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The ISCIP Analyst

2005-03-04

The ISCIP Analyst, Volume X, Issue 3

<https://hdl.handle.net/2144/11801>

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Russian Federation: Executive Branch

By Susan Cavan

PRESIDENCY

Get tougher!

At a cabinet meeting on February 21, President Putin instructed Interior Minister Rashid Nurgaliyev to "get tougher" on "bandits" in the Caucasus (for a more detailed discussion of MVD activities, which Nurgaliyev reported to Putin at this meeting, please see Security Services below). (1) The only surprising thing about this admonition is that Putin hasn't taken his own advice.

While Putin's response to September's jarring attack in Beslan – holding an hours' long meeting with foreign journalists, specialists, and academics and then turning inward to attack Russia's diffusion of governance (such as it was) by tightening vertical control over the regions -- is strikingly weak, certainly by Putin's standards, for those who wonder how long the rule of the sword (and the shield) will last, it is a red flag. Hence we see evidence of opposition to Putin unimagined since the electoral rout of the 2003 parliamentary elections: Dissatisfaction and criticism with the handling of the Beslan hostage crisis, especially among the families of the children; the failure and attendant criticism of administrative reform; Ukraine's rejection of Putin's attempts to influence voters in their presidential election; pensioners taking to the streets throughout Russia to protest the monetization of benefits; cracks in the cohesion of the Kremlin apparat, as insiders tussle for authority; and, perhaps most surprisingly, the appearance of an opposition candidate a full three years before the next (scheduled) presidential election.

Former Prime Minister Mikhail Kasianov did not, apparently, call a press conference to announce as a potential contender in 2008, but rather to publicize his new consultancy endeavor. (2) Nonetheless, Kasianov not only dropped a "coy" hint at presidential ambitions by responding to a direct question on his presidential ambitions with "everything is possible;" he went further in his criticism of the current executive, "The main thing is that whoever comes to power [in the next election] spearheads a movement toward democratic values." (3)

Already, analysts are handicapping Kasianov's chances and, again, a familiar name surfaces as the potential kingmaker. Andrei Ryabov of the Carnegie Moscow Center claims, "If Kasianov means business, Anatoli Chubais will back him." (4) It is interesting to note that among Kasianov's perks, remnants of his tenure as Prime Minister, are not only bodyguards and his Moscow residence, but "a direct line to the Kremlin." (5)

What is not disclosed however, is just who answers at the other end of Kasianov's Kremlin hotline.

Within the Kremlin, there are traces of infighting, which appear magnified when compared to the remarkable stillness of apparat waters during most of Putin's administration. The division between "liberal economists" and siloviki has been evident for some time; there is now, however, actual cross-pollination of spheres as economists venture into the security sphere (as in the case of P.M. Fradkov addressing MVD and FSB officials) and siloviki (such as presidential aide Viktor Ivanov) hold forth on the tariff regime before the Customs Service. (6) Speculation over the cause of past appointments (e.g., Dmitri Kozak being transferred to the Caucasus in order to get him out of Moscow) and rumors of new personnel moves (apparently, current Drug Czar Viktor Cherkesov is anxious for a higher profile post and has his eyes on the FSB chief spot) are as rampant today as they were during any of Yel'tsin's unfathomable absences

throughout his administration. If access to the texts of decrees was as open today as it was in the nineties, it would be interesting to compare the number of decrees promulgated now to those that would appear during any of the famous Yel'tsin "holidays." The variety of decrees and, in particular, the number issued that directly contradicted those issued just days earlier, provided a remarkable "kremlinological" tool for gauging the membership and relative strength of apparat factions.

Putin's missteps in Ukraine, inaction and inability to protect Russian citizens, (especially in southern Russia), and curtailing of democratic development, which garnered heavy international criticism, have left him weakened, and there appear to be few rallying to rebuild his tarnished image. For some, Putin likely burnt bridges of support after turning on the financial kingpins behind the "Family" that brought him to power; for others, Putin is either too weak or slow in bringing the military in line with the "security agenda," and, of course, there are those who have continued simply to toil in the economic and financial minefields as Russia lurches (on the back of its oil reserves) toward a vigorous GDP. None of these groups have a particular urgent motivation to prop up Putin's sagging administration. However, that does not mean that they will not find suitable motivation should a threatening political force appear.

Putin, on his own (or Putinists, sinn féin)

The reverberations from Ukraine's Orange Revolution are still echoing across Central Eurasia, but if Kommersant has its story right (and there is some debate about that), then Putin and his team already have set to work creating a mass student organization to replace the "Walking Together" movement. Nashi, or Our Own is being organized by Kremlin Deputy Chief Vladislav Surkov, together with Walking Together's creator, Vasili Yakemenko. Surkov has reportedly met with youth activists in St. Petersburg to formulate the foundation of a movement that will have branches in major urban areas across Russia and hopes someday to boast a membership of 200-250,000.

Funding reportedly will be provided by Kremlin-favored oligarchs, who hope their business interests will benefit from a stable Putin administration. Perhaps Surkov and these Putin supporters hope that any mass demonstrations by students in Russia can be diverted through an alternative source of young, urban groups controlled, at least politically, by the Kremlin (or one faction therein).

Source Notes:

(1) RTR Russia TV, 1100 GMT, 21 Feb 05; BBC Monitoring via Lexis-Nexis.

(2) The Moscow Times, 25 Feb 05 via ISI Emerging Markets Database.

Kasianov's new consulting agency, MK-Analytika will, no doubt, benefit from the publicity attending his announcement, but if opposition to Putin was not "bankable," Kasianov would not have employed this tactic.

(3) Ibid.

(4) Gazeta, 25 Feb 05; What the Papers Say (WPS) via ISI Emerging Markets Database.

(5) Ibid.

(6) Gazeta.ru website, 17 Feb 05; BBC Monitoring via Lexis-Nexis.

(7) Kommersant, 21 Feb 05; WPS via Lexis-Nexis. Ekho Moskvyy, 21 Feb 05 had a report of the new movement, "Nashi," drawn from the Kommersant report, but also ran comments by the alleged founder of the new movement (and former head of Walking Together, Vasili Yakemenko, that "what Kommersant is saying is simply ridiculous." (Ekho Moskvyy, 21 Feb 05, 0745 GMT; BBC Monitoring via Lexis-Nexis).

Russian Federation: Security Services

By Eric Beene

The tactics security forces displayed in the somewhat lopsided confrontation between Russian security forces and reported terrorists in Makhachkala, Dagestan (described in the last NIS), which included the use of a tank to destroy the building in which the terrorists were holed up, appear to have become standard operating procedure for the security services, as evidenced by the similar tactics displayed in another such operation later in January. These tactics appear to be part of a new Kremlin plan in the Caucasus that includes greater force and more frequent raids, increased rhetoric and even a de-Chechenization of security in the region (possibly withdrawing support from the clement Chechen regime), although it is not clear how well the plan is being coordinated at this point.

On the last weekend in January, security forces began what became a two-day operation against suspected terrorists in Nalchik, Kabardino-Balkaria. Available details are less than clear, but it appears the first stop for FSB and regional Interior Ministry agents was a house to arrest two suspected terrorists plus a woman alleged to have lived with the suspect in last August's Rizhskaya subway bombing. Successful in that encounter, agents then proceeded to apprehend three more suspects in a nearby apartment building, where they met with less success. After spending Saturday attempting to negotiate with the three in the five-story structure, several dozen police and special forces personnel raided the building Sunday morning with what was described as "heavy artillery, armored vehicles and gas." The building was said to have been ablaze when the raid was concluded. (1) All terrorists within (reports vary, claiming three or four, including women) were reportedly killed. Initially, authorities were tight-lipped on the operation, perhaps because of the presence of women among the dead alleged terrorists, or perhaps because of the scale of the operation in contrast, again, with the number of terrorists. More complete reports did not appear in the media until the last week of February, along with words, which have become almost boilerplate that tied the suspected terrorists to Aslan Maskhadov and Shamil Basayev.

Accompanying these later, more complete reports were descriptions of other, less publicized, similar action—160 police and FSB troops killed a single "rebel militant" in Karachayevo-Cherkessia, and an unreported number of special forces personnel killed terrorist leader and al-Qaeda emissary Abu Dzeit, along with two other accomplices, in an Ingushetian village. Not surprisingly, much more was made of the latter event, including claims that Abu Dzeit distributed al-Qaeda funds throughout the Caucasus and that he was personally involved in the June 2004 Ingushetia attack and the Beslan siege in September 2004. Perhaps also not surprisingly, Kommersant questioned these claims, both the fact that Abu Dzeit was killed and that he was as influential as FSB reports made him out to be. (2) The suspicion regarding the identity claim, certainly, is to be expected: following the January Makhachkala incident (see previous NIS Obs), government agents reported that Rasul Makasharipov was among the dead. Makasharipov later posted a statement on the Chechen Kavkaz Center website stating that he was, in fact, alive and well and would continue to fight. (3)

Such tactics were put on display for all to see on a Channel One TV report in February highlighting an interdepartmental anti-terror exercise in the Moscow Region. The report showcased the government's new GROU, or operational command groups, combining forces from the Interior Ministry, the FSB, the Defense Ministry and the Emergency Ministry. In the presentation, the forces, "[a] mini army . . . helicopters, special troops and armoured hardware," were under the command of a single person from the Interior Ministry, in this case Colonel General Nikolai Rogozhkin. This GROU appears to be an Interior Ministry-led team. The report stated that such groups already have been "set up in 12 parts of the Southern Federal District" in the second half of 2004 (although not specifically as a result of the Beslan siege) and had shown their success in the Makhachkala and Nalchik raids. The report also claimed that the Interior Ministry was "drafting a proposal to set up such units all over Russia, not only in the Southern Federal District." (4)

There are two common themes with these events: First, security services have stepped up their actions significantly, using large force elements from multiple agencies to capture or, more often, kill even a solitary terrorism suspect. All of these events appear to get a spotlight, even if it comes into focus only some weeks after the fact, but that obviously begs the question, What are we not seeing? And second, all of these relatively high-profile actions, which include claims of direct links to al-Qaeda and the deaths of the highest-ranking members of the separatist terror movement, have taken place outside of Chechnya, although typically in adjacent regions. Perhaps this answers the begged question—scant news from Chechnya proper does not necessarily mean scant action. It is quite possible similar events are occurring there as well, but without success, publicity is of no use. Besides, the threat to Russian security has manifested itself as terrorist acts outside Chechen borders; success in deterring and denying terrorist freedom of action and movement in adjacent areas is much more clearly painted as success in Russia's war on terror.

