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Russian succession geometry: Medvedev's parameters

The strange image of President Vladimir Putin passing on the Kremlin keys to his handpicked successor, Dmitri Medvedev, and then not going away but rather just moving across town, leaves Medvedev in an awkward position.

On the one hand, it would take a remarkable shift to transfer Russian public sentiment away from the occupant of the Kremlin. While Medvedev has been careful to identify the Government (as opposed to the Kremlin) as the seat of executive authority in Russia, (1) as odd as that might be, it seems unlikely that public opinion will follow: the leader in the Kremlin has the truly impressive authority, even if the constitution is a tad vague on some of the finer points of the division of power. On the other hand, President Putin has a tremendous wealth of personal popularity and appeal within Russia. Medvedev owes his position to Putin's succession decisions: to endorse and lead United Russia; to recommend Medvedev to party and populace; to carve a new niche for himself in the Government, rather than staying on in the presidency; and to put his "electoral machine" into action on Medvedev's behalf.

Given the enormous influence Putin has brought to bear to ensure his successor's election, Medvedev's presidency, at least in its earliest phase, likely will remain respectfully similar to the Putin administration. As Medvedev assumes the position of president, there are both a learning curve and a "honeymoon" that have to be factored into the calculation of his room to maneuver on issues foreign and domestic.
Medvedev was introduced as President-elect to US President Bush at the "legacy summit" that brought Bush and Putin together in Sochi for their presumed last meeting as presidents. The summit also produced a "Strategic Framework Declaration" on US-Russian relations. (2) In the course of their joint press conference following the talks and socializing, both Bush and Putin made clear that they expected Medvedev to hew to the path they have created. According to Putin: "first as chief of staff of the Presidential Executive Office and then as first deputy prime minister in the Russian Government, and as a member of the Russian Security Council, Mr. Medvedev has been one of the co-authors of Russia's foreign policy." (3)

President Bush had a more delicate task, to explain both that Medvedev was experienced, and yet that he was respectful enough not to assume even the most ceremonial of presidential formalities before his inauguration: "And so my first impressions [of Medvedev] are very positive – smart fellow. You know, I got to see him at Crawford once before, and then he came to the White House, I think with Vladimir, and then came on his own time. But we never really had a full discussion. … [H]e understands there's a certain protocol, and that he is taking his time, he's studying, he's preparing to assume office. But he is not going to act like a President, nor assume presidential duties until he gets to be the president." (4)

This juxtaposition of Medvedev's experience—his responsibility for Putin administration policy formulation and his trips with Putin to the US—with the remnant of his acolyte phase of studying up to be president one day (soon) is a fitting description of this moment in the Russian President-elect's career. Russian successions historically have been destabilizing and have produced treacherous waters for leadership candidates to traverse since a proper mechanism to ensure legitimate succession has been long absent. (5) Medvedev is both a part of the old regime and the chance for a new start, but this is a very dangerous moment in time for him: Take too many swipes at the
outgoing regime (or hit too close to the outgoing president) and he risks the backlash of a still very powerful Putin, who maintains several levers (and the pull) he could use to hamstring his successor's presidency.

It is within the context of these constrained parameters, that the ongoing "war of investigations" within the apparat demonstrates the dangers of this transitional period, as well as the shift of perception of power from Putin to Medvedev. Medvedev's associates are attempting to assert themselves bureaucratically, by honing in on targets that are identifiable within the Putin regime, but not intrinsic to or inseparable from Putin himself. In the best bureaucratic tradition, rooting out corruption just happens to help the ambitious to get a leg up and knocks rivals off their rungs.

The current turf war is familiar enough and has its genesis in the early days of the Putin regime, when Yel'tsin Family members jostled with siloviki, economists, and lawyers from the "new" St. Petersburg set. Apparently surprised and not entirely willing to assume the duties of the presidency, Putin retained a number of former Yel'tsin associates for several years, as he simultaneously drew in his former colleagues and advisers from the St. Petersburg Mayor's Office and the security services.

