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PRESIDENCY

Fear and loathing

With more than two years to go before the next scheduled presidential election in Russia, it is disconcerting that the campaign to select the next president has hit a fever pitch so soon, but the jockeying for position (and profits) is unmistakable. Whether it's the more familiar smear campaigns of prosecutorial investigations into corruption, or the sniping between the Defense Minister and Procurator-General, or even the more extreme—and yet not unheard of—possible assassination attempt on Anatoli Chubais, the signs of a succession struggle abound. (1)

There are several layers to this struggle, some of which are a direct result of Russia's unfinished transition: With the governing ideology still an unstable mesh of democratic, authoritarian and socialist elements, there is a continuing sense that the "soul" of the state is still at risk; the elite clans, easily identifiable in the Yel'tsin era and throughout much of the Putin administration, are disintegrating as personal ambition—political and financial—disrupts the allegiances of onetime political expediency. There is a foreign factor as well, the perception of western involvement in the Orange, Rose and Tulip revolutions has added that dash of paranoia, which exacerbates all the other trends.

For years, the "Young Turk" reformers of the Yel'tsin era clung to state power under the banner of creating, and then securing, private ownership as the foundation of Russia's renunciation of its Soviet past. The creation of oligarchic power and influence, which sprung from the methods chosen by some of these
Young Turks, was partially reversed in the first surge of the Putin administration. (It is, at the very least, arguable that there is a qualitative difference between the practice of allowing private businessmen to profit from sketchy government auctions and then appointing them to powerful political positions, and the consequence of Putin's actions, which disentangled several "oligarchs" from the overt levers of public administration, but allowed political figures and administrative elites to enter the private sector through oversight and ownership of the very businesses confiscated from the last administration's pet financiers.)

Putin's awkward response to the attack at Beslan, which included the controversial "reforms" of the legislature and negation of elections of regional leaders, demonstrates quite vividly the clash of authoritarianism and democracy in Russia. While his changes will proceed, as long as Putin insists that they do, the clamor over the reversal of democratic choice in the regions has demonstrated a large pool of discontent.

Disappointment and frustration with the regime were perhaps most evident this year in the clash over the monetization of benefits. A largely economic and budget-driven decision to convert state benefits was reversed in a number of sectors (most notably the military) due to the widespread protests. Whether these decisions and their consequences amount to a clash of economic ideologies, or rather a response to the state's continuing inability to meet the population's expectations, is an open question.

While much time and ink (band width?) has been spent in the demarcation of clans within the Putin Kremlin, most notably the emigration from St. Petersburg and the rise of the siloviki, the winds of political change threaten to disrupt the apparent bonds of clan loyalty. It has suddenly become more fruitful to determine who sits with whom on what board of directors and what mergers are allowed to proceed, rather than how many years one spent with the services or how well one knew Sobchak.
It is, however, the element of fear over potential foreign intervention in the electoral process that magnifies the levels of discontent in the country (powerful and populace), draws potential political contenders into open struggle, and adds urgency to the apparat maneuvers to secure their "portfolios" before the dreaded political and economic restructuring believed to be inevitable in a post-Putin Russia.

In her attempts to understand apparat responses to possible political challengers to Putin (who, it should be remembered, is not eligible to run in 2008), Yulia Latynina developed an understanding of the anxiety over western involvement in Russian politics among the Kremlin elite: "The United States cares about nothing else but selecting Russian presidents. The Americans are preoccupied by that for 23.5 hours a day, with the remaining half hour spent on toppling Lukashenko."

(2)

**Walking together with our own Putin people**

The first manifestations of the Putin administration's flirtations with a "cult of personality" were awkward: Youth in colored t-shirts with Putin's face emblazoned on them, cheering at rallies or marching through Moscow; a pop song extolling the virtues of Vladimir Vladimirovich; book burnings by nervously intense young Russians. It had all of the potential for idol worship, but little of the follow through.

Older and perhaps wiser, some of the leaders and members of the early Putin fan clubs have created a new movement, Nashi (Our Own). (3) While their foundational meetings were intriguing, it is their recent summer camp that has sparked real interest.

The event, titled "Seliger 2005" for its proximity to Lake Seliger (north of Moscow), reportedly was attended by 3,000 activists and featured guest
speakers including some of the Kremlin's most influential denizens: Deputy Chief of Staff Vladislav Surkov, spin doctor/ideologist Gleb Pavlovsky and State Duma Deputy Andrei Kokoshin, among others. Surkov's comments were particularly pointed, as he vowed to "hand over the country" to the Nashi youth and called on the activists "to protect the youth from Western influence." (4)

The camp initially appeared as an open-air education program with a strong element of discipline (attendees forego alcohol and cursing, instead participating in daily runs and informative lectures), but the armed guards patrolling the perimeter and high-profile guests soon drew attention to the gathering. (5)

The day after the Seliger 2005 camp concluded, Nashi activists (the commissars) were invited to an audience with Putin at Zavidovo. (Putin had been scheduled to speak at the camp but evidently was unable to attend.) In addition to lauding the group for their "example of civil society," Putin provided the acolytes with a meal and posed for photographs. (6)

Nashi managed to turn out a reported 60,000 marchers for the Victory Day celebrations in May, and is reputed to be "managed by 3,000 federal commissars from 30 regions in central Russia." (7) The reality of that regional base is yet to be tested.

Nashi has its share of critics too, of course. Federation Council Speaker Sergei Mironov describes the organization's activists as "ideological wolves who could become unmanageable." (8) That is certainly one of the many dangerous possibilities.