Russian president Vladimir Putin clearly and publicly approves of such tactics. Following the Nalchik raid, he was quoted as saying, "I think you should tie up all the loose ends that could appear in the process of investigating this [Nalchik] affair . . . You should work like this in the future, and treat [the terrorists] more severely." He praised Interior Minister Rashid Nurgaliyev and the Interior Ministry-led efforts and charged him with further toughening Interior Ministry efforts to combat terrorism in the region. (5)

However, Dmitri Kozak, Putin's envoy to the Southern Federal District, evidently has concerns. Specifically, he has criticized the "system of control" over anti-terror actions in the Southern Federal District. He claims that in Chechnya specifically, government organizations have been "piled on one another" with no single agency bearing responsibility for overall coordination. "There are 13 regions in the Southern federal district. The FSB is in charge of the war on

terrorism in some of them, while the Interior Ministry is in charge in others." Acknowledging the newly created counter-terror groups (GROUs), evidently there is some confusion over who is in command: technically, regional leaders should be in charge, however, specially-trained Interior Ministry personnel have been inserted into the chain of command. One official familiar with the situation claimed that the system is ineffective: "There is nobody in the Interior Ministry or Defense Ministry to hold accountable for failed operations." (6)

In an attempt to alleviate his frustration, Kozak has drafted a presidential decree that would put the FSB in charge of anti-terror operations throughout the region, countering a move by President Putin last June in which he designated the FSB in charge of anti-terror efforts throughout Russia except for the Southern District, which falls under Interior Ministry authority. This would also run counter to a proposed anti-terror bill under consideration in the Duma that would give the lead for such efforts to regional leaders. Kozak's plan would rely on commanders of regional FSB directorates to chair local anti-terror commissions and command a headquarters for counter-terror operations. Such a change would have to be incorporated into the proposed legislation. (7)

This may be part of a larger Kremlin plan to de-emphasize Chechen participation in its efforts in the region. In late 2002, the Kremlin began a policy of "Chechenization," whereby Chechens themselves were enlisted in the Russian fight against separatist terrorists, lessening the Russians' war-fighting burden. This policy appears to have been less than successful, following numerous incidents of terrorist-led violence not just within Chechnya, but throughout Russia as well. Following the death of pro-Moscow presidential choice Akhmad Kadyrov last May, the Kremlin inserted the former Chechen Interior Minister, Alu Alkhanov, into the post, but owing to competition from others (Ruslan Yamadaev, Ramzan Kadyrov, and Aslanbek Aslakhanov) for influence in the region, or perhaps simply due to incompetence, the region's security situation has deteriorated. (8)

Kozak's proposal would draw a more direct line of control from Moscow to the fielded forces, bypassing regional leaders. It has the added benefit of relying on the president's own FSB over the Interior Ministry, despite their apparent status in the region. But it does put him in direct confrontation with Interior Ministry chief Rashid Nurgaliyev, who is himself under attack from Prime Ministry Mikhail Fradkov who has charged the Interior Ministry with uncontrolled corruption. (9) It also puts his desires at odds with the proposed anti-terror legislation, but President Putin himself has expressed some concern with that legislation as well. This could be a simple case of Kozak's frustration with the status quo and the lack of effective security in the region, or it could be a political move for position as the landscape is drawn prior to 2008. In either case, it is a dangerous game to play without a larger plan in sight. Certainly a more rational plan for coordinating counter-terror activities is in order, and no single agency has proven itself spectacularly capable of executing such operations in the past. Kozak's criticism of the current state of affairs, which puts the Interior Ministry in charge of anti-terror operations in one highly volatile part of the country while the FSB retains in control elsewhere is valid. His solution may be a good one, but if it is simply politically motivated, it is likely to be no more effective than the current arrangement.

Source Notes:

(1) Anna Arutunyan, "Troops Confront More Terror Cells In North Caucasus," The Moscow News, 23 Feb 05 via ISI Emerging Markets; Russia: "Kabarda Police Chief Shies Away From Speaking On Nalchik Siege," text of report by The Caucasus Times web site, BBC Monitoring, 7 Feb 05 via ISI Emerging Markets.

(2) Anna Arutunyan, "Troops Confront More Terror Cells In North Caucasus," The Moscow News, 23 Feb 05 via ISI Emerging Markets; and "Abu Zeit – Terror Kingpin Or Small Fish?" Chechnya Weekly, Volume VI, Issue 8, 23 Feb 05, The Jamestown Foundation.

- (3) "Security Forces Again Battle Dagestani Militants" Chechnya Weekly, Vol. VI, Number 6, 9 Feb 05, The Jamestown Foundation.
- (4) "Russian Power Agencies Drill Troops For Joint Fight Against Terrorism," Text of report by Russian Channel One TV, 18 Feb 05, BBC Monitoring via Lexis-Nexis.
- (5) Judith Ingram and Said Tsarnayev, "Putin Calls For Tougher Action In The Caucasus," The Moscow Times, 22 Feb 05, p. 3; available online at (<http://www.themoscowtimes.com/stories/2005/02/22/011.html>).
- (6) Natalia Slavina, "Responsibilities For Fighting Terror Should Be Personified—Envoy," Itar-TASS, 21 Feb 05 via Lexis-Nexis; and Natalia Gorodetskaya, "The F.S.B. Will Be Placed In Charge," Kommersant, 24 Feb 05, p. 3 via ISI Emerging Markets.
- (7) Natalia Gorodetskaya, "The F.S.B. Will Be Placed In Charge," Kommersant, 24 Feb 05, p. 3 via ISI Emerging Markets; and Nabi Abdullaev, "Police Role May Pass Back To FSB," The Moscow Times, 25 Feb 05 via ISI Emerging Markets.
- (8) Andrei Smirnov, "Russian Security Officials Want To End Chechenization," Chechnya Weekly, Vol VI, Issue 8, 25 Feb 05, The Jamestown Foundation.
- (9) Simon Saradzhyan, " Police Force Gets A Dressing Down," The Moscow Times, 17 Feb 05 via ISI Emerging Markets.

Russian Federation: Foreign Relations

By Rebecca Mulder

"Russia's 'Special' Path?"

President Bush and President Putin emerged from their private summit meeting in Bratislava, Slovakia and presented themselves as a united front, standing together on issues of mutual concern and underemphasizing areas of disagreement between the two states. With Russian press headlines like "Friendship won the day" (Vremya novosti), "Gas in exchange for democracy" (Vedomosti) and "Putin can be trusted when he talks about democracy"

(Izvestia), it would seem that the summit was a vote of confidence in Putin from Bush, allowing the Russian leader to return home after successfully handling criticisms on the key issue of Russian democracy.

During the public press conference following the private meeting between the two leaders, Bush made some "soft" statements concerning democracy, making it clear that a democratic system for Russia is important to maintaining a solid U.S.-Russian relationship. However, these statements did not reflect sharp criticism for Putin's specific consolidation of power, suppression of the media, the conflict with Chechnya or general backsliding on democratic values. Bush mentioned rule of law, the protection of minorities, a free press and a viable political opposition but only to say that "democracies have [these] certain things in common" and that "in the 21st century, strong countries are built by developing strong democracies." (1) He expressed concern that Russia may not be fulfilling its commitment to universal democratic principles but was conciliatory in recognizing that Russia is changing, that he "applaud[s] President Putin for dealing with a country that is in transformation." (2) Overall, Bush concluded that the two men "found a lot of agreement, a lot of common ground, and the world is better for it" and that "the common ground is a lot more than those areas where we disagree." (3)

Putin responded that this "dialogue of interested partners" was a reflection of joint efforts "to accumulate a unique cooperation." (4) His public remarks centered on the areas of cooperation between Russia and the U.S., especially international security. The fight against terrorism, specifically measures to neutralize systems of financing and recruiting of terrorists, to stem the illicit trade of MANPADS, and to stop proliferation in Iran and North Korea. Economic cooperation and the possible accession of Russia to the WTO, the expansion of the operation of U.S. oil companies in Russian energy markets, cooperation in the provision of liquefied natural gas from Russia to the U.S. (set for 2010-2011),

and general bilateral investment cooperation are other areas of interest the two states are supposed to continue to pursue jointly.

When pressed by reporters on the issue of his attitude toward Putin, Bush stated that Putin is the "kind of fellow who, when he says, yes, he means yes, and when he says no, he means, no" and that "yes meant yes, when we talked about the values that we share." (5)

Putin claimed that Russia made a choice for democracy fourteen years ago and that "any kind of turn towards totalitarianism for Russia would be impossible, due to the condition of Russian society." (6) Putin stated that "we are not going to invent any kind of special Russian democracy" but that "the principles of democracy should be adequate to the current status of the development of Russia, to our history and our traditions." (7) Putin's idea of the essence of democracy is to "strengthen statehood and it should improve living standards for the people." (8)

It seems that in the discussion of democracy, Putin and Bush may speak a slightly different language. The same words may have different meanings. As new waves of liberation roll through the Caucasus and Ukraine (and, perhaps, Central Asia), Putin and other post-Soviet leaders are faced with challenges to authoritarian leadership and a probable geopolitical reorientation of democratized republics, thus undermining Russian-led efforts to create an alternative bloc in post-Soviet Eurasia. (9) On the eve of the summit, Putin spoke to Slovak journalists and said that he could not understand the logic of "imposing" democracy on the states of Russia's "near abroad." He remarked, "If democracy doesn't work in the post-Soviet countries – as some people seem to believe – what's the need to introduce it there?" (Š) "But if we introduce democratic principles [into these countries' political systems], why then do we need revolutions there?" (10) Putin and other CIS leaders are pushing an "adaptation" of democratic principles and institutions in their countries, to cite Russian

Defense Minister Sergei Lavrov, "Democracy is not a potato and cannot be readily transplanted from one field to the other." (11) In fact, Russia is concerned with asserting hegemony in post-Soviet territories, and their democratization constitutes an obstacle.