Yel'tsin's former Chief of Staff, Aleksandr Voloshin, who was said to be instrumental in securing the presidency for Putin, remained in the Kremlin and guided both administrative and ideological tasks. (6) However, it did not take long for the influx of "new" St. Petersburgers, particularly the siloviki among them, to produce friction in Putin's Kremlin and rumors of the imminent ouster of Yel'tsin Family members, including Voloshin, became more persistent. (7)

Clearly, the Kremlin rivalries came to a head with the arrest of Yukos Chief Mikhail Khodorkovsky, which led to the resignation of Voloshin and the promotion of his deputy, Dmitri Medvedev to Chief of Staff. (8) Despite his departure,
Voloshin retained a measure of influence in the Kremlin, helping Medvedev to restructure the workings of Putin's Executive Office. (9) Nonetheless, the siloviki faction seemed ascendant for much of the remainder of Putin's presidency, so much so that concerns surfaced about the possibility of a security services led coup or disruption of the electoral process. (10)

During the later stages of Putin's presidency, what appeared to be clear distinctions between former Yel'tsin Family members, siloviki, and other "new" St. Petersburgers, in fact developed into more complicated splits and factional arrangements between groups. (11) In recent years, a rupturing siloviki faction has splintered, in large part, due to financial flows and competing revenue claims. While the repercussions of these battles were first visible only through the investigations and arrests of proxy targets, standing in for well-connected elites, the publication last October of Viktor Cherkesov's plea for a return of the chekhists' "social corporativeness" opened a window into the extent of the fractures within what had appeared to be a cohesive siloviki faction. (12)

Whether Cherkesov's article was a starting point or a response to siloviki factional overreach, it appears clear that the once-dominant Kremlin group led by Igor Sechin was facing a severe downswing in its influence. Their unsuccessful attempts to convince Putin to override constitutional proscriptions and stay in power for a third term, in a replay of the also ill-fated Korzhakov maneuver (named after Yel'tsin's former bodyguard), marked a denouement for the group and, for some, suggested a death knell in the siloviki bid for Kremlin power. However, the current vilified head of the siloviki faction has been very close to Vladimir Putin for a very long time, and it is unlikely that he will go off into happy retirement, while Putin takes up the role of prime minister. (13)

Dmitri Medvedev has been both a "soldier" and a leader in the apparat battles of the Putin "family." Now, as Russia moves on with another unconventional transition that seems poised to offer up dual centers of authority, the issue of
due to the dueling apparatchiki also surfaces once again. During Yeltsin's presidency, power ebbed and flowed from government to Kremlin as the focus of initiatives (economic issues, for instance, were very much handled by the government) shifted and as the strength and health of the president waned. At certain periods, battles broke out over contravening orders and decrees issuing from the president's office and the government.

Assuming Putin is nominated as prime minister, he will have as much leeway as he wishes in appointing government personnel; Medvedev may be somewhat more constrained (at least for the time being) in his Kremlin appointments, depending on the extent of his arrangement with the outgoing president. Putin's decision to go forward with the elections and to choose Medvedev as successor has resulted in the perceived decline of power from Sechin and the siloviki and an increase in influence for Medvedev's own patronage tail.

Currently, the war of investigation committees, a presumed precursor to actual arrests and trials of previously well-connected officials, indicates a shift toward Medvedev. Rumors of a new organization, a "Russian FBI," suggest there will be changes, likely consolidation, in the myriad of investigatory bodies. The head of the Investigations Committee of the Prosecutor's Office (SPK), Aleksandr Bastrykin, recently sacrificed his deputy, Dmitri Dovgiy (Head of the main Investigation Directorate) in what is viewed as a bid to save his own position. Tension between Bastrykin and General-Prosecutor, Yuri Chaika, has been seen as a proxy war for Sechin and Medvedev. Bastrykin's desperate moves, including the pronouncement that foreign spies had infiltrated SKP and then the removal of Dovgiy, seems likely to result in a reduction of the authority of the SKP or an assertion of Chaika's authority over it. (14) According to one analyst, "The logical conclusion is that Bastrykin cut off his right hand to save his own seat." (15) Unfortunately for Bastrykin, it is highly unlikely that this will have been successful surgery.
Some members of the Medvedev "faction" clearly are anxious for a defeat of their siloviki rivals. However, Medvedev is constrained by both a greater responsibility and a greater danger to proceed with caution as this transition proceeds. As Medvedev begins his presidency, he will need to calculate the variables presented by both the soon-to-be former President Putin, and his closest associates. While there is a clear shift in perception of power away from the siloviki, a resilient Putin, reorganizing the structures of government as part of his remit as prime minister, could easily allow his long time associates to reassert themselves. Medvedev needs to plan across several planes: how to consolidate and expand his personal power; how to contain and undermine his enemies; and how to conduct relations with his mentor, patron, and predecessor in the Kremlin. His calculations must include both the motility of personnel, as well as the utility of still evolving institutional relations.