Source Notes:

(1) See Previous NIS Observed for details of the recent clashes between apparat figures, military elites and other "interested parties" in the upcoming elections.
Terrorists on TV
Shamil Basayev's appearance in a pre-taped interview on ABC’s ‘Nightline’ with Radio Liberty reporter Andrei Babitsky drew an irate response from the Kremlin: It culminated in a Ministry of Foreign Affairs announcement that the mandatory accreditation for ABC journalists in Russia would not be extended. Defense Minister Ivanov labeled ABC as ‘persona non grata’ in Russia. (1)

An embarrassment, a rivalry, poor word choice or precedent?
While deriding ABC News for broadcasting the propaganda of a self-proclaimed terrorist, Russian authorities refused to acknowledge an embarrassing reality—that this lone Russian-born journalist gained a private audience with Basayev at his hideout. After years of effort, the FSB, MVD and the GRU have all failed to detain or destroy Basayev, despite Putin’s promise to “find terrorists... in the outhouse.” (2) Perhaps this underlying embarrassment was the trigger for Moscow’s recent vindictive behavior.

Basayev seems entirely willing to provide fuel for the fire of public anger and indignation, identifying himself in the terms that FSB Director Nikolai Patrushev...
or MVD Chief Rashid Nurgaliev themselves have used. “I admit, I'm a bad guy. A bandit, a terrorist.” He also warns that incidents like the Beslan massacre could occur again, as long as the “genocide of the Chechen nation continues...anything can happen.” (3) Stalin himself could not have described a more perfect enemy of the state.

Whatever the impact of such an interview on public opinion or support for Kremlin policies, there is another factor in the decision to oust ABC: The Kremlin's assumption that all foreign reporting is an expression of official foreign government policy. Thus, as Kommersant has reported, the Kremlin reacts as if ABC is operating as a mouthpiece for the U.S. administration, and that the broadcast is further evidence of the deterioration of U.S.-Russian relations. (4)

The fact that Babitsky reports also for Radio Liberty, an organization that receives some U.S. government funding, bolsters this approach. For his part, Babitsky has stated that he never intended to interview Basayev for Radio Liberty. He insists that while on vacation from the network, he traveled to Chechnya to interview a Basayev associate; instead he was masked and taken to Basayev himself. (5) Pundits interviewed by RIA Novosti argued that the interview might have been conducted intentionally, but proved "too hot" for Radio Liberty, and therefore was pitched to ABC. (6) The Kremlin's distorted view of the relationship between the state and the media in the U.S. has been evident previously, but the Putin administration's inability, or resistance, to understand this separation of roles increases the likelihood of misperceptions and conflicts.

Leaving aside the foreign relations ramifications, Russian anger might just as easily have sprung from the title for the online version of the story: “Chechen Guerilla Leader Calls Russians ‘Terrorists’.” (7) The idea that a reputable news institution would refer to Basayev as a guerilla and the Russians as terrorists is viewed as ludicrous. Basayev calls himself a terrorist, why won't ABC? Bolshoi Gorod editor Masha Gessen holds that the Kremlin’s punishment of a foreign
news agency should be seen as a more general warning to all journalists against covering the Chechen conflict in terminology other than those sanctioned by the government. (8) Currently, journalists in Chechnya must register with the Ministry of Defense, which invariably limits their freedom of movement and content. Punishing ABC would serve to reestablish this precedent.

**Or, perhaps, something more personal…**

Andrei Babitsky, and his coverage of Chechnya in particular, has been controversial throughout the Putin regime. Babitsky’s reporting has been a primary source of evidence for those foreign governments and NGOs that have accused the military and security agencies of violating human rights in Chechnya.

While attempting to travel to Beslan to cover the school siege, he was detained by the MVD and accused of attempting to carry explosives onto a plane, then arrested for "hooliganism" after being provoked into a fight with two unidentified men. (9) Gazeta reported that he was detained in Dagestan in 2000 after he reportedly attempted to cross the border using a fake passport. (10) Novaya gazeta recalled that he was “abducted” by the FSB in Chechnya that same year, and after interrogation over a charge of aiding terrorists, was released in what seems to have been a staged prisoner exchange for Russian servicemen. [11] Clearly, the Kremlin would like Babitsky neutralized, and this incident has provided the Kremlin with a passable excuse to ban him from Russia.

**…or something much more complicated**

It would not be unfair to say that Shamil Basayev provides a useful scapegoat for the deteriorating situation in the Caucasus. One might say that there is a certain symbiotic relationship between the security services and Shamil Basayev which boils down to the following: Basayev did it. With every fresh attack in Russia, Basayev either claims responsibility, is held responsible by the security services, or both. Hardly an incident occurs, large or small, that is not attributed to
Basayev in some way. While he remains free to operate against Russian elements in the Caucasus, it is probably also true that he has little to do with the day-to-day operation of terrorist activities in Russia. Yet, he is still held responsible.

The Kremlin knows this reality. It has thus become clear that the Russian authorities are intent on presenting their war on terrorism as one against a mastermind and his organization, rather than an idea. Ideas have a way of dodging bullets.

Consider Rasul Makasharipov, who was the most wanted man in Dagestan until he was killed during a raid by Dagestani MVD troops on July 6, reportedly, in his own home. (12) Makasharipov had become a regional celebrity, both claiming and being assigned responsibility by local MVD authorities for nearly all of the anti-Russian violence in Dagestan. Yet even as the announcement of this victory was being made, another bombing occurred in Makhachkala, the Dagestani capital. (13)

Putin traveled to Dagestan the following week, in secret, due to security concerns. (14) Attacks occur there on a nearly daily basis. The destruction of this one man seems to have had little effect.

Still, the security services persist with a policy of "lone attribution." Shamil Basayev may be such a "good enemy" for the security services and the military, that it might be too risky for them to kill him. It is no secret that many involved in running the campaign in the Caucasus would like it to continue indefinitely, since these corrupt officials are drowning in floods of Moscow’s money.

However, even if the security services wanted to win the war, they might have a harder time with Basayev gone. After all, they killed Aslan Maskhadov, the man the FSB claimed was his partner in crime and co-leader of the terrorists. The
security situation in the Caucasus has only deteriorated since. If they kill Basayev and the violence continues, what explanation will the security services have?