The idea of an "adapted democracy" as described by Putin was criticized by Anna Politkovskaya in a recent *Novaya gazeta* article and she likened it to the term "creeping authoritarianism" that some in the U.S. have used to describe Russia's political system. Politkovskaya states that the democratic hopes for Russia haven't come true – "because of oligarchs, then the illness of Yel'tsin, a war, a collapse of the freedom of speech, losing the qualities of parliament by the parliament, decrease of the opposition" – and that these developments took place in much of the post-Soviet arena, disabling hopes for democracy there, as well. (12) The reporter believes that no "adapted democracy" would help Russia, and would be as likely to fail as what's been termed Russia's current "managed democracy." (13) She also notes that "the Kremlin is free to accentuate our originality and Russia's peculiar way as long as it wants to" but that the modern reality demonstrates that the quality of a state is a product of the equality of its elites which, in ideal situations, "pull up their nation." (14)

Perhaps, as Politkovskaya implies, the question of a future democratic Russia lies with the potential desires of the masses, denigrated by an observer with *Novaya gazeta* as "millions of indifferent lumpkins" who, as a recent poll from *Vision* (as reported by *Profil* magazine), indicated that 20-30% pay virtually no attention to developments in foreign affairs and almost as many (20-25%) "are inclined to drastic fluctuations in their assessment of Russia's foreign policy course, under the influence of the media." (15) On the whole, the same poll shows, Russians show a 65-70% approval rating of the president's actions overall, and he is the most trusted politician in Russia at the moment, although according to the Public Opinion Foundation (FOM), Putin is not really perceived

as a politician, because a politician is someone who is struggling for power: "He's not fighting for power; a tsar is not a politician in a monarchy." (16)

Putin may describe his desire for an "adapted democracy" and U.S. officials may describe it as "creeping authoritarianism," underscoring concerns that Russia has moved and continues to move away from democratic values and institutions, but what President Bush seemed to take away from this rather anti-climatic summit, was that "the most important statementŠwas the [Russian] President's statement, when he declared his absolute support for democracy in Russia, and they're not turning back. To me, that is the most important statement of my private meeting and it's the most important statement of this public press conference. And I can tell you what it's like dealing with the man over the last four years: When he tells you something, he means it." (17) If this is true, then Putin means what he says when he promotes an "adapted democracy." But if this is not the democracy Bush speaks of, if Putin's adaptations are ultimately antithetical to Western democratic principles and institutions, then Putin will be a man of his word in upholding a very different kind of political system than Bush envisions.

Source Notes:

1) White House Office of the Press Secretary via Johnson's Russia List (JRL), 24 Feb 05, #8-JRL 9068 via (www.cdi.org/russia/johnson/9068-8.cfm).

2) Ibid.

3) Ibid.

4) Ibid.

5) Ibid.

6) Ibid.

7) Ibid.

8) Ibid.

9) The Eurasia Daily Monitor (The Jamestown Foundation), 25 Feb 05, "Different Understanding of Democracy May Put Bush and Putin on Collision Course" by Igor Torbakov via (www.jamestown.org).

10) Ibid.

11) Ibid.

12) What the Papers Say via ISI Emerging Markets, 25 Feb 05 via (http://site.securities.com/doc.html?pc=RU&doc_id=69520708).

13) Ibid.

14) Ibid.

15) Ibid.

16) Ibid.

17) Ibid., White House Office of the Press Secretary via JRL, 24 Feb 05.

Russian Federation: Domestic Issues and Legislative Branch

By Robyn Angley

Toward civil society influence?

The bill for the establishment of a public chamber passed its second reading on February 18. The law is slated to have its final reading in early March and go into effect on July 1. A number of amendments aimed at making the chamber more transparent were cut. The resulting public chamber will consist of 126 members. The president will appoint one third of the members or 42 people. Those presidential appointees will select a second group of 42 culled from national non-governmental organizations (NGOs). The remaining third will be chosen by the first 84 members and will be drawn from regional NGOs. Representatives from regional NGOs will be recruited using regional conferences. The conferences are not required to be publicized; there is also no minimum number of groups

required to participate. These factors leave the process open to easy manipulation.

Analysts predict that the public chamber will force a rift between human rights organizations that are willing to cooperate with the government and those that are not. (1) Some have complained about the fact that the public chamber's pronouncements will be advisory and will not carry the force of law. While it is clear that it should not be the responsibility of an unwieldy public chamber to balance the actions of the executive, Putin's post-Beslan reforms so denuded the legislative branch that public oversight was left to the newly-created chamber. The erosion of even its rudimentary functions along with the usurpation of appointment prerogatives lessens further the value of democratic governance in Putin's Russia.

However, the public chamber model could serve as an effective mechanism of public accountability if the media serve their function as providers of information and report on the chamber's reactions to laws. Media coverage of the chamber could serve as a mechanism to increase transparency. Unfortunately, the current state of the media in Russia makes thorough coverage of the chamber's activities unlikely. The media's reaction to the chamber's pronouncements will be a key determinant of the chamber's efficacy.

A legitimate cause for concern lies in the infrequency of the public chamber's meetings and in its administrative structure. The chamber is set to meet only twice annually; its daily activities will be overseen by a small staff led by an official appointed by the government. Delegating daily direction of the chamber's activities to someone who is responsible to the prime minister and the president allows much room for manipulation. Perhaps someone who is voted on by the public chamber should assume those responsibilities.

Several key human rights organizations such as Memorial already have stated their intention not to participate in the public chamber. (2) The lack of transparency in the assigned operations of the organization raises concerns that the president will use the chamber to claim the approval of civil society when it may be, in fact, manipulated or coerced. The non-participation of groups that might wield influence will weaken the effectiveness and legitimacy of the organization. It does not mean, however, that the public chamber is doomed to serve as another powerless public body. As with many situations in Russia, in the (unlikely) event that the members of the public chamber (or heads of regional governments, for example) are willing to act independently of those who appointed them, the system could function effectively because of appropriate checks and balances. Unfortunately, the nature of political power is such that allegiance is likely to go to the one who is best able to ensure the continuance of one's own personal power. If that political reality wins out in the public chamber, then Russia has just witnessed the birth of yet another rubberstamping scapegoat. While convenient to have around, they're not good for much more than affirmative bleating.

A glance at the media

There are several reasons to cover events in a media system that is dominated by government-owned media or is highly government influenced. First, coverage ensures that people know what the government is doing for them. It presents the government spin on things and makes it look as though politicians are earning the money they are receiving (or the benefits they are receiving in the case of the state Duma, which - somewhat hypocritically - recently defeated a bill proposing the monetization of parliamentary benefits). Second, newspapers provide an important public service by notifying their audience of issues that are likely to have an impact on them. In this way, the media serves as a sort of public information system. Third, the media has to report on significant events that many people know about, otherwise they lose credibility.

Russia's media and government have come under fire in recent years, the former for self-censorship and the latter for tighter control of media content and tougher treatment of journalists. These allegations have some foundation. For example, the FSB recently ordered the deportation of Yuri Bagrov, a Radio Liberty correspondent for the North Caucasus, under claims that he used falsified documents to establish Russian citizenship. Bagrov, whose mother and wife are Russian, was granted a reprieve by the North Ossetian Interior Ministry on February 23, but not before restrictions on his freedom of movement had prevented him from covering the Chechen presidential elections in August and the Beslan hostage-taking. (3)

Incidents such as Bagrov's aside, the Russian media cover more events and issues than the reasoning mentioned above would suggest. Western researchers, including those who contribute to this publication, rely on the Russian media as sources for the information they analyze. As much as Russia is attacked for its restrictions on the media and the way it keeps government criticism from being voiced, opposition opinions are still voiced in some newspapers and events unfavorable to the government, such as the pensioners' protests, are still being covered. As much as they do wrong, it should be acknowledged that the Russian media are still doing some things right.

Of constitutional amendments and such

The issue of amending the constitution as regards the president has resurfaced. Drafts have been written proposing the appointment of the president by a state assembly. The president would not have a heavy concentration of power. The prime minister, on the other hand, would have a great degree of direction over the government. Not surprisingly, one name to surface as a potential prime minister was that of Vladimir Putin. Despite all the talk, State Duma speaker Boris Gryzlov announced that his faction, which holds the majority in the Duma, would "use it for preserving the existing Constitution." (4) Gryzlov's avowals

aside, given the Duma's record of collaboration with the Kremlin, it seems unlikely that a constitutional amendment, if pressed, will be rejected.

Reforms and no confidence

A no confidence vote in the government, proposed by the Communists, was voted down on February 9. The vote was a direct result of the social upheaval caused by the poor implementation of the monetization of benefits scheme passed by the Duma in August. The Communists attempted to position themselves (largely after the fact) as the leaders of the protest, even scheduling additional rallies. Rumors of impending shifts in the government persist although Putin has resisted intimations that he may fire one or more of his ministers. The Duma is requesting a report from Prime Minister Mikhail Fradkov on benefit reform in late March. (5) In response to the protests, the Duma raised the amount of money allotted for benefits, drawing primarily from the stabilization fund. The International Monetary Fund has issued a warning to Russia, stating that the stabilization fund should not be subject to further infringements unless for the purpose of paying off Russia's external debt. (6) Meanwhile, the protests continue.

Source Notes:

(1) "Public chamber left toothless," Moscow Times, 21 Feb 05 via ISI Emerging Markets.

(2) Ibid.

(3) "Police tell journalist he can stay in Russia," Moscow Times, 24 Feb 05 via ISI Emerging Markets.

(4) "Speaker Gryzlov says Duma to do best not to amend Constitution," ITAR-TASS, 15 Feb 05 via World News Connection (WNC).

