenaries to the Abkhaz in 1992-1993 and was implicated in the December 1996 murder of Red Cross personnel in Chechnya. For its part, Georgia has announced that it will hold large-scale military exercises involving 10,000 armed forces personnel in late June or early July. (ITAR-TASS, 11 Jun 97)

The Chechens, who aided Abkhazia in the past, have recently pledged to honor Georgia's territorial integrity. Ahmed Zakayev, a security aide for Maskhadov, characterized Georgia as "Chechnya's main strategic partner," and went on to say that "Chechnya cannot agree with the fact that the Abkhazian leadership is today obviously striving to strike an alliance with Russia to the detriment of general Caucasian interests." (ITAR-TASS, 3 Jun 97) This is not tantamount to a pledge to aid Georgia should war erupt. Nor have Georgia's other "strategic partners," Ukraine and Azerbaijan, announced any such commitment. Georgia may yet again find itself alone against Russia and its Abkhaz clients.

Newly Independent States: Central Asia

By Monika Shepherd

TAJIKISTAN

Remainder of Sodirov's militia still under siege

As of 13 April, Rezvon Sodirov and his three remaining supporters were still believed to be hiding in the Surkh Gorge, 80 km southeast of Dushanbe in the Vakhshskii Mountain Ridge (between the towns of Nurek and Rogun), although Sodirov and his men had not been spotted in three days. A Tajik military source refuted the rumor that Sodirov had managed to escape to Afghanistan or Kyrgyzstan, saying that the joint government-UTO force had sealed off all possible exits from the gorge. Presumably the reason that the troops had lost sight of Sodirov's group was that, due to heavy rains and the risk of landslides, search operations had been stalled for a few days. Furthermore, the troops had been instructed not to fire on the area where Sodirov was believed to be hiding, because Tajik government authorities wanted the men taken alive. The group was also known to be holding a local resident hostage to act as their guide (Interfax, 13 Apr 97), so perhaps the troops' reluctance to shoot was also partially out of concern for the man's safety.

At the beginning of April there were rumors that Rezvon Sodirov and his younger brother Fathiddin (who was wounded by the joint government-UTO forces in March) had been killed, but Ghaffar Mirzoev, commander of the Tajik Presidential Guard (one of the government units involved in tracking Sodirov) flatly denied these rumors. Responding to another rumor, presidential press spokesman Zafar Saidov denied reports that Mirzoev had supplied Sodirov's group with a truckload of ammunition two weeks beforehand (Clandestine Voice of Free Tajikistan, 3 Apr 97).

Comment

Residents of a local village reported seeing Sodirov a few days before, close to the time that the troops lost sight of him, so perhaps the gorge was not sealed tightly enough.

7th round of inter-Tajik peace talks postponed

Opening ceremonies for the 7th round of inter-Tajik peace negotiations were held in Tehran on 9 April (IRNA, 9 Apr 97) but later that afternoon Akbar Turajonzoda, deputy leader of the UTO, informed journalists that the talks had been temporarily suspended due to the detention of 11 UTO members in Moscow. The UTO members were accused of having participated in terrorist actions against Russian military personnel serving in Tajikistan. Turajonzoda stated that the UTO wanted all charges against the men to be dropped, in accordance with the general amnesty that was to take effect in Tajikistan within the next month. Foreign Minister Talbak Nazarov, the head of the Tajik government delegation at the peace talks, denied any knowledge of the 11 UTO members' arrest (ITAR-TASS, 9 Apr 97).

On 10 April, UTO leader Said Abdullo Nuri issued a signed statement in which he blamed the Tajik government for the break in the peace negotiations. He accused the Tajik government of asking Moscow authorities to arrest the men (one of whom was a member of the UTO negotiating team) and labeled their action a "political provocation." He also charged the Tajik government with violating the 1995 Almaty cease-fire by executing two UTO supporters who were due to be released in the failed 7 April POW exchange (ITAR-TASS, 10 Apr 97).

Maksim Peshkov, head of the Russian commission for Tajik settlement, responded to Nuri's statements by saying that only one UTO member was being detained by Moscow's law enforcement authorities, and that the man could not be released, based on the gravity of the charges against him (ITAR-TASS, 10 Apr 97).

Nuri's next course of action was to order all UTO commanders to cease having any contact with representatives of the Tajik government (Clandestine Voice of Free Tajikistan, 11 Apr 97).