Source Notes:

(4) Nezavisimaya gazeta, 1 Aug 05; WPS via Lexis-Nexis.
(5) Novaya gazeta, 4 Aug 05; WPS via Lexis-Nexis.
(6) RIA Novosti, 8 Aug 05 via Lexis-Nexis.
(7) Nightline, ibid.
(9) The Moscow Times, 6 Sep 04 via Lexis-Nexis.
(10) Gazeta, 1 Aug 05, What the Papers Say via Lexis-Nexis.
(11) Novaya gazeta, 28 Jan 05; WPS 31 Jan 05 via Lexis-Nexis.
(12) Nezavisimaya gazeta, 8 Jul 05, WPS via Lexis-Nexis.
(13) Ibid.

Russian Federation: Foreign Relations

By Rebecca Mulder

The Finnish example
At President Putin's recent meeting with Finnish President Tarja Halonen. The official agenda included travel rules between Russia and the E.U., forestry, high technology, innovation and common border arrangements. This followed the Russia-E.U. summit, where decisions were made regarding the “road map” for the creation of the “four common spaces,” and the Northern Dimension Initiative. The latter, a program aimed at balancing the development of southern and northern Europe and making use of the abundance of natural resources in northern Russia, was initiated by the E.U. in September 1997 and became official E.U. strategy in June 1999. Finland assumes the rotating E.U. presidency in the second half of 2006 and Halonen stated that E.U.-Russian cooperation and the Northern Dimension Initiative would be key elements of the E.U. agenda. (1)

Alexander Yakovenko, spokesman for Russia's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, stated that Russian-Finnish relations are strong, with an emphasis on favorable economic development and greater competitiveness within their national economies. He added that investment opportunities have increased and Russia is third in Finnish foreign trade. (2) Putin expressed his reservation concerning the admission of Estonia and Latvia into the E.U. and raised once more the issue of Russian speakers in the two countries: “The modern law system in all developed countries has common approaches. There are basic notions: citizen, foreigner, a stateless person and a person with dual citizenship. Our partners in the Baltics invented a new notion – non-citizen. This does not exist in any other country.” (3) Yakovenko added that Finland, a nation of rich democratic traditions, “which make it possible for all the people permanently resident in the country to participate in municipal elections irrespective of citizenship…can serve as a good example for Riga and Tallin.” (4) Halonen, however, disagreed with these assessments of the situation in the Baltic republics and stated that the matter will not be a priority during Finland's E.U. presidency.

Indeed, Finland, Estonia and the E.U. have shown interest in minority rights issues within Russia, namely the status of the Finno-Urgic peoples related to
Finns and Estonians. Vladislav Surkov, Deputy Head of Putin’s presidential administration chose to interpret this interest as geopolitical in nature, supposedly because of the oil-rich location in which these ethnic minorities reside. (5) The issues mentioned are likely to remain contentious. Other matters generating friction between Moscow and Helsinki concern Finland’s support of the Baltics’ position on border treaties with Russia, their demand that Russia recognize that they were forcibly annexed, and concern that the expansion of Russian oil tanker and port facilities to increase energy export in the Baltic Sea region could endanger the ecological security of the area.

**No peace treaty needed**

Presidential Envoy in the Far East Federal District Konstantin Pulikovsky recently stated that no peace treaty ending WWII is needed between Russia and Japan, and, therefore, no resolution of the dispute over the Kuril Islands (the Northern Territories) is necessary. Pulikovsky remarked, “The problem of the so-called Northern Territories is more of a PR platform for election campaigns of Japanese politicians. This is their domestic affair, which does not concern Russia.” (6) Moreover, he claimed that, in any case, relations were fairly strong in the economic and tourist spheres. Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov also stressed that the absence of a peace treaty has not hampered varied bilateral cooperation. (7) Russia continues to acknowledge the territorial problem with Japan but rejects Japan’s demand that the four Kuril islands be returned.

Russia’s rejection of a peace treaty and its unwillingness to make any concessions to Japan are likely to harm future relations, however friendly or economically advantageous Russia asserts that they might be. Without an attractive scenario for large-scale investment, Russia may not be able to secure Japanese interest. China's status in the region could prove to be a very dynamic force as well. Russia’s dismissive attitude towards Japanese concerns is likely to affect future relations between them.
The North Korean problem
The first stage of the fourth round of the six-party talks involving North and South Korea, the United States, Japan, China and Russia were held in Beijing, July 26-August 7. Aleksandr Aleksayev, head of the Russian delegation, said that whether the new round of negotiations would yield any positive results depended largely on the outcome of bilateral consultations between North Korea and the United States, which seeks a mutually acceptable way to bring about a nuclear-free Korean peninsula. (8) Talks are scheduled to resume in late August or early September, giving delegates time to come up with acceptable solutions between now and then. China continues to play the leading role in these talks but whether its influence leads to denuclearization by North Korea remains to be seen.

“Imperialism” in Cuba
U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice’s recent announcement of the creation of a post responsible for preparing a change of power in Cuba (“Cuba Transition Coordinator”) sparked a vehement response from Karen Khachaturov, head of the Russian Committee for Cooperation with Latin America: “This is another anti-Cuban gesture and a demonstration by U.S. authorities of their extreme hostility to their island neighbor, the victim of almost 50 years of unjust trade sanctions.” (9)

Attack in Poland
Four high school pupils of the Russian Embassy in Poland were attacked and severely beaten by about fifteen Polish teenagers in a Warsaw park. Russian officials assert the attack is connected to anti-Russian sentiments in Poland, “recently fueled by politicians’ unfriendly statements.” (10) A spokesman with the Russian Foreign Ministry stated, “The responsibility for the current situation in bilateral relations rests with the Polish authorities.” (11) A demand was made to the Polish ambassador that Polish authorities carry out a thorough inquiry into the matter, finding and punishing those guilty, and compensating the injured parties. Russia expects official apologies from Poland. (12)
Source Notes:

(4) Ibid., Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 1 Aug 05 via http://www.ln.mid.ru.
(7) Ibid.
(11) Ibid.