(5) "State Duma to ask Fradkov for report on benefit reform in late March," ITAR-TASS, 15 Feb 05 via WNC.

(6) "IMF urges quicker reforms," Moscow Times, 18 Feb 05 via ISI Emerging Markets.

Russian Federation: Armed Forces

By Jeff Kubiak and Kyle Colton

INTERNAL

The gravest threat

It is little wonder that the most highly publicized area of agreement between Presidents Bush and Putin at their recent summit was on the issue of nuclear security cooperation. In the joint statement released after the summit, Bush and Putin proclaim that "The United States and Russia will enhance cooperation to counter one of the gravest threats our two countries face, nuclear terrorism." (1) This problem was emphasized by several high profile actors on both sides of the Atlantic recently. Self-exiled oligarch Boris Berezovsky grabbed media headlines early in February when he advised the Kremlin that it should accept the Chechen proposed ceasefire and offer to negotiate, because, he claimed, he had received information that the Chechen rebels were in possession of a small nuclear explosive device. (2) This report initiated a flood of speculation as to whether or not Berezovsky's claim was anything more than a political attention-grabbing stunt. Although Russian authorities refused "to comment on the delirious statements of a person who is on the international wanted list," numerous experts refuted the idea that the Chechens actually could have come into possession of such a device. (3) Nearly all experts agreed that it would be virtually impossible for the insurgents to explode such a device even if they had one. Nonetheless, the media flurry that followed Berezovsky's comments, including several calls by members of the government and Duma to examine more thoroughly the possibility that his claim could be true, highlights the universal sensitivity to the perceived danger presented by the prospect of terrorist organizations gaining possession of a nuclear capability.

Defense Minister Sergei Ivanov was quick to claim that security of Russia's military nuclear facilities is world class and routinely provides media and other foreign observers opportunities to witness security exercises at nuclear military facilities. "We pay very close attention to the issue of guarding and defending military facilities, and we are willing to show that the existing myths that Russia has problems in this area are indeed nothing but myths." (4) A December 2004 report by the U.S. National Intelligence Council, a think-tank that supports the U.S. intelligence community notes the efforts of the Russian Defense Ministry in a rare positive light. According to the report, the Russian Defense Ministry is not the source of significant concern with regard to loose nukes. However, the report documents numerous cases of stolen or lost nuclear material from Russian nuclear facilities that were under the jurisdiction of the Federal Agency for Atomic Energy. Despite claims that all the material has been recovered; the report concludes, "that undetected smuggling has occurred, and we are concerned about the total amount of material that could have been diverted or stolen in the last 13 years." (5) A similar alarm was sounded by U.S. Senator John Rockefeller, vice chairman of the Senate Intelligence Committee. Following a CIA briefing on security threats that face the U.S., Senator Rockefeller surely aimed to have an impact on the agenda of the U.S.-Russian Presidential summit when he insisted "a lot of those lost nuclear weapons can be out circulating in the terrorist community" and suggested that President Putin "ought to be very worried" that these weapons or materials could end up in the hands of Chechen separatists. (6) According to Igor Ostretsov, the deputy director of the All-Russia Research Institute of Atomic Engineering, it would be technically possible for terrorists, in primitive conditions, to create a real atomic bomb out of spent nuclear fuel. "The main preoccupation should be to ensure 100 percent security of spent nuclear fuel at power stations and at storage sites." (7) In a radio report, Ekho Moskvyy radio correspondent Andrei Gavrilov claimed that Chechen rebel field commander, Shamil Basayev, has on more than one occasion "declared readiness to resort to nuclear terrorism in Russian cities." Gavrilov goes on to

recount several instances where nuclear materials had been planted by terrorists in an effort to make a statement, and once, in 1998, in an apparent effort to explode a dirty bomb. (8) Indeed, nuclear materials are loose in Russia. They are loose in small quantities, as was evidenced this past November when a Russian geologist turned in plutonium that he had been storing in his garage after finding it in a garbage heap outside an abandoned laboratory in 1997 or 1998. (9) And, as Moscow military analyst Pavel Felgenhauer points out, hundreds of tons are vulnerable in the form of plutonium sitting in unsafe storage still awaiting completion of a new facility in the Urals. (10) The U.S. has committed \$1.6 billion this year under the Cooperative Threat Reduction program to push its oversight over the disposition of Russian nuclear weapons and material, without which it is assumed that the Russians could not hope adequately to secure the enormous amount of arms-grade nuclear material. (11) Russians are asked to balance their fear of the U.S. with their fear that Basayev will attempt to make good on his threat.

Now it's legal

Early in February the Duma passed, in its first reading, a bill that would allow Defense Ministry resources (troops and money) to be used domestically in the fight against terrorism. (12) Purportedly part of the government's effort to respond to the Beslan tragedy, the new law serves only to legitimate the government's current counter-terrorism efforts in the North Caucasus rather than representing a new strategy. It is common knowledge that units from the Defense Ministry's 42nd Motorized Rifle Division, which is permanently stationed in Chechnya, not only participate daily in military missions against Chechen rebels, but that, until recently, significant numbers of airborne troops also had been deployed to the mountainous regions of Chechnya to conduct operations. These units were contract soldiers belonging to the 76th Airborne Division stationed in Pskov and have since been redeployed. Their missions were assumed subsequently by the contract soldier units of the 42nd Division. On a number of occasions, Ivanov has, bragged about the performance of his contract

soldiers in Chechnya: "These divisions are well known. They proved quite efficient during counterterrorist operation in the North Caucasus. It is there that the new approaches towards using army units and fighting illegal armed groups were first tested in the fight against international terrorism." (13) On other occasions, Ivanov had been an outspoken opponent of using defense ministry forces in the counterterrorist struggle, saying that using the army to fight terrorists is like using a hammer to kill a mosquito. (14) This picture was drawn very vividly in a recent article written by Nabi Abdullaev that recounts the keystone cop-like performance of security forces in two recent standoffs against small groups of terrorist. The standoffs ended in both cases only after the army troops bulldozed terrorist-occupied houses with armored vehicles (in one case a tank, in another an armored personnel carrier) killing the terrorists inside. (15)

The fact of the matter is that although the 42nd Division has been fully transitioned to contract soldiers, the new professionals still suffer from many of the old deficiencies. The unit still has only outdated and worn out equipment, no modern communications gear, and the troops use their own money (at least they have some now) to purchase foreign made radios. (16) Their flak jackets are damaged and not replaced and obsolete night vision equipment means that terrorists basically move with impunity at night. Because the tours are longer, more time can be put into training the contract soldiers who now run through nearly 10 months of combat training before being put into action, as compared to the 5 months available to conscripts. However, training is still limited to small groups of soldiers since regimental exercises are not possible for security reasons. (17) The contract forces still demonstrate the same lack of discipline, violence towards their fellow soldiers, and criminal behavior that all were emblematic of the conscripted force, and which vastly reduces their effectiveness and continues to reflect poorly on the government. (18)

Retired General Makhmud Gareyev, President of the Academy of Military Sciences, claims that the government's real problem in its struggle against

terrorism is not the lack of firepower, but the disastrous lack of coordination between the three primary power ministries – defense, interior and Federal Security Service (FSB) – and the remarkably poor intelligence gathering effort demonstrated thus far. (19) He observes that instead of improving efficiency, the new bill was designed to enhance the distance of the Kremlin and the FSB from criticism concerning their handling of the operation. Having moved the primary coordination function for antiterrorism operations to the Interior Ministry last summer, this latest move puts another layer of scapegoats between any disaster and the Kremlin.

Putin: defender of the soldier

On 7 February, President Putin made an obvious effort to buy another insurance policy by portraying himself as the defender of the soldier. In a televised cabinet meeting, Putin "dressed down" his ministers, specifically the Finance Minister Aleksei Kudrin, for not having responded with adequate speed and thoroughness to Putin's demand that military salaries are raised across the board. (20) Back on 24 January, in response to rising political heat over the declining socio-economic status of the military that was accelerated by the benefits reform enacted January 1, Putin instructed Kudrin to meet with Ivanov and develop the details to support a 20% pay raise for the military – and, to make it happen much sooner than the 1 September date suggested by Kudrin. Putin had been made well aware that the armed forces would once again not see pay raises in 2005 and that more than a third of military families would live below the poverty line. But Putin's overt demonstration of support for the military came only as the Kremlin began to feel the heat from the unpopular benefits reform combined with other political defeats the Kremlin has suffered recently. While some in the media talk about the potential for a rebellion within the military, Felgenhauer thinks that Putin is far more concerned that the Russian military should not behave (or fail to act) as did the Ukrainian military, should civil unrest arise, but instead would defend the authorities. (21) Putin's display on national television

reflects his hope that if he defends the soldier now, the soldier will return the favor in the future.

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EXTERNAL

Ukraine and NATO

Ukraine inherited a huge Soviet-legacy military when it gained independence in 1991. While a powerful force, this military was designed as a component of the overall Soviet military apparatus and did not serve the evolving needs of the newly independent Ukraine. Additionally, Ukraine did not possess its own military/civilian institutions due to the central command model of the Soviet-era forces. The process of adapting the military into a truly Ukrainian force, capable of meeting Ukraine's security challenges, was slowed by the need to create its defense institutions, such as the National Security and Defense Council, Ministry of Defense, General Staff, Component Service Commands and Defense Academy. NATO participation and assistance with Ukrainian military reform

started almost immediately after the country's independence and since President Viktor Yushchenko's ascendancy to power, the possibility for Ukrainian full membership in NATO looks brighter than ever.

A history of cooperation

NATO-Ukraine relations started in 1991 when Ukraine joined the North Atlantic Cooperation Council, now known as the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council. While politically and economically tied to Russia, Ukrainian President Leonid Kuchma saw increasing ties with NATO as a way to lessen Russian influence. In 1994, Ukraine became the first CIS country to join the Partnership for Peace (PfP). This NATO program was designed to enhance security and defense cooperation between NATO and individual countries.