On 16 April the peace negotiations resumed, only to be canceled again the following day. The peace talks were then rescheduled for 16 May, in Tehran, at which time the legalization of Tajikistan's opposition parties will be considered (ITAR-TASS, 18 Apr 97). Turajonzoda again made a statement in which he blamed the Tajik government for the negotiations' abrupt end, citing the arrest of the 11 UTO members, as well as the Tajik government's refusal to set a date for the legalization of the opposition parties as the two main reasons for the UTO's decision to postpone the negotiations. He also demanded that the 11 UTO supporters be released from prison and that the charges against them be dropped completely, before the negotiations resumed (Clandestine Voice of Free Tajikistan, 18 Apr 97).

Comment

Turajonzoda fears that the Tajik government is trying to shut the opposition, particularly the Islamic Renaissance Party, out of the government by limiting the opposition's political activities to such an extent that when new elections are held, most of the opposition candidates will have had so little time to gather support that they will win few if any seats in the new government. Turajonzoda seems to believe that the Tajik government is mainly interested in the military aspect of the peace agreements, which call for the UTO's forces to be disarmed and integrated into the government's armed forces. This is a legitimate concern, especially since the disarmament of the UTO's forces is to be completed long before new elections are held and could indeed deprive the UTO leaders of considerable leverage in the transitional government.

UN to consider sending peacekeepers to Tajikistan

After a meeting with President Rahmonov on 21 April, Gerd Dietrich Merrem, the UN Secretary-General's Special Envoy to Tajikistan, told journalists that not only will the number of UN observers in Tajikistan be increased (at present there are 45), but that the UN Security Council is to consider whether to send peacekeeping forces to Tajikistan at its next meeting in June. Merrem also said that General Franklin van Hapken, the UN secretary-general's military adviser on peacekeeping, was in Dushanbe to hold discussions with representatives of the UTO and the Tajik government on ways of carrying out the military agreements that had been signed thus far. Should the Security Council decide to send UN peacekeeping troops to Tajikistan, it would most likely be in order to aid in the implementation of the military protocol which was signed in March (Radio Tajikistan Network, 22 Apr 97).

President Rahmonov survives assassination attempt

On 30 April, President Emomali Rahmonov was injured when a man threw a grenade at him in the city of Khujand (the administrative center of Leninobod Province in northern Tajikistan). Two people were killed in the attack and 49 injured. Rahmonov was wounded in the leg. The man who threw the grenade, Firdaws Dustboboev, is rumored to have been one of the organizers of the May 1996 anti-government demonstrations in Khujand. He was immediately taken into custody by local security forces (ITAR-TASS, 30 Apr 97).

Abdunabi Sattorzoda, deputy leader of the UTO negotiating team, suggested that the attack on President Rahmonov might have been an act of retaliation for the government's recent crackdown on a riot in the Khujand prison during which more than 20 inmates were killed, including two of the riot's organizers (ITAR-TASS, 30 Apr 97).

The Khujand prison held at least 800 inmates (it was originally designed to hold only 300), 100 of whom seized control of the building to protest conditions in the prison. On 15 April they took four guards hostage and, in return for their release,

demanded that trials be granted to those inmates who had not yet been sentenced, that a number of ill and disabled inmates be released or hospitalized, and that the Ministry of Internal Affairs rescind its decision to transfer a number of the prisoners to southern Tajikistan, where prison conditions were rumored to be much worse (RFE/RL Newline, Apr 97). Tajik authorities did attempt briefly to negotiate with the leaders of the prison takeover, but negotiations broke down quickly (Interfax, 21 Apr 97), and on 18 April special police units stormed the prison, killing 17-30 inmates, including two of the protest's leaders, Jamshed Abdushukurov and Ikrom Ashurov. Ashurov and many of the other inmates were political prisoners who had been incarcerated for the roles they played in the 1996 anti-government demonstrations in Khujand (Clandestine Voice of Free Tajikistan, 18 Apr 97).

The leaders of both the National Revival Bloc (led by former prime minister, Abdumalik Abdullojonov) and of the Democratic Party of Tajikistan condemned the Dushanbe government for the way in which it handled the prison protest (Clandestine Voice of Free Tajikistan, 23 Apr 97).

Comment

Abdumalik Abdullojonov's party has a fair amount of support in Khujand and also has good relations with the UTO. The Khujandis undoubtedly continue to hope that they will be able to regain at least some influence in the Tajik government. Abdullojonov has been lobbying for a voice on the National Reconciliation Commission and at first it seemed as though President Rahmonov was willing to grant the National Revival Bloc a few seats (which would have come out of the UTO's share of seats) on the commission, but he has since changed his mind. If the Khujandis are completely shut out of the transition government, "terrorist" attacks on President Rahmonov and his administration may well become a common phenomenon.

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