Russian Federation: Domestic Issues and Legislative Branch

By Robyn Angley
Putin, NGOs, the press, and the Public Chamber

The "Law on the Public Chamber" went into effect on 1 July 2005, giving rise to heightened discussion about the state of civil society in Russia. The discussion with the most significant ramifications emanates from the Kremlin itself. At a meeting of the Council for Facilitating the Development of Civil Society Institutions and Human Rights on 20 July, Putin brought up the issue of Western funding to Russian NGOs. His comments demonstrated characteristic perception on his part, although perhaps unintentionally. "I am categorically against the foreign financing of [NGOs'] political activities in Russia...We understand that he who pays the piper calls the tune," he said. (1) That's why he went on to offer state funding to NGOs. "The grants that our organizations of this kind [i.e., NGOs] receive, including from abroad, represent mere pennies, really, and we are ready to take steps to provide our own support. The only thing that worries me is that I would not want you to think that this would be some kind of dependence, some kind of bribery offered by the state. We are ready to work in this direction in consultation with you, if we can develop a mechanism for cooperation in this area." (2)

Putin's remarks were met with frustration by some NGO representatives. Lyudmila Alekseyeva, the head of the Moscow Helsinki Group, participated in the 20 July meeting with Putin and expressed her frustration both with being accused of being a Western lap-dog and with the potential consequences of accepting money from the state. "If we take money from the state for our work, how will we be able to say, for example, that state officials falsify results of elections.... If we wish to be independent from our state officials we have no choice but to take money from the West." (3)

Putin's comments come just as the Public Chamber, a body that initially was proposed to allow more oversight of the state structures by civil society, is coming into effect. The Chamber is suspected by some activists and critics of
being a tool used by the state to demonstrate civic support and participation while, at the same time, curbing criticism by co-opting civil society groups into state structures.

Nonetheless, the reaction of civic groups has not been entirely negative. Lyudmila Alekseyeva, whose Moscow Helsinki Group has stated that it will not be participating in the Public Chamber, dismissed the body as a means of controlling the state's actions, but thought it could be useful. According to Alekseyeva, for the social groups that join it, the Public Chamber will provide a channel of communication with officials. For her own organization, however, Alekseyeva seems to prefer the communication channels already in place. "There is nothing for rights activists to do there. We have the Council for Promoting the Development of the Institutions of a Civil Society and Human Rights under the Russian President and the Human Rights Commissioner," she said. (4)

In his speech on 3 August to the representatives of the Presidential Consultative Bodies on the formation of the Public Chamber, Putin outlined his criteria for the 42 members of the Chamber that he appoints. He stated that they should have "broad public support, personal authority and influence in society and in their professional circles." They should also be "prepared for work at expert level" and "as free as possible of political bias." (5)

Putin evidently expects the Public Chamber to fit well within the scheme of Russia's "managed democracy." The Chamber "should not be like some kind of ministry for working with civil society, but should be one of the fundamental structures within civil society itself." (6) In other words, civil society does not consist of self-organizing, autonomous groups of people that have coalesced around social or political interests, as commonly conceived in the West. Instead it is to be a group of people hand-picked by the state (or those close to the state) to serve as a symbol of public approval and support.
The unfolding process of establishing the Public Chamber demonstrates clearly the two-track trajectory of civil society development in Putin's Russia. On one side, state-initiated or state-influenced civic groups receive benefits from the government, including subsidized rent and other assistance. (This is likely one of the perks of belonging to the Public Chamber. According to a gazeta.ru article last December, only groups accredited by the Public Chamber will be eligible for state-sponsored grants.) It is members of these organizations (and other innocuous but well-respected members of society) that are likely to be selected by the president because he cannot afford to have vocal opposition in the Public Chamber.

On the other side, independent civic organizations have developed outside of government influence; these groups conform more to the Western definition of civil society in terms of autonomy from the state. They include environmental groups, feminist organizations, and human rights activists. Many of them receive funding from Western-based foundations and are vulnerable to shifting emphases in the donor community, from seed grants to NGO resource centers, for example. Their focus, in part, is determined by the projects and initiatives that donors are interested in supporting. Because this funding provides their primary means of existence, many NGOs must adjust their activities accordingly. Some independent civic groups have refused to join the Public Chamber, including the human rights group Memorial, as well as Moscow Helsinki Group.

Finding Russian-based funding for NGOs whose activities might provoke the state has become even more challenging since the arrest and conviction of Mikhail Khodorkovsky, a wealthy businessman with political aspirations whose company Yukos committed millions of dollars to civic organizations in the early portion of this decade. The risk of criminal prosecution for businesses and individuals supporting controversial NGOs has made Western funding all the more critical in maintaining NGOs with opposition viewpoints.
Independent NGOs face the challenge of trying to make themselves heard in a society whose media have come under increasing state pressure. Ironically, Putin raised the issue of "the Chamber's interaction with the media, above all regarding public involvement in ensuring guarantees for freedom of speech and, of course, citizens' rights to freely disseminate and receive information" at the 3 August meeting. (8) His comments follow on the heels of the announcement by the Foreign Ministry on 2 August that the licenses for ABC journalists (mandatory for operating legally as a journalist in Russia) would not be renewed. The decision reflects displeasure with ABC's broadcast of an interview on its television show Nightline. The segment featured Chechen terrorist Shamil Basayev, interviewed by Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty (RFE/RL) journalist Andrew Babitsky. RFE/RL Mass Media Relations Director Donald Jensen told RIA-Novosti that the interview was conducted by Babitsky while he was on vacation in Russia, thereby abdicating any responsibility for his actions on the part of RFE/RL. He added, "RFE/RL has not used this material." (9)

The refusal to renew the licenses of ABC journalists is a clear signal from Moscow about both press freedom and coverage of the "counter-terrorist operation" in Chechnya. Foreign media outlets have been much more willing to air unfavorable coverage of the Chechen war than the Russian domestic press and have constituted a primary means of access to Western governments by independent Russian NGOs. Clamping down on coverage of Russian affairs by Western media, particularly on the issue of Chechnya, will make it all the more difficult for human rights organizations to make their voices heard. The Public Chamber may provide access to state structures for compliant, state-influenced civic groups, but for those preferring to remain outside that system, the number of options for reaching both a domestic and international audience are rapidly shrinking.