Russian disinclination to sign a treaty with Ukraine that would formally recognize Ukraine's borders, pushed Ukraine toward greater rapprochement with NATO. In 1997, Ukraine informed NATO that the Partnership for Peace program no longer met Ukraine's security needs and requested a special partnership agreement with NATO. President Kuchma said, "NATO is an alliance of democratic and civilized states which do not threaten or pose territorial claims on anyone." (1) National Defense and Security Council chief Volodymyr Horbulin stated that "certain actions and statements by Russia's Duma and members of the Russian government force Ukraine to seek to protect its security in a security system." (2)

While NATO and Russia were proceeding with talks about their new relationship, Ukraine moved to establish official relations with NATO and sign a special partnership agreement at the 1997 NATO Madrid Summit. During NATO discussions, Ukrainian National Security and Defense Council head Volodymyr Horbulin, Foreign Minister Hennady Udoenko, and Defense Minister Oleksandr Kuzmuk agreed that the current military status of Ukrainian forces would not allow them to join NATO, but they reserved the option to apply for NATO membership in the future.

Ukraine's push for official NATO ties and discussions regarding membership impelled President Boris Yel'tsin to visit Kiev prior to the Madrid Summit. In Kiev, Presidents Kuchma and Yel'tsin agreed in principle to the Ukrainian-Russian treaty. The treaty was signed in May 1997 and ratified by the Russian parliament in December 1998 and February 1999. The obvious lesson was that continued Ukrainian engagement with NATO provided Ukraine with leverage when dealing with Russia.

Charter on a Distinctive Partnership and Partnership for Peace

At the NATO Madrid Summit in July 1997, Ukraine signed the Charter on a Distinctive Partnership. The document covered cooperation in the areas of economic security, conflict prevention, crisis management, military reform, including enhanced civilian control, non-proliferation, arms control and transfers, and combating drugs and organized crime. Additionally, the Charter allows for expansion in all areas.

Since signing the Distinctive Partnership Charter, the record of Ukraine-NATO cooperation has been impressive. Ukraine frequently has hosted NATO military exercises for both ground and naval forces. It has converted its Soviet-era Yavoriv military range, Europe's largest military training area, into a NATO peacekeeping training center. It maintains a joint military unit, the Ukrainian-Polish joint battalion, UkrPolBat, which participates in NATO peacekeeping missions. The battalion joined the NATO peacekeeping mission in Kosovo under NATO command. It also has been deployed to the Lebanese-Israeli border as part of UNIFIL. Ukraine has allowed nearly 1,200 military flights, mostly American, to transit Ukrainian airspace, en route to Afghanistan and Central Asia.

Ukraine has established an outstanding record of Partnership for Peace participation. Ukraine has taken part in almost 200 PfP events every year since

1999. In addition to participation, Ukraine has hosted several annual PfP exercises. The largest naval, air and amphibious exercise conducted by NATO in the former USSR was hosted by Ukraine in the Black Sea in June 2000. The Annual 'Peace-Shield' PfP exercise has also been hosted by Ukraine.

Even more impressive, despite the ongoing political situation and some "hostile rhetoric" during 2004 in Ukraine, the Ukrainian military still participated in 220 events within the framework of NATO's Partnership for Peace program. (3) Ukraine and the United States conducted joint naval exercises in the Black Sea in November 2004 that included Ukraine's flagship, the Hetman Sahaidachny, the Kostiantyn Olshansky large landing craft, and the United States' 6th Fleet command ship, the USS La Salle. The exercise was conducted in advance of the Ukrainian Navy joining NATO's anti-terrorism operation, Active Endeavor, conducted in the Mediterranean Sea. Ukraine is scheduled to join the operation in 2005. (4)

Ukraine and NATO difficulties

The Kosovo conflict was the first serious crisis in Ukrainian-NATO relations; President Leonid Kuchma's non-bloc, multi-vector foreign policy swung toward Russia, but Ukraine did not sever relations with NATO fearing that would lead to a break with the EU as well. While the NATO campaign in Kosovo did little to affect NATO-Ukraine relations, it did affect public perception of NATO even in Western Ukraine, which was solidly pro-NATO. This perception has lingered since 1998 and will have to be overcome if Ukraine is going to pursue full membership.

The second issue was the establishment of the NATO-Russia Council in May 2002. Previously, NATO had been careful not to elevate Russia over Ukraine in bilateral arrangements, so this new role for Russia in NATO caused concern for the impact on relations with Ukraine. However, on May 23, President Kuchma

decided to initiate preparations for the full membership of Ukraine in the alliance, and to draft a strategy to reach that goal. (5)

At the NATO Prague Summit in November 2002, the NATO-Ukraine Action Plan was adopted. While not part of the Membership Plan, the Action Plan set out specific goals, covering political and economic issues, information issues, security, defense and military issues, information protection and security, and legal issues. NATO urged Ukraine to take the reform process forward and strengthen democracy, the rule of law, human rights and the market economy. NATO agreed to significantly step up its efforts to transform the defense and security institutions in Ukraine.

To support the implementation of the Action Plan's objectives, Annual Target Plans are set for Ukraine to establish its own targets in terms of the activities it wishes to pursue both internally and in cooperation with NATO. Assessment meetings take place twice a year and a progress report is prepared annually. Despite the lack of progress in democracy, law, human rights and economy, the military has done surprisingly well in achieving its goals in both the NATO-Ukraine 2003 and 2004 Target Plans.

Military reforms despite political tensions

While initially slow, Ukrainian military reform was stimulated by aggressive NATO involvement, specifically Poland. In 2004, the Ukrainian Army was cut by 70,000 personnel. When Defense Minister Yevhen Marchuk was dismissed in 2004 due to an ammunition storing and disposal issue, President Leonid Kuchma told new Defense Minister Oleksandr Kuzmuk that military reform must be pursued further. "We must not dismiss those who benefit the armed forces. I am referring to military professionals," Kuchma said. "We must depart from old approaches and stereotypes concerning military threats, and develop the armed forces on the

basis of the principle of a sufficient defense." (6) One week before Kuchma's comments, NATO Military Committee chief Harald Kuyat had given high marks to the progress Ukraine's military reforms and said that the long-term plan for reform is "quite healthy." (7) Kuyat said that all NATO evaluators noted the positive aspects of Ukrainian military reform and the "openness and sincerity" with which Ukraine made its report on this reform.

In October 2004, the Ukrainian government announced plans to reduce its armed forces by 50,000 to 235,000 servicemen in 2005, according to Defense Minister Alexander Kuzmuk. The reduction was in line with the approved, NATO-endorsed Ukrainian armed forces reform. Current servicemen will be dismissed in 2005, as opposed to previous years when reductions were made by trimming redundant positions and setting smaller conscription targets. (8)

Since becoming president in December, Viktor Yushchenko has pushed for more military reforms. Yushchenko wants the terms of conscription reduced from 18 months to 12 months in the ground forces and from 24 months to 18 months in the Navy by the beginning of 2005. More importantly, he wants a plan for the entire Armed Forces to switch over to a contract system by the beginning of January 2010. In the fall of 2004, the first few combat units started a test period for the new contract system. (9)

The Defense Ministry also has other problems such as an outdated monetary allowance system, a huge disparity between civilian and military pay and retirement issues.

The Ukrainian Defense Minister has formed working groups to reform the system of monetary allowances and social bonuses and compensations to the servicemen and civilian personnel of the Armed Forces. The main objective of the working group is to develop a concept for a new and more effective system of payment for all Ministry personnel, as well as to find ways to provide housing and

improve the mechanisms of social bonuses and compensations for servicemen and military pensioners. The first meeting of the working group, held in February 2005, discussed the issue of reforms of the monetary allowances, social bonuses and compensations to servicemen and civilian personnel of the Armed Forces, as well as the plan to address the reform concept. (10)

The economy consequences of NATO membership

In addition to continued military reforms, there are other issues raised by possible NATO membership that President Yushchenko has to take into account. Ukraine was the sixth largest weapons exporter in terms of the overall volume of conventional arms supplies from 1999 to 2003. During that period, Ukraine's weapons exports totaled 2.195 billion dollars. (11) The concern in Ukraine and Russia is that the push toward NATO will undermine this component of Ukraine's economy. Presidential candidate Viktor Yanukovich actually used this issue during his failed campaign. He warned against pushing for NATO integration because this may cause Ukraine to "lose the entire military-industrial sector of the economy." (12) "If we gear our policy only towards the development of relations with NATO and accession to this organization, we may lose a whole sector of the economy – the military-industrial one," he told Russian journalists on Monday. "Because NATO standards will need to be introduced, we will have to close plants, and buy weapons and equipment in the West. We cannot allow this to happen," he said. (13)

During a meeting of the Interparliamentary Russian-Ukrainian commission on 15 February 2005, the Chairman of the CIS Affairs committee at Russia's Federation Council, Vadim Gustov, said that if Ukraine joins NATO then the volume of its arms and military equipment exports could dwindle considerably. (14) Gustov said that Ukraine's admission to NATO with its differing weapons standards and trade limitations would result in diminishing the export potential of the Ukrainian defense industry complex. (15)

While transforming the Ukrainian defense industry is a major internal problem for the new government, the external problem likely will be the transformation's impact on the Russian arms industry. Many parts for Russian weapons systems are made in Ukraine. Kiev's Research Center for the Army, Conversion and Disarmament Problems estimates that Ukraine exported approximately 600 million dollars in weapons in 2004. About one fourth of those exports were under contracts negotiated through Russia's Rosoboroneksport arms exporter, but Moscow's Center for the Analysis of Strategies and Technologies estimates the number closer to half. (16)

Russian Industry and Energy Minister Viktor Khristenko estimates that 2,000 businesses interact between the two countries in the arms industry and without this interaction it will not be possible to produce some products. Russia does not produce the AA-10 Alamo (R-27) medium range air-to-air missile, but does often include these missiles when selling its aircraft throughout the world. Numerous types of gas turbine engines for both ships and aircraft are produced by Ukraine at Motor Sich in Zaporizhzhya, not in Russia. (17) No matter how quickly Ukraine moves toward NATO membership, it is unlikely that President Yushchenko could restructure completely Ukraine's defense industrial complex. However, NATO membership or even increased cooperation will force Ukrainian-Russian defense exports to suffer.