Source Notes:
(3) Press conference following Russian-US talks, 6 Apr 08 via http://www.kremlin.ru/eng/speeches/2008/04/06/1517_type82914type82915_163261.shtml.
(4) Ibid.
(6) See, for example, "Alexander Voloshin Becomes Second Person In State?", by Alexander Komozin, Nezavisimaya gazeta, p1, 1 Feb 00; Russian Press Digest, 1 Feb 00 via Lexis-Nexis Academic; The Order of Vladimir, Kommersant-Vlast, 22 Feb 00, pp. 5-7; What the Papers Say (WPS), 29 Feb 00 via lexis-Nexis Academic; "The man behind the curtain," Interview with Boris Berezovsky,


(9) "It's too early to write off Aleksandr Voloshin," Novye Izvestia, 17 Mar 04, p.2; WPS, 17 Mar 04 via Lexis-Nexis Academic.

(10) See, among others, "The dirty Autumn of 2003," by Aleksandr Budberg, Moskovskii komsomolets, 12 Sep 03; WPS, 12 Sep 03 via Lexis-Nexis Academic; "Headed toward junta of the siloviki," by Yulia Latynina, 16 Jul 03, Novaya gazeta; Moscow Times, 16 Jul 03 via Lexis-Nexis Academic.


(12) "We can't have warriors turning into merchants, by Viktor Cherkesov, Kommersant, 9 Oct 07; WPS, 9 Oct 07 via Lexis-Nexis Academic.


(14) "Analysis: Struggle Among Russian Factions for Control Over Investigations," Open Source Center Analysis, 4 Apr 08 via David Johnson's Russia List (JRL), 2008-#70, 7 Apr 08.

(15) "The elite are already lining up behind Dmitri Medvedev, which is putting Vladimir Putin is a state verging on hysteria," by Natalya Royeva, 31 Mar 08; www.forum.msk.ru via JRL 2008-#69, 4 Apr 08.
As inauguration approaches, Russia’s political parties find themselves in transition

As dictated by the Constitution, President Medvedev will have two weeks from his inauguration, May 7, to choose an acting prime minister and submit his nomination to the Duma, which has a week to consider and approve it. The official announcement of Vladimir Putin’s nomination as prime minister is expected to come within days, if not on the day of the inauguration. In light of the lack of suspense over who will be chosen as prime minister, and the fact that the majority faction in the Duma is Putin’s own United Russia party, there is doubt that Putin will make the traditional visit to the Duma in order to outline and defend his policies. (1) This streamlined transition is just another indicator of the unusual relationship between the current president and the president elect, who apparently intends to keep Putin in a central role in the government. Putin himself already has acknowledged his strong support base, commenting last month that “the chairman of the government can and must rely on the majority in the State Duma.” (2) It should become apparent soon after the election whether United Russia will remain devoted to Putin or to the president after the inauguration.

Medvedev has denied that this succession arrangement is an indicator of a shift away from a strong Russian presidency to a parliamentary republic, a policy supported by the Russian people. In a recent Levada Center poll, 67% of those surveyed want to keep the current system of strong presidential rule, whereas only 10% of respondents said that the prime minister should be running the state. (3) This reluctance to entrust the state to the legislature may reflect a lack of
confidence in the organization, as many citizens appear to associate the strength of United Russia directly with Putin’s involvement. (4) In the same survey, two-thirds of respondents indicated that United Russia only won the parliamentary majority because the Kremlin endorsed it. (5)

In order to raise its public status, United Russia will lay out its plan to implement Putin’s Strategy 2020, a comprehensive vision for Russian politics, economics and culture in the next decade, at its upcoming congress, scheduled for April 14-15 in Moscow. (6) United Russia’s conventions traditionally are highly organized party showcases, serving as a background for major announcements and focusing the country’s attention on its policies, but a sense of urgency seems to hang over the upcoming event. (7) Party activists are using the occasion as an opportunity to take a leading role in the events that will dominate the Russian agenda in the near future, in order to establish United Russia as an active partner with President Putin and President-elect Medvedev, rather than a malleable voting bloc. It also is rumored that the meeting will be the venue at which President Putin will announce his United Russia membership and his plans to replace current party head Boris Gryzlov as the organization’s official leader. Although a Kremlin spokesman has denied Putin’s plan to join United Russia or even to attend the congress, his administration has been actively involved in planning the event. (8)