Source Notes:
(1) "Foreign-funded NGOS pry into Russian politics – Putin," Reuters, 21 Jul 05 via Johnson's Russia List (JRL) # 9207.
(3) "Alekseev: We are tired of being called the lap-dogs of the West," Argumenty i Fakty, 27 Jul 05 via JRL #9211.
(4) "Russian civil society watchdog must be apolitical: Putin," Agence France-Presse, 3 Aug 05 via JRL #9216.
(6) Ibid.
(7) "Russian civil society watchdog must be apolitical: Putin," Agence France-Presse, 3 Aug 05 via JRL #9216.
(9) "Radio Liberty says correspondent interviewed Basayev while on vacation," RIA Novosti, 3 Aug 05 via JRL #9216.

Russian Federation: Armed Forces
By Marcel LeBlanc

Lessons Learned from Priz
Kremlin officials claim last week’s rescue of the mini-submarine Priz (designated AS-28) and its seven member crew was the direct result of lessons learned during the Kursk disaster of August 2000. Specifically, in handling the Priz incident, officials cite their willingness to seek foreign assistance—in this case British,
U.S., and Japanese equipment and personnel—as a sign of a fundamental mindset shift among Russian military leaders. Although help did arrive in time to save Priz and her crew, analysis of this near-tragedy suggests Russian leaders did not learn as much from Kursk as they contend.

**Contrasts from Kursk**

Russian military accidents, specifically those involving submarines, inevitably will be compared to Kursk. In happy contrast to that disaster, everyone on board the Priz was rescued and the mini-sub was recovered largely undamaged. The direct result of an international rescue effort—one for which Russian Defense Minister Sergei Ivanov expressed “deepest gratitude”—this success significantly involved three of Russia's former military rivals using Western equipment and personnel, in cooperation with the Russian fleet, to rescue a Russian asset. (1) What changed in the ensuing five years following the Kursk to make commanders so much more willing to seek help? Perhaps less than appears on the surface. The Priz, unlike the Kursk, was not a nuclear-powered, flagship-of-the-fleet submarine. It had only a seven member crew, was only 44 feet long and was not a “tactical” submarine. Also, not to be overlooked is the benign nature of Priz’s accident. Entanglement in fishing nets or an underwater acoustic array (the story varies from source to source) does not raise the same thorny issues as was the case with the Kursk's undetermined on-board explosion. (2) After being freed by Britain’s remotely operated submersible Scorpio, Priz surfaced under its own power, allowing a number of Russian officials to avoid questions about the training and maintenance of Russia’s once-vaunted fleet. All of these factors made the decision to ask for help in 2005 undoubtedly easier and more viable than in 2000.

**Similarities to Kursk**

Happily for the crew of AS-28, events transpired in their favor, even though all indications during the first half of their ordeal suggested otherwise. In chilling similarity to Kursk, the official position taken following initial reports of Priz’s
troubles was to disavow any such incident. (3) The Russian leaders followed this position with claims they had “no comment,” a position that evolved into a desire to avoid “interfering” with the rescue. Finally, President Putin dispatched Defense Minister Sergei Ivanov to “direct” the rescue efforts. He nearly missed the actual rescue. (4) There are even claims by Radio 3 journalists in the port city of Petropavlovsk-Kamchatski that a phone call to their station forced Russians officials to acknowledge that AS-28 was in trouble. (5) If this is true, it seems only a phone call prevented the Priz from meeting a fate similar to the Kursk.

Much like the Fall of 2000, military and political leaders are grappling with what should be objective details surrounding the mini-sub’s rescue. This inability to get their collective facts straight will prevent the self-evaluation necessary to avoid another serious event. For example, questions still abound surrounding the amount of oxygen on board Priz after her crew was rescued—an important detail in evaluating how critical the situation had become before officials asked for help. Also to be determined is just what snagged the AS-28, fishing nets or underwater cables the Russian Navy had placed on the sea floor. This is an important factor in determining whether Priz’s crew was properly trained and equipped for the mission or just unlucky. Most importantly, why did the Russians fail to provide rescue equipment of their own? In post-rescue interviews, Defense Minister Ivanov claimed that logistically it was more feasible to fly the British Scorpio to Kamchatka than the Russian Venom (Russian submersible similar to Scorpio). (6) This statement is grimly amusing considering that Scorpio was flown from Scotland to Kamchatka, and it conflicts with statements from Russian admirals (both active and retired) who claim either that Russia has no such capability or that it lacks the personnel to operate equipment of this kind. This glaring discrepancy could spell disaster for future submariners who find themselves in peril.

The Road Ahead
The Kremlin’s official call for help in rescuing Priz and its crew undoubtedly was correct and, obviously, timely. However, some stark contrasts from—and surprising similarities to—the Kursk tragedy of August 2000 point to far less institutional change than has been heralded by the same officials. In this light, calls for procedural reform to prevent future accidents and promises for technical upgrades to rescue crews if accidents do happen, ring hollow. (7) More importantly, an inability for honest, self-critical analysis in the highest echelons of the military will affect morale at the deck plates and will almost guarantee another disaster in the future. Given its complex technical nature and training-intensive environment, the submarine force seems the most likely candidate for such a mishap.