Ukraine's road toward NATO

Since President Yushchenko's rise to power through the Orange revolution, he has made it clear that his policies will focus on European integration. He was the only non-NATO head of state invited to the 22 February NATO meeting. At that meeting, NATO leaders expressed support for Ukraine's reform agenda and agreed to strengthen cooperation with the country.

At the special NATO-Ukraine Summit, President Yushchenko outlined to NATO Heads of State and Government his plans and priorities for the reform process in

Ukraine. "NATO is ready to work with you," ready to "sharpen and refocus" the existing cooperation, NATO Secretary-General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer said at a joint press conference with President Yushchenko. (18) "Ukraine has made its position clear about joining the Membership Action Plan," he told reporters, "At the same time it means that our country will be also using the possibilities that are provided by the existing instruments for cooperation, meaning the Action Plan between NATO and Ukraine." (19)

As an expression of its determination to enhance cooperation, NATO has launched a NATO Partnership for Peace (PfP) Trust Fund project to help Ukraine deal with the huge Soviet-era stockpiles of ammunitions, small arms and light weapons. The Project will help Ukraine destroy these aging stockpiles including numerous Man-Portable Air Defense Systems (MANPADS). This 30 million dollar initiative is the largest single demilitarization effort in the world, and the largest of its kind ever undertaken. The United States has stepped forward to act as the lead nation for this NATO/PfP Trust Fund project, the first time the United States has volunteered as the lead nation. (20)

Conclusion

President Kuchma's multi-vectored foreign policy never fully aligned Ukraine with NATO. His repeated use of NATO as leverage against Russia served simultaneously to start the reform of the Ukrainian military. More importantly, no matter the political situation or rhetoric, Ukraine never stopped pursuing its NATO Action Plan goals. In early 2005, President Yushchenko took command of a military that is much closer to NATO standards than the post-Soviet legacy military inherited by President Kuchma.

That said, Ukraine is still several years away from joining NATO. The country has significant defense reform to complete prior to achieving NATO standards. Additionally, if we look at the 1995 NATO enlargement criteria, Ukraine has significant work to do in each area: 1) established democracy; 2) respect for

human rights; 3) market-based economy; 4) armed forces under civilian control; and 5) good relations with neighboring states (resolution of internal ethnic disputes). (21) President Yushchenko needs to continue his string of victories by having Ukraine designated as a market economy this year and receiving WTO membership before the March 2006 parliamentary elections. WTO success coupled with further reformist success in the 2006 elections could then accelerate the NATO application process. President Bush and NATO Secretary-General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer have emphasized NATO's "open-door" policy that would admit Ukraine if President Yushchenko can succeed with his reforms.

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Newly Independent States: Western Region

By Elena Selyuk

MOLDOVA

Russia vs. Voronin

The approaching parliamentary elections in Moldova are contested by a puzzling blend of political parties, most of which have very similar platforms. A month before the elections, yet another player has emerged in the Moldovan political arena – Russia.

At the beginning of February, a group of Russian deputies visited Tiraspol (the capital of Transdniestr), without obtaining prior approval from Chisinau. Moscow's stated goal of the visit was to devise a plan to protect fellow Russians in this unrecognized republic. Moscow realizes that the Transdniestr conflict requires new approaches. Tiraspol did not have to wait long. Soon after the deputies' return to Moscow, the Duma unanimously supported Deputy Alksnis' (formerly known as the "black colonel") initiative to introduce economic sanctions against Moldova in response to Voronin's refusal to sign the "Kozak memorandum" in November 2003. The most significant of the proposed sanctions are: (1) Supplying energy to Moldova based on world prices (excluding Transdniestr); (2) banning imports of alcohol products from Moldova (excluding products produced in Transdniestr); and (3) introducing visas for Moldovan citizens wishing to travel to Russia (excluding residents of the Dniestr republic). Voronin accused Russia of trying to interfere with the Moldovan parliamentary election campaign by turning the Moldovan population against the party in power. The Moldovan Prime Minister Vasile Tarlev stated that "certain Russian political forces are sparing neither effort nor money to destabilize the situation in Moldova." (1)

It is difficult not to agree with Mr. Tarlev. Given that the Moldovan Communists refused to sign the Kozak memorandum at the last minute, boycotted numerous CIS summits, called for the withdrawal of Russian "occupation" troops from Transdniestr at NATO summits, and fiercely advocated for Moldovan integration with Europe, it comes as no surprise that Moscow has its eyes set on eliminating Voronin and his party from the Moldovan political scene. Although Russia's intentions to remove the Communists from power are evident, it is not clear whom it would like to replace them. While their names may suggest differently,

the Communists, the Christian Democrats, the Democratic Moldova voting bloc, and the Social Democrats (parties that have realistic chances of obtaining parliamentary seats), in essence have very similar political programs, which boil down to bringing Moldova closer to Europe – a goal incompatible with Russia's geopolitical aspirations for Moldova.

Moscow denies any accusation of attempts to influence Moldova's parliamentary elections in Moldova and claims that the well being of Russians in Transdnestr was its primary concern when voting for the introduction of sanctions. The sincerity of these words is doubtful, to say the least. Given Moscow's record of "selling out" Russian citizens living abroad for all kinds of useful commodities (gas, for example, which was the impetus behind the Russia-Turkmenistan deal in April 2003, which bartered the citizenship of thousands of Russians living in Turkmenistan for a sweetheart energy arrangement), it is unlikely that the well being of Russians in Transdnestr is Moscow's main concern. If there is no economic or geopolitical gain in sight, Russia is unlikely to act. In addition, the timing of such sanctions is curiously close to the parliamentary elections. The Kozak memorandum failed almost two years ago. Why did Moscow decide to act only now?

It is doubtful that Russia's threats to introduce economic sanctions against Moldova will have the desired effect – for at least two reasons.

First, the proposed sanctions will hurt the general population and not the bureaucrats in power. Russia is one of Moldova's main export markets. By closing the door to Moldovan wine producers, it dooms them to uncertain times and lost income. Introducing a visa regime with Moldova will mean that thousands of Moldovan citizens who now work in Russia will have to return to Moldova and, most likely, find themselves unemployed for a prolonged period of time. Increased energy prices will mean higher energy bills for the regular citizens. In a fair, transparent democracy these sanctions could have made the

people rise up against a government that failed them. In Moldova, however, where the main mass media sources are government-controlled, the ruling party is likely to present its own interpretation of the situation or simply not avoid mention of the Moldova-Russia squabbles altogether.

Second, Voronin's official approval rating remains rather high. Recent opinion poll of the Institute for Public Policies showed that if elections were held at the time of the survey (mid-February), Voronin's party would have won with almost 62 % of the vote (2) – an unrealistically high estimate, later disputed by the Social Democratic Party, which claimed the Communists' real approval rating was approximately 27.5%. (3) While both figures might lack objectivity, the fact that the Communist Party of Moldova is still the most popular one in the country is a reality. Although election results will, most likely, be rigged, it will be done in order to boost the percentage with which the Communists will win, rather than to change the winning party altogether.

Consequently, due to the Communists' relative popularity and lack of objective information coming from the main media sources, even if the elections are rigged, it is dubious that mass protests will take place. The opposition, however, is not losing hope. It already has "reserved" the Central Square in Chisinau for the purpose of holding mass protests against the falsification of the election results. Different opposition parties even chose various colors for the upcoming revolution – orange (Christian Democrats) and yellow (Democratic Moldova voting bloc) are the two most prevalent ones. (4) If Russia is serious about removing Voronin from power, it will be interesting to watch its reaction on 7 March.

UKRAINE

Clean-up operation

One of Yushchenko's campaign promises was to get rid of corruption in the government and to ensure transparency within the ruling elites. The President

has begun to fulfill his promises recently by opening investigations against some government officials and by dismissing others. The Prosecutor-General's Office has instituted a criminal case against the former head of the Directorate for State Affairs under the former president Leonid Kuchma, Mr. Ihor Bakay. The reason is abuse of office and illegal use of state funds totaling 3.4 million dollars. Bakay was said to have left Ukraine in late December 2004, right after Viktor Yushchenko won the presidential election. (5) The Secret Service is also investigating its former Deputy Chief Volodymyr Satsyuk who headed a special department charged with raising funds for the intelligence service. Satsyuk is also suspected of implication in the dioxin poisoning of the President. (6) Yushchenko also has issued a decree dismissing Mykola Obykhod and Serhiy Tuz as deputy heads of the Security Service of Ukraine. Yevhen Serhiyenko, the head of the directorate for fighting corruption and crime, was fired, as well. (7) At the end of February, Yushchenko, as he had promised, dismissed the Customs Service Chief, Mykola Kalensky.

Earlier in February, Yulia Tymoshenko stated that the government would challenge in court the privatization of nearly 3,000 businesses. There have been previous attempts to investigate all these cases, but they were closed following orders from the government. (8) "We will open a public and transparent tender, and you will see how we will earn three to four times more," said Yushchenko to a group of foreign investment bankers. (9)

Yushchenko's recent dismissal of top officials and investigations of privatization deals undoubtedly are aimed at increasing the fairness and transparency of the system, but ordinary Ukrainians have not yet seen any real direct improvement in their lives. My aunt, a longtime resident of Ukraine, expressed concerns that seem almost universal in Ukraine now, "Re-privatization started in Ukraine. All that was sold by the former regime to their friends for nothing is being taken back by the government. In short, the revolution continues! I only hope that ordinary people will benefit from all this, as well. It can happen that the government re-

divides everything between its own members and that will be the end of the democratic show!"