Among members of Russia’s fractured opposition parties, “unification” is the current buzzword; several opposition party representatives met last week in St. Petersburg to discuss ways to regain public support after an extremely unsuccessful year. (9) Without political capital or media cooperation, the next phase in the evolution of the opposition will be critical in determining the future of its struggle for survival and recognition. However, the parties appear to be splitting into two general groups. On one hand, some moderate party leaders, led by Grigory Yavlinsky of the Yabloko liberal party, appear to be considering limited cooperation with the government in exchange for reduced pressure on
party supporters, while other, more radical figures advocate emphasis on an opposition bloc and continued struggle against those in power, as illustrated by the demonstrations held last weekend in St. Petersburg at the behest of Garry Kasparov, leader of the United Civil Front party and the Other Russia coalition. (10)

One factor complicating the split between opposition parties is the growing hope that the Kremlin’s grip on the country may loosen after the upcoming shift of power to Medvedev, who publicly has advocated the “rule of the law,” as well as freedom and democracy. One hopeful signal is that several longtime critics of the current regime, including Yavlinsky, have been invited to advise Medvedev. His willingness to talk to the President-elect has alienated some of Yavlinsky’s allies, including members of his own party, who have called for his resignation on the grounds of “collusion with the Kremlin.” (11) After his meeting with Medvedev and Putin, Yavlinsky explained his decision as representing part of a process, “We can't be all or nothing; let's do it step by step.” He also dismissed more confrontational approaches to the conflict, terming them nonproductive. (12)

Opposition parties also have the daunting challenge of convincing the electorate that they have something better to offer than the current regime, which has overseen a decade of rising standards of living, economic growth and a resurgent Russia on the world political scene. (13) The media also complicate attempts to convey opposing messages, opting instead for an uncompromisingly pro-Kremlin vision.

The St. Petersburg Conference event, “New Agenda for Liberal Forces,” is expected to bring together party leaders from United Front (Kasparov); Union of Right Forces (including Nikita Belykh and Boris Nemtsov); and (part of) Yabloko (Maksim Reznik). (14) In a letter addressed to all opposition party leaders in anticipation of their attendance at last weekend’s conference, two reasons were cited for opposition forces’ current inability to unify, including “unprecedented
actions aimed at restricting freedom of the press, freedom of assembly, freedom of political parties' activity in the country" and the democrats themselves, who cling to past doctrine and leadership, leaving them unprepared to handle the current challenges facing their parties. (15) Nationalist rhetoric by some and overly aggressive criticisms of the regime can be detrimental to a united opposition, since it not only distracts party leaders from their original purpose, but makes the opposition appear disoriented and ultimately less attractive option in the eyes of Russian voters, including the opposition's potential support base of "progressively-minded citizens, estimated at 10-15 million voters." (16).

Even now, party leaders seem determined to make the same old mistakes, as Kasparov is in the process of forming a new coalition of politicians who lost their seats in Parliament last December. The group, tentatively titled the National Assembly, would consist of 500 to 600 members from liberal opposition parties and would act as a parallel body to the official State Duma to discuss traditionally ignored issues such as finding solutions to pressing national problems, including corruption and social inequality. (17) However, some opposition leaders, including former Prime Minister and erstwhile presidential candidate Mikhail Kasyanov, along with Yabloko leader Yavlinsky, are openly critical of the idea, and, as has happened so often in the past, opposition leaders are unwilling to band together. Kasparov has exasperated the membership issue by refusing to work with members of parties willing to enter into discussions with the Kremlin, going so far as to announce publicly that Yavlinsky is no longer allowed to label himself as a member of the opposition. (18)

Aside from Kasparov’s suggestion for a National Assembly, there are currently no plans to transform any new coalition into a political party, as conference leaders have chosen to concentrate first on ideological agreement, then party development. (19) To this end, attendees including democratic politicians, activists and businessman, and members of current opposition parties, will conduct discussions aimed at consolidating popular support. Despite the letter’s
caveat that the conference reserves the right “to continue criticizing the authorities, including “in a sharp manner,”” conference organizers were also careful to include the current administration in the process, and invited it to participate in a discussion about the elimination of restrictions on political opposition and free speech in Russia. (20) There has been no word yet on whether or not the Kremlin took advantage of the opportunity.