Source Notes:

(2) Vladimir Isachenkov, "Rescued Sailors Were Running Low on Oxygen," Associated Press, 8 Aug 05 via Johnson's Russia List (JRL) #9219.
(4) Ibid.
(5) "Whistleblower broke secret of Russian sub and 'saved men's lives',' Agence France Presse, 9 Aug 05 via JRL #9220.
(6) "British were fastest to reach mini-sub accident site - Russian minister," Channel One TV, Moscow, in Russian 0500 GMT, 8 Aug 05; BBC Monitoring via JRL #9219.
(7) “Criminal Probe of Mini-Sub Accident Begins,” Associated Press, 9 Aug 05 via JRL #9220.
BELARUS

Lukashenka prepares for presidential election

On 27 July, Belarusian Police and OMON forces stormed and seized the Hrodna headquarters of the Union of Poles in Belarus (SPB). SPB Chair Andzelika Borys told Radio Free Europe (RFE), “The police and OMON forces, carrying weapons, broke into the building…. They began to demand that members of the Union of Poles, who were inside, leave the building. People were indignant. There were about 20 of us. On what basis was the order issued? Why were the police there? Why was the OMON there? Without any explanation, they began to throw people out by force.” (1)

Authorities detained and questioned those who had been inside the headquarters for a number of hours, after which time they were released. No explanation for the action was provided. However, the reason behind the attack could not be more clear. The decision by Belarusian President Aleksandr Lukashenka to attack the SPB points to a frightening willingness to do whatever is necessary to hold onto power through next year's presidential election. The SPB is naturally a prime Lukashenka target, given that it is the largest non-governmental organization in Belarus, and that it receives partial funding from Poland. However, the attack also demonstrates the significant effect of the Georgian and Ukrainian “color” revolutions on the leadership of other post-Soviet states, and underscores Russia’s continuing support for Lukashenka’s policies.

According to Andzelika Borys, the Union of Poles in Belarus maintains an “active membership” of 10,000 ethnically-Polish Belarusians, but claims to represent all 400,000 ethnic Poles in the country. It is widely said to be the most active independent association in Belarus, focusing on Polish language education, lobbying for the rights of minorities, and – most disturbing to the authorities –
attempting to provide Belarusian citizens with independent news from Poland. The group also apparently serves as an informal center for journalists writing about events in Belarus. At the time of the raid on SPB headquarters, there were ten Belarusian and Polish journalists inside, reporting for Gazeta Wyborcza, the Associated Press, Glos Znad Ziemma, Nasha Niva, Pressbol and the online www.Pahonia.Promedia. (2)

In recent months, the organization has become more vocal in its criticism of Belarusian authorities and more independent in its activities – two things not tolerated by Lukashenka. In particular, when SPB members elected new leadership early this year, they ignored an informal requirement that NGOs within Belarus receive approval of their leadership. Instead, the group publicly elected new management – led by Borys – during a national congress in March.

The Belarusian Justice Ministry reacted negatively to the election of a leadership unconnected to (or unco-opted by) the government, but took no immediate steps against the group.

However, on the morning of 12 May, Belarus’ big brother entered the fray. Russian FSB Director Nikolai Patrushev lashed out at foreign international organizations and claimed that a summit had been held in Slovakia where “the possibility of continuing ‘velvet revolutions’ on the post-Soviet space was discussed.” Moreover, he claimed that “various non-governmental organizations” were being used for this purpose, and that $5 million had already been allocated “to finance opposition movements in Belarus.” (3)

Belarusian authorities fell into line. The Belarusian Justice Department announced that the election of SPB’s new leadership over two months earlier was flawed, and that “the rulings of the 6th convention [of the SPB] are annulled.” (5) The authorities also began threatened to detain members of the organization. In response, journalist and SPB spokesman Andrej Pachobut said, “By all
means, we shall defend the right to determine the public life of the Poles in
Belarus independently.” (6) The stage for confrontation was set.

Soon after, both Belarus and Poland expelled several diplomats each. The spat
also increased already tense relations between Russia and Poland, with the
latter accusing Russia of supporting Belarus’ authoritarian policies.
Rzeczpospolita wrote, “The issue: Ukraine today, and Belarus in the future.
Russia wants to maintain these countries within its exclusive sphere of influence.
Poland, in turn, sees Ukraine as a member of the E.U. in a foreseeable future,
and sees other post-Soviet states - Georgia, perhaps Moldova, and definitely
post-Lukashenka Belarus - in close relations with Europe. These two strategies
cannot be reconciled.” (7)

Tensions increased significantly in June when an outspoken member of SPB was
killed in Minsk in what was described as “a brutal knife attack.” Spokesman
Pachobut said that Jusefa Varaska’s death followed accusations on Belarusian
television that the SPB had been given millions of dollars by NATO to use in anti-
governmental activity. He said it also came in the midst of continued harassment
of SPB members. (8) Not surprisingly, no arrests have been made in the case.

In the days following the OMON raid on SPB, both the E.U. and U.S. issued
statements of condemnation. In particular, the E.U. said the raid demonstrates
“once again the systematic and increasing repression of civil society, the political
opposition and the independent media.” (9) Poland also released its own much
harsher statement and called on the E.U. to take concrete steps against Belarus.
“The E.U. should take decisive and coordinated steps to urge the Belarusian
regime to respect human and national minority rights, international law and
bilateral treaties,” the Foreign Minister said. (10)

E.U. and Polish diplomats also attempted to secure a commitment from Russian
President Vladimir Putin to discuss the issue with Lukashenka. The efforts
appeared to be to no avail – a predictable result, given past experience. In mid-July, Poland had also prevailed upon Putin to discuss the harassment of the SPB during a summit between the two held in Zavidovo, Russia. Putin instead chose to stand next to Lukashenka, shaking hands in a photo opportunity relished by the beleaguered Belarusian president. Lukashenka said, "I greatly value such support, particularly in the sense of developing positive personal relations." (11)

Buoyed by Russia’s support, Lukashenka and his allies remain defiant in the face of international condemnation. The latest foreign ministry response harkened back to previous claims of inappropriate interference in Belarus. “The unilateral and politicized approach of evaluating the situation in Belarus confirms [their] aim to change the independent course of the Belarusian state,” it said. (12) The ministry also summoned the Ukrainian and Moldovan ambassadors to express its “dissatisfaction” that Ukraine and Moldova had joined the E.U. statement criticizing Belarus. Lukashenka showed no sign of backing down. (13)

Although no SPB members were arrested on the night of the police raid, SPB members and journalists from Poland have been under increased attack by security services in the last two weeks.