Source notes:

- (1) Infotag News Agency, 22 Feb 05; BBC Monitoring via ISI Emerging Markets.
- (2) RFE/RL Newsline, Vol. 9, No. 33, Part II, 18 Feb 05.
- (3) Reporter.md, 22 Feb 05 via (www.reporter.md).
- (4) Kommersant Plus, 22 Feb 05 via (<http://www.km.press.md/index.html>).
- (5) TV5 Kanal, 22 Feb 05; BBC Monitoring via Lexis-Nexis.
- (6) Agence France Press, 20 Feb 05 via Lexis-Nexis.
- (7) UNIAN News Agency, 15 Feb 04; BBC Monitoring via Lexis-Nexis.
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Newly Independent States: Caucasus

By Tammy Lynch

GEORGIA

We're not gonna take it anymore

During February, Russia and Georgia had numerous opportunities to make progress on a number of contentious issues plaguing their relations. For the first time since the Rose revolution, a Russian Foreign Minister visited independent Georgia, the two countries' foreign ministries held "framework" talks, and the Russian and Georgian parliamentary speakers met in Vienna. However, the discussions generally devolved into heated rhetoric and recriminations, as Georgia accused Russia of reneging on past agreements and Russia again threatened "preemptive" terrorist strikes in Georgia's Pankisi Gorge.

The month began badly when Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov's February 18 visit was downgraded by Georgia from an official state visit to a "working" visit. The partial snub came after Lavrov refused to lay a wreath at the memorial to Georgians killed in separatist conflicts during the 1990s. The Georgian government cannot have been surprised at Lavrov's response, given Russia's support for the separatist movements, but the country's willingness to openly challenge the Russian foreign minister sent a clear signal.

The meeting itself between Lavrov and Georgian Foreign Minister Salome Zourabichvili resulted in nothing more than plans for yet another round of talks on the same issues that have already been discussed for years. Putting her best foot forward, Zourabichvili explained, "We have agreed, and this is very important, on how to continue working over these issues." (1)

Primary among these issues are Russia's non-compliance with its 1999 agreement to disband its military bases in Georgia and its single-handed destruction of the OSCE Border Monitoring Operation in Pankisi Gorge.

At the 1999 OSCE Istanbul Summit, Russia and Georgia signed an annex to the adapted CFE Treaty. In it, Russia agreed to "disband and withdraw" its bases in Gudauta (Abkhazia) and Vaziani by July 2001. The two countries also agreed that "during the year 2000" they would "complete negotiations regarding the duration and modalities of the functioning of the Russian military bases at Batumi and Akhalkalaki" (2)

While Russia closed the small Vaziani airstrip in 2001, the country merely announced that the soldiers at the Gudauta base within Abkhazia were now "peacekeepers," and therefore, its military base had been eliminated (a technique also used in Moldova's Transnistria separatist enclave). Russia also appears to have tried to draw out, as much as possible, the negotiations over the "duration" of its other two bases in Georgia.

On December 23, 2000, after five rounds of negotiations covering almost a year, the two sides had barely moved forward on the question of Batumi and Akhalkalaki. Russian then-Deputy Prime Minister Ilya Klebanov explained, "Russia offered to extend its mandate by another 15 years. We think there's no necessity for a hasty withdrawal." (3) When Georgia balked at the suggestion of Russian military bases on its territory for another 15 years, a spokesman at the Russian Defense Ministry complained about "Georgia's inappropriate attitude." Indignantly, he said, "Georgia is talking not about the terms and conditions of the functioning of the Russian military bases in Akhalkalaki and Batumi, but about their closure." (4)

Now, more than four years later, Akhalkalaki and Batumi remain, as does Guduata in another form, and the two sides have reached nothing near consensus. Moreover, throughout all these years, Russia has worked closely with the leadership of the Georgian breakaway republics. This cooperation has become far more public in the last year, as Moscow has hosted several meetings of various representatives of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, and as the country passed a bill making Abkhaz and South Ossetian residents – inside the sovereign country of Georgia – Russian citizens.

At the same time, Russian rhetoric regarding Georgia's so-called support for Chechen terrorists has increased in the last several months. At the end of 2004, Russia used its OSCE veto to scuttle an extension of the mandate of the OSCE Border Monitoring Operation (BMO) along the Georgian-Russia border. Lavrov called the mission "no longer needed" and said "it has not been instrumental in reducing the number of border violations." Therefore, he said Russia's own border guards will control the border. (5) The OSCE BMO mission, which provided 24 hour monitoring of the Pankisi Gorge border crossing by internationally trained observers, is now closed.

Throughout the last several months, the Russian media have been filled with accounts of supposed border violations in Pankisi, along with suspiciously detailed descriptions of how groups of Chechens are using Pankisi Gorge as a base. Russia Major-General Ilya Shabalkin, for example, related that "a gang of over 200 men" was near the Georgian villages of Duisi and Tsinabani, while "a gang near the village of Birkani includes 30 or so foreign mercenaries talking Turkish among themselves." (6) Meanwhile, another "source" explained that a "group of about 50 militants" was camped near the villages of Omalo and Tselebani." (7) Russian officials explained that these "bases" were used as training camps and as "rest points" for Chechens hiding from Russian forces or needing medical treatment.

However, despite repeated requests from Georgian leaders that Russia provide detailed information explaining when, where and how these "militants" were crossing the border, the country provided nothing. Moreover, Russia apparently decided not to avail itself of assistance from the international OSCE Monitoring Operation – which may have been able to use its helicopters and other surveillance equipment to document Russian claims. As it was, the monitoring mission found that the border was stable with little activity.

Without the mission, Georgia fears that Russia will use the excuse that Chechens are hiding in Georgia as a pretext for military strikes within its borders. On February 13, Russian Defense Minister Sergei Lavrov said, "We have killed so many foreigners in Chechnya carrying passports with a Georgian tourist visa in their pockets. (Š) You can't deny they are penetrating our territory through the territory of Georgia, that's a fact." (8) However, Georgia can and does deny this fact, and continues waiting in vain for documents and details.

The Defense Minister went on to ask, "If Š we know that some place in the world there are terrorists in hiding, plotting to carry out a terrorist act on the Russian

territory, should we wait and let them go. Š? Or hit them straight away? I think the answer is clear." (9)

Finally, Georgia appears to have had enough. On February 24, during a meeting on the sidelines of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, Georgian Parliamentary Speaker Nino Burjanadze held an apparently difficult meeting with her Russian counterpart, Boris Gryzlov. Burjanadze reported that she "informed him in detail about our absolutely justified complaints toward the Russian side." Burjanadze said she pointed to "the border issue, the need to pull out the Russian bases as soon as possible, [and] the problem that Russia has been actually meddling in Abkhazia and Samachablo South Ossetia." (10)

Most important, Burjanadze drew a line over the remaining Russian military bases in Georgia. "I very openly told Mr. Gryzlov that if in the very near future we failed to agree on a final date for the Russian military bases pullout, the Georgian parliament would declare the presence of the Russian bases illegal on Georgian territory, and I'm sure that the rest of the authorities will also support us in this matter." (11) The comment followed a similar statement made by Givi Targamadze, Chair of the Georgian Parliamentary Defense and National Security Committee. On February 23, Targamadze said, "If Russia does not specify the deadline for withdrawing its bases within several months, Georgia should start the procedure for closing them unilaterally." He said this procedure would include blockading all supply routes into the bases. (12) Already, Georgia has begun surreptitiously holding up visas for Russian servicemen, thus interrupting the rotation of personnel. (13)

Burjanadze has also been vocal about the BMO mission and Russia's claims regarding Pankisi Gorge. She said, "Statements made by high-ranking Russian officials do not allow us to conduct Russian-Georgian relations in a normal and civilized manner. Those truly irresponsible statements Š clearly aim at the further deterioration of Russian-Georgian relations and prepare the ground for

justifying, on the basis of these statements, certain provocative actions to be taken against Georgia." She noted, "When Georgia is left face to face with Russia and is not able to fall back on international observers, Russia will find it much easier to make allegations against Georgia." (14)

Burjanadze and other Georgian leaders are now pressing international organizations for assistance in continuing to have some type of an international presence on the border. They are also asking that international pressure be increased on Russia to remove its military bases.

So far, NATO is refusing to ratify the adapted CFE treaty until Russia honors its 1999 Istanbul commitments. Also, the US recently announced the continuation of a training package for Georgian military and border guards. However, the EU and the OSCE have offered very limited assistance on both issues.

In response to this hesitance, Georgia continues to increase the pressure itself on Russia to pull out its bases, and is attempting to create its own international border monitoring group, possibly made up of former Soviet and client states. The country is hoping also that its recent decision to more than double the number of troops in Iraq – from 300 to 850 – will help convince the U.S. and NATO to participate in a border monitoring mission. The fact is that Georgia's dependence on Russian energy supplies and its economic situation will make it difficult for the country to take care of these issues without significant Western support. Given the precariousness of Georgian-Russian relations, the Western international community would do well to work to eliminate any future potential areas of military conflict by energetically supporting Georgia's efforts to keep its territory free of foreign troops, and to monitor its border openly and effectively.

Source Notes:

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- (2) Joint Statement of the Russian Federation and Georgia, 17 Nov 99 via www.osce.org/docs/english/1990-1999/cfe/cfeinact99e.htm
- (3) Agence France Presse, 23 Dec 00 via Lexis-Nexis.
- (4) Interfax News Agency, 26 Dec 00 via Lexis-Nexis.
- (5) Interfax News Agency, 0952 GMT, 19 Jan 05 via Lexis-Nexis
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- (7) RIA Novosti, 29 Nov 04 via Lexis-Nexis.
- (8) Civil Georgia, 13 Feb 05 via (www.civil.ge).
- (9) Ibid.
- (10) Rustavi-2 TV, 1800 GMT, 25 Feb 05; BBC Monitoring via Lexis-Nexis.
- (11) Ibid.
- (12) Interfax News Agency, 23 Feb 05 via Lexis-Nexis.
- (13) Vremya Novosti, 22 Feb 05, p. 5; Defense and Security via Lexis-Nexis.
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Newly Independent States: Central Asia

By Fabian Adami

KAZAKHSTAN

Opposition on the verge of splitting?