Source Notes:
(1) “Political Forecasts [press summary]: United Russia could miss out on the May holidays,” WPS Agency, 4 Apr 08 via David Johnson’s Russia List (JRL), 4 Apr 08, 2008-#69.
(3) Ibid.
(5) Ibid.
(6) Ibid.
(7) Sergey Nikolayev, “Congress as a factory of thoughts,” Nezavisimaya gazeta, 1 Apr 08 via David Johnson’s Russia List (JRL), 3 Apr 08, 2008-#68.
(8) Ibid.
(9) “Organizers of Russian opposition conference urge democrats to unite,” Interfax, 2 Apr 08 via David Johnson’s Russia List (JRL), 3 Apr 08, 2008-#68.
(10) Alan Cullison and Gregory L. White, “Putin’s win splits foes over whether to fight or talk,” Wall Street Journal, 3 Apr 08 via http://online.wsj.com/article/SB120717035399884373.html. Last accessed 5 Apr 08.
(11) Yevgeni Tumanov, “Surprise from Yavlinsky: Media discuss whether it is possible for opposition to cooperate with authorities,” Nezavisimaya gazeta, 1 Apr 08 via David Johnson’s Russia List (JRL), 3 Apr 08, 2008-#68.
Politkovskaya killer “identified”

In October 2006, Anna Politkovskaya was killed execution style, as she entered her Moscow apartment. At the time of her death, Politkovskaya was preparing to publish a new investigative report into the use of torture by Russian and loyalist forces in Chechnya.

Although the investigation into Politkovskaya’s murder began immediately after the incident, the first major breakthrough (according to the authorities) occurred in mid-February 2007, when Komsomolskaya pravda carried a story claiming military satellite photography had allowed law-enforcement authorities to identify, track, and arrest two Chechen individuals believed to be involved with the assassination. (1) Not surprisingly, the question of why military hardware was
being used to track the controversial journalist on the day of her murder was not addressed.

The next piece of interesting news about the investigation arose in the fall of 2007, when Prosecutor General Yuri Chaika announced that a senior officer serving in the FSB, Lieutenant Colonel Pavel Anatolyevich Ryaguzov, had been detained in connection with the case. According to Chaika, Ryaguzov (naturally acting as a rogue operative), had carried out surveillance on Politkovskaya on behalf of Shamil Burayev, a prominent opponent of Chechen President Ramzan Kadyrov.

Burayev, so claimed Chaika, had passed Ryaguzov’s surveillance report to two Chechen assassins. The idea that Chechens had carried out the hit was bolstered by the FSB’s success in tracing the murder weapon, left at the scene, to a weapons workshop in Daghestan. (2) The final piece of Chaika’s working theory on the assassination was that the hit was carried out by the same gang that killed Central Bank Chairman Andrei Kozlov. Both the Politkovskaya and Kozlov hits, according to Chaika, had been carried out at the behest of a prominent Russian individual living abroad. (3) Although no names were publicized, Chaika presumably was referring to Boris Berezovsky.

During the last two weeks, Russian law-enforcement authorities apparently have achieved another major success in the investigation. On 28 March, Vyacheslav Smirnov, a member of the Prosecutor’s office, told the military court hearing Ryaguzov’s case that “the direct murderer” of Politkovskaya had been “identified.” (4) Authorities, so claimed Smirnov, were using “all measures…to find and detain him.” (5)

At the time of this announcement, Lt. Colonel Ryaguzov (charged under Article 285 of the Criminal Code), had filed a petition to be released from pre-trial custody. Apparently as a result of the killer being identified, the court denied
Ryaguzov’s motion. Instead, the prosecution’s request to extend Ryaguzov’s custody by four and a half-months was approved, meaning he will remain in pre-trial detention at least until 21 August 2008. (6) The deadline for the completion of the investigation also has been extended; authorities now have until 7 September 2008. (7)

Not surprisingly, the new developments described above have drawn a cynical reaction. Lyudmila Alexeyeva, Head of the Moscow Helsinki Group argued that the news regarding a suspect had been released to maintain the “reputation of our law-enforcement agencies.” Moreover, the news might have emerged because of the “upcoming Russian Federation-NATO summit and a Russian-American meeting at the highest levels.” (8) At Novaya gazeta (Politkovskaya’s newspaper), editors attempted to temper the news by claiming the development was not new. Dmitri Muratov, Deputy Editor of the newspaper claimed that authorities had told him about the alleged suspect as far back as October 2007: “In order to establish the murderer and search for him, it was necessary for Ryaguzov to remain in custody.” (9)