Pachobut and SPB newspaper editor Andrzej Pisalnik were arrested in late July and will serve 10-15 days in jail. Two journalists representing Poland’s most popular newspaper, Gazeta Wyborcza, and a reporter for Polish TVP1 also were briefly arrested on the way to cover Pachobut’s trial. Several days ago, a Polish photojournalist was removed from a train and detained when attempting to return to Poland. (14) And most disturbingly, on 3 August, Veslaw Kewlyak, the deputy head of SPB, was jailed for 15 days. His crime? Meeting with the deputy speaker of the Polish Sejm. “A Sejm deputy has arrived in Hrodna today without notifying the Belarusian authorities and under the protection of a diplomatic passport. He held a meeting with the illegitimate leadership of the Union of Poles in Belarus,” Belarusian State TV announced indignantly. (15)
These latest arrests follow the arrests of most of Lukashenka’s political opponents – decimating the ranks of potential “democratic” successors. At this time, six major opposition figures sit in prison, usually jailed for holding unauthorized gatherings or slandering the president. The majority of these leaders, including ex-Foreign Minister Mihail Marinich, leader of the Narodnaya Gramada Party Mikalay Statkevich, and MPs Andrey Klimau and Sierhay Skerbets had been seen as possible challengers to Lukashenka in the election. It is not surprising, then, that most have sentences miraculously set to end not long after the September election. Still, their fates are better than some of their colleagues who simply disappeared.

Following these latest incidents, an excerpt of a recent letter from political prisoner Skrebets to the new leader of the Narodnaya Gramada – himself facing increased persecution – seems particularly relevant. “I hope that freedom and democracy will win in our country soon,” he said. “It’s a question of time, but only for those who deserve freedom, who are ready to fight for it. I am ready for that, and you should hold on, too.” (16)

Source Notes:

(2) Reporters Without Borders, 29 Jul 05; via www.rsf.org.
(3) Associated Press, 12 May 05, 17:20 GMT via Lexis-Nexis.
(4) RFE/RL, 18 May 05 via www.rferl.org.
(5) Charter 97, 05 May 05 via www.charter97.org.
(6) Ibid.
(7) Rzeczpospolita, 8 Jul 05; BBC Monitoring via Lexis-Nexis.
(8) ISN Security Watch, 29 Jun 05 via www.date.minsk.by.
(10) BBC, 0253 GMT, 30 Jul 05 via news.bbc.co.uk.
(12) RIA Novosti, 4 Aug 05 via www.en.rian.ru.
(13) Ukraine also held its ground. Following the summoning of its ambassador, the Foreign Ministry wrote, “Ukraine believes that government pressure and interference in legitimate activities of civil, non-governmental organizations and mass media are unacceptable in any country. … We believe that resolution of all problems … in accordance with generally accepted democratic standards will allow to create more favourable conditions for cooperation between Belarus and neighbouring countries and the European community.” (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine, 4 Aug 05 via www.mfa.gov.ua/eng/.)
(15) Belarusian TV, 1800 GMT, 1 Aug 05; BBC Monitoring via Lexis-Nexis.

Newly Independent States: Central Asia

By Fabian Adami

KAZAKHSTAN

Update: Succession Act II?

Nursultan Nazarbaev's second term as Kazakh President officially expires in January 2006. At this point in time, new Presidential polls are slated for December 2005. Due, in part, to their massive defeat in last September's elections, Kazakhstan's opposition parties held discussions last spring aimed at agreeing on a joint candidate who would face Nazarbaev in the elections. (1) The eventual choice of the opposition groups was Zhamakh Tuyakbai, former speaker of the Majlis and Deputy Chairman of Nazarbaev's Otan Party. Tuyakbai
had resigned in the immediate aftermath of the Parliamentary elections, citing massive electoral violations by Nazarbaev loyalists. In a straightforward interview with Nezavisimaya gazeta, Tuyakbai claimed that Kazakhstan's opposition had strong links with "the west" and with "international organizations," and would be receiving support from them in the pre-election period. He also revealed that another opposition leader, Bolat Abilov, had traveled to Kiev to observe the "Orange Revolution." (2) Finally, Tuyakbai warned that Nazarbaev would use force to maintain his grip on power if necessary. (3)

In terms of domestic policy, Nazarbaev's concerns about revolution must be viewed as unfounded: he has succeeded in neutralizing opponents, and in contrast to neighboring Kyrgyzstan, there were no mass protests after September's elections, despite the fact that they were widely viewed as fraudulent. Instead Nazarbaev fears that the role (or perceived role) of Western NGO's in fermenting events in Georgia, Ukraine and Kyrgyzstan might be reprised in Kazakhstan. Nazarbaev has stated that the revolution in neighboring Kyrgyzstan was made possible only due to then President Askar Akaev's "weakness," (4) a statement that can only be read as a threat to use force, if necessary. Taken together with events in the aforementioned countries, Tuyakbai's statements about foreign support for the opposition have given the President cause for action.