In September last year, Kazakhstan held its second parliamentary elections since obtaining independence in 1991. During the year preceding the polls, several events occurred that were to have a considerable impact on the vote. First, in October 2003, President Nursultan Nazarbaev's daughter Dariga formed her own political party, Asar, and announced her intention to run in the elections. (1) Nazarbaeva's emergence onto the political scene seemed to indicate that the long-rumored succession battle between Nazarbaeva and her brother-in-law, Timur Kubilayev, finally had been decided in her favor.

Then, in July 2004, President Nazarbaev appointed Altynbek Sarsenbayev, one of three co-chairmen of Ak Zhol (Kazakhstan's strongest opposition party) to the post of Information Minister. (2) In his first official interview, Sarsenbayev stated that he had accepted the position only upon receipt of a guarantee from Nazarbaev that elections would be conducted in an "open and honest" fashion. (3) Less than two weeks after Sarsenbayev's appointment, Bolat Abilov, another of Ak Zhol's co-chairmen, was convicted of slandering a fellow Majlis deputy, and barred from running in the polls. (4) It was evident immediately that these events were part of a concerted campaign to subvert the opposition and to clear the path for Nazarbaeva's ascendancy. Election returns showed that this campaign had been successful: Asar gained three seats in the Majlis, making it the second largest pro-presidential party in the country.

Less than 24 hours after the election, Sarsenbayev announced his resignation, stating that he could not remain in a government which "actively interfered with the election campaign, juggled and falsified results of the expression of people's will." (5) The question had to be posed as to why Sarsenbayev accepted the President's "assurances" and took a government post. One plausible answer is that he wished to draw attention to the plight of opposition groups, and Kazakhstan's democratic deficit.

If this indeed was Sarsenbayev's motivation, then he was successful. But his actions may have weakened even further the only viable opposition group in Kazakhstan.

On 13 February, Ak Zhol's third co-chairman, Alikhan Baimenov, called a special plenary meeting of the party, and proposed a vote of no confidence in Sarsenbayev. Although several regional factions of the party refused to join the vote, the motion was passed, and Sarsenbayev's position now stands in question. Abilov chose to side with Sarsenbayev in calling the vote a "foolish escapade." (6) Baimenov apparently called for the vote due to an alleged

violation of party rules. Sarsenbayev has apparently been negotiating in recent months with Democratic Choice of Kazakhstan and the Communist Party with the intent of forming one joint opposition group, to be called the Coordinating Council of Democratic Forces. (7) The proposed triple-merger would see a joint candidate put forward for the Presidential elections slated for January 2006. Baimenov has claimed that such merger talks are not permitted by the Ak Zhol charter, and submitted the no-confidence motion for that reason.

A dispute in the leadership of Ak Zhol apparently has been fermenting for some time, with the vote of no confidence merely being the first public manifestation of a wider problem. Baimenov and other senior opposition figures, since September, have been accusing Sarsenbayev of betraying the opposition's cause whilst serving as a Minister, because he ordered the closure of several media outlets that were sympathetic to the opposition's cause. (8)

The war of words between the co-chairmen since the plenum has continued: Abilov published a statement in which he accused Baimenov of violating party statutes by calling for the vote against Sarsenbayev. As yet, there has been no indication that Baimenov has responded to this allegation. But if Sarsenbayev is not removed—as called for by the vote, it is possible that Baimenov will split from the party. Baimenov holds the sole seat gained by Ak Zhol in the parliamentary elections. It is not clear what would happen to the seat if he leaves the party, but it is possible that the seat would be put up for re-election, and that Kazakhstan's opposition would lose its "symbolic" presence in the Majlis. (9) At this point in time, Party members apparently are divided equally between the two leadership factions, and a decision on whether to break up the party will be made at its next congress, to be held on a date, as yet unspecified, in the near future.

The dispute in Ak Zhol worsens an already dismal situation for the opposition in Kazakhstan. In January, an Almaty court ruled that Democratic Choice of Kazakhstan must be liquidated because statements made in December by the

party had effectively threatened revolution and called for "resolute public actions, including civil disobedience campaigns," and further, had declared Nazarbaev's Presidency to be "illegitimate and anti-people." (10) As yet, the party has not disbanded, and has moved to appeal the judgment against it. It must be stated that the likelihood of a successful appeal is remote. If Ak Zhol indeed splits, and Democratic Choice is liquidated, Kazakhstan will lack any viable opposition group that will be able to collect the necessary signatures to mount a challenge against Nazarbaev in 2006.

Kyrgyzstan elections

On 27 February, Kyrgyzstan held parliamentary elections. The three-month period prior to the elections witnessed several important developments. First, President Askar Akaev's son, and most importantly, his daughter, Bermet Akaeva, were nominated to stand in the election. (11) At the same time, Roza Otunbaeva, co-leader of Ata Jurt-one of Kyrgyzstan's leading opposition parties, and former Foreign Minister, was barred from running in the election. Although the official explanation for her exclusion was that she failed to meet residency requirements, it was suspicious, to say the least, that Otunbaeva had planned to run in the same district as Akaeva. (12)

Otunbaeva's exclusion sparked a number of protests outside the Parliament in Bishkek. President Akaev was quick to dismiss the protesters, labeling them "home grown instigators" who wished to re-create Kiev's Orange Revolution. (13) Prime Minister Nikolai Tanayev joined in attacking the protesters, even going as far as issuing a thinly veiled warning that the government would be prepared to use force to prevent revolution if necessary. (14)

That President Akaev and his government are deeply concerned about a 'Kiev repetition' has been shown throughout the election campaign. In an interview given to Nezavisimaya gazeta, Akaev accused the United States of covertly funding Otunbaeva's candidacy, while Tanayev warned the OSCE that any

outside meddling in the polls would not be tolerated. (15) At the same time, President Akaev attempted to appeal directly to the Kyrgyz people. In a key speech given at a youth rally in Bishkek, Akaev argued that the elections were a "test" for the country, and stated that Kyrgyzstan was immune to the "sickly foreign rose, orange and yellow viruses" represented by opposition figures. (16)

At first glance, Akaev's appeals would seem to have fallen on deaf ears: There have been protests around the country for the last three weeks—including on election day itself. A closer look however, shows that these protests have been caused directly by the actions of President Akaev and his government.

On 8 February, the newspaper Moya Stolitsa Novosti (MSN) published an article alleging that members of Akaev's family, including his children, had been involved in illegitimate business deals. Nine days later, President Akaev accused the newspaper of "systematic information terror," and threatened to sue the media outlet, unless a full apology was published. (17) On 22 February, the printing house in which the newspaper is housed, experienced a power outage lasting 48 hours. Freedom House protested the outage, noting that it was probably a deliberate attempt at "censorship," and that the action raised serious concerns that "the Kyrgyz government seeks to deny opposition newspapers and candidates a voice in the crucial pre-election period." (18) Akaev's threat to sue resulted in protests in Bishkek during which calls were made for the government to cease harassing media outlets. As a result of the power outage becoming public knowledge, the protests lasted into the next day. (19) The more serious protests, however, have been those that have occurred nationwide in reaction to the barring of opposition candidates from the elections.

On 22 February, a large protest involving several thousand persons occurred in the Naryn region, where the demonstrators blocked a major highway leading to Bishkek and demanded that the government reinstate opposition candidates from the district. A second demonstration involving similar tactics occurred at Issyk-Kul

Oblast, where 2500 persons used logs and garbage to block another major thoroughfare to protest the barring of opposition candidate former Prime Minister Arslanbek Maliev from the election. Similar protests on a smaller scale—including one in Jalal-Abad Oblast involving 500 demonstrators—reportedly took place in three of Kyrgyzstan's seven oblasts. (20) The government's reaction to these protests—some of which lasted more than five days—revealed major concern: On 25 February, the Interior Ministry announced that it was placing all law enforcement personnel, including riot police, on high alert for the remainder of the election period. (21) There was no indication whether the military's alert status had also been upgraded.

Until now, Kyrgyzstan's Parliament had been a bicameral body. As a result of recent changes, Parliament is now a unicameral institution with 75 seats. 420 candidates competed for these seats in Sunday's election. Preliminary turnout data showed that over 50% of the eligible population voted in the polls. (22) However, the election has proven to be largely inconclusive with preliminary results showing that only 30 of 75 seats were decided. (23) Run-off elections are expected to be held for the remaining 45 seats on Sunday, 13 March.

As was the case in neighboring Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz government, together with CIS observers, has been insisting that there were no violations, and that the polls were a demonstration of Kyrgyzstan's forward progress. (24) However, the OSCE, in its preliminary statement, noted that it had observed "widespread withdrawal of candidates from the election campaign, bribing of voters, and a low level of voter confidence." (25) In the interim, the most interesting developments are that President Akaev's son won his district, while his daughter Bermet—running in the district previously occupied by Roza Otunbaeva—has made it through to a second round. President Akaev held a press conference after the polls closed on Sunday evening, during which he announced that he "never intended to launch any constitutional amendments" to extend his term, and that he was "not going to do so now." (26) Under the Kyrgyz Constitution, Akaev's

current (second) term must be his last; it is an interesting omission however, that President Akaev failed to address the question of whether one of his pro-presidential allies in the Parliament might launch such an amendment for him. As such, Akaev's statement should not yet be taken at face value. Akaev's future moves may depend on his daughter's performance in the 13 March run off.

Finally, although the opposition Ata-Jurt party held a small rally (which Roza Otunbaeva addressed) on 28 February in Bishkek, no really major demonstrations have been held so far since the elections. (27) It remains to be seen what occurs when the Central Election Commission announces the final results of the 30 decided seats, and what occurs in the second round of voting.

Source Notes:

(1) See NIS Observed: An Analytical Review, Volume IX, Number 14 (15 September 2004).

(2) Ibid.

(3) Ibid.

(4) Ibid.

(5) See NIS Observed: An Analytical Review, Volume IX, Number 15 (29 September 2004).

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- (12) Ibid.
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- (27) "Kyrgyzstan: Opposition Holds First Protest Ahead of Election Results," RFE/RL Feature Article, 28 Feb 05 via

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Unless otherwise indicated, all articles appearing in this journal were written especially for *Analyst*. This article was originally published at <http://www.bu.edu/iscip/digest/vol10/ed1003.html>.