In early June, deputies loyal to Nazarbaev introduced a bill to the floor of the Majlis which would "severely hobble" the work of NGO's operating in Kazakhstan. (5) Open admissions have been made by deputies that the law is designed to defend the country against "pseudo revolutions." (6) If ratified, the bill would do several things: first, all NGO's would be forced to re-register prior to Presidential polls. Secondly, all NGO funding including monies from foreign sources would have be approved by the Kazakh government, and thirdly NGO's would be forced to disclose their expenditures to the government fully, and could be shut down if their operations were viewed as "working against" the regime. (7)
At the time of writing, the bill has passed both Kazakhstan's upper and lower chambers, and has been sent by President Nazarbaev before the country's Constitutional Council, which has yet to reach a decision. In an interesting development, Nazarbaev's daughter Dariga, and her political party Asar have issued a direct appeal to the President, asking that the law be vetoed. Asar's appeal to Nazarbaev claims that the laws will "negatively affect what has been achieved by thousands of non-governmental organizations in partnership with the executive and representative bodies during the last decade." (8)

As a result of Asar's performance in 2004's Parliamentary elections, Dariga Nazarbaeva is in line to succeed her father. Her position begs the question as to why Asar has reacted to the NGO bill in this manner. Given the Majlis' status as a "puppet body," this bill almost certainly was proposed and designed by Nazarbaev himself. A glance at Nazarbaeva's history reveals that Asar's statement may be Act II of a political game for her benefit.

In the run up to last September's Parliamentary elections, Nazarbaeva was directly critical of Otan, stating that the party was guilty of "bullying" and vote rigging throughout the electoral process. (9) Her outbursts were designed primarily to bolster her domestic public image as a first step toward the Presidency. Given President Nazarbaev's fears of foreign interference, it seems likely that the bill will be upheld and written into law before December's election. On this occasion, Asar's statement clearly is designed to position Nazarbaeva as a virtuous 'democrat' in the eyes of the West, and to curry the favor and support of foreign NGO's and governments, hopefully preempting international opposition to her accession.

**Kyrgyzstan & Uzbekistan**

**U.S. bases: In or out?**
A month ago, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) convened in Kazakhstan. A joint declaration issued by the leaders of the member countries called for U.S. forces to be removed from the region as soon as possible. (10) The declaration noted that since the "anti-terrorist operation in Afghanistan" had been completed, stationing troops in the region no longer constituted strategic necessity. (11)

It rapidly became clear that the joint declaration by the SCO leaders could not be taken as entirely representative: Since early July, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan have taken very different positions on the issue of basing. It is rumored that President Islam Karimov of Uzbekistan was the primary force behind the SCO declaration, which constituted his response to U.S. pressure for an enquiry into the Andijan rebellion. (12) The newly-elected Kyrgyz government at the time stated only that it required "clarification" on a timetable for withdrawal from the United States, while its Foreign Minister, Roza Otunbayeva noted that Kyrgyzstan wished to strengthen its ties with the U.S.. (13)

In the weeks since the SCO summit, the Uzbek position has remained intractable. The government controlled Uzbek media has mounted a series of attacks against the U.S. and its policies, portraying Washington as imperialist, and stating that "Uzbekistan plays an active role in the international war on terror…However, when Uzbekistan faced terrorist aggression," foreign governments failed to "provide any help, even moral support. On the contrary, they distort the events [of Andijan] and libel our country." (14)

On 29 July, the Uzbek government delivered a note to the U.S. Embassy in Tashkent, renouncing the basing agreement for Karshi-Khanabad (K2), which currently houses approximately 1,000 U.S. Troops. The Uzbek government reportedly has given the U.S. 180 days—six months—to close the facility. (15) At this point in time, Uzbekistan's policy apparently extends only to the U.S. presence in the country. Notably, the German government has not yet been
asked to remove the 300 strong Bundeswehr contingent which is based at Termez, some 150 miles South-East of K2. (16) As such, the Uzbek government's position should be viewed first as reaction to a perceived 'betrayal' of Tashkent by Washington, and second as part of a long-standing desire on the part of President Karimov to remove a potentially 'meddlesome' foreign presence—perceived as a threat to his position—from the country.

President Kurmanbek Bakiev and the new government of Kyrgyzstan have proved more responsive to U.S. diplomacy. On 25 July, Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld arrived in Bishkek for a series of talks with Kyrgyz officials. The result of these discussions with Bakiev, Prime Minister-in-waiting Feliks Kulov, and acting Defense Minister Ismail Isakov on 26 and 27 July was an apparent pledge that U.S. forces can remain at their Manas and Ganci airbases in Kyrgyzstan "until the situation" in Afghanistan "has improved." (17) Once Afghanistan is no longer a "hotbed of tension…and source of terrorism," (18) basing agreements will be revisited. Talks between Rumsfeld and Kyrgyz officials also apparently resulted in a $200 million interest-free loan to develop the infrastructure at Manas, (19) as well as agreements to develop closer exchanges on "defense technology" issues. (20) In hindsight, it is obvious that the Kyrgyz request for "clarification" in the aftermath of 10 July elections represented little more than the opening move in an ultimately successful bargaining game, designed to gain as much as possible from the U.S. in return for continued basing rights.

Source Notes:

(1) See NIS Observed: An Analytical Review, Volume X Number 6 (28 Apr 05).
(2) Ibid.
(3) Ibid.
(4) Ibid.
(5) "Russia: Will Putin Follow in Nazarbaev's Footsteps?" 29 Jul 05 via www.rferl.org/featuresarticle/2005/07/6b221d32-84c9-43c8-b4dc-217775c8c775.html.

(6) Ibid.


(8) INTERFAX, 1 Aug 05; FBIS-SOV-2005-0801 via World News Connection.

(9) See NIS Observed: An Analytical Review, Volume X Number 14 (15 Sep 04).

(10) See NIS Observed: An Analytical Review, Volume X Number 8 (26 Jul 05).

(11) Ibid

(12) Ibid

(13) Ibid


(15) Eurasia Insight, 1 Aug 05 via www.eurasianet.org/departments/insight/articles/eav080105_pr.


(18) INTERFAX, 27 Jul 05; FBIS-SOV-2005-0727 via World News Connection.

(19) Ibid.

(20) Eurasia Insight, 26 Jul 05 via www.eurasianet.org/departments/insight/articles/pp062605_pr.

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