It would hardly be surprising if Russian authorities had re-released news of a suspect out of political expediency. Whatever the facts, there are still valid questions to be asked about the investigation. Given the speed with which Ryaguzov and Burayev, as well as other unnamed Chechens were identified and arrested, why is it taking so long for authorities to track and arrest the alleged triggerman? More importantly, the authorities have as yet failed to address a major problem—or more accurately, discrepancy—in their case. Given that a military satellite apparently was used to track Politkovskaya, is it really likely that Lt. Colonel Ryaguzov was acting alone? Did he have the means and the authority to task a satellite? If he did not, then the investigation needs to proceed higher up the chain of command. It will be interesting to see, once Ryaguzov’s trial begins in the fall, how law-enforcement authorities attempt to explain away this discrepancy.
Russian Federation: Armed Forces

By Lt. Col. Carol Northrup

Hollow force

The Russian Ministry of Defense is having a garage sale. The Russian armed forces reportedly own land equivalent to an area the size of Greece (1) (mostly in the form of garrison towns in which they once housed many of the nearly four
million soldiers then in their employ). The Defense Ministry plans to auction off most of this land, along with other property and equipment it no longer needs in what could be the world’s largest clearance sale. Merchandise includes everything from “fabulous mansions and guest houses to dilapidated garrison towns, unused shooting ranges and vast tracts of neglected land on which no human has set foot for years.” (2)

The military has shrunk to just under 1.14 million and is struggling to fill its ranks with qualified personnel. The Kremlin—and most Russians—would like to move from a conscription military to a professional force. If it is to persuade people to sign up, however, living and working conditions will have to improve drastically. Moscow reportedly hopes to raise tens of millions of dollars by selling off unneeded and unused property. The defense ministry plans to use this money to build homes for soldiers and their families.

Izvestia reports that as of 1 January this year there were 122,400 military families waiting for housing. (3) Though retiring officers are entitled by law to an apartment from the state within three months of retirement, it currently takes six to seven years for a retired officer to vacate his “temporary” quarters and move to permanent housing. (4) While many senior military officials enjoy palatial accommodations, most Russian servicemen live in squalid conditions. In order to resolve the housing problem, the Armed Forces need as many as 450,000 housing units. (5) The auctions are yet another indicator that, despite recent muscle-flexing in the international arena, Russia’s military is beset with a myriad of complex problems for which there are no easy solutions.

All branches of the armed forces in Russia are having difficulties maintaining minimum required troop numbers; the national population is declining, numbers of career service members are declining, and draft evasion is rampant. The Russian state news agency, ITAR-TASS, reported that “99% of draftees reported to the assembly points” in 2007, (6) and the official number for the fall 2007 draft
is 10,657 evaders. (7) However, these numbers probably are highly optimistic. According to US Open Source Center’s analysis of local Russian media reporting, in only seven of Russia’s 82 regions around 20,000 draft evaders were reported in 2007, (8) and some analysts estimate draft evasion nation-wide to be near 90%. (9) In addition, one in three young men who does report for conscription is medically exempted and 50 percent have duty limitations for medical reasons. (10)

The abysmal housing situation is not the only reason Russians avoid conscription; the Russian army has an atrocious reputation for hazing and violence. The Soldiers’ Mothers Committee, a nationwide group that seeks to protect the rights of conscripts, estimates that as many as 3,500 soldiers die each year from “accidents and suicides” that can be attributed directly or indirectly to hazing. (11) According to RIA Novosti, the Russia Army lost 224 draftees to suicide in 2007—more than any other major armed force in the world. (12) Alexander Kanshin, chairman of the Public Chamber’s Commission for Veterans, Servicemen and their Families, blames the high suicide rate on “insufficient social protection for servicemen … and pressure exerted by senior servicemen on junior conscripts.” (13) The combination of poor living conditions and poor working conditions makes military service far from a desirable occupation. In the words of one Russian defense analyst, service in the Russian military is like having a prison sentence in a very, very bad prison. (14)

Moscow recognizes that it must change conditions dramatically if it is to make military service an attractive option and field a capable, professional force. In recent years, President Vladimir Putin has been very vocal about his desire to rebuild all branches of the military and reverse the years of neglect they have suffered since the collapse of the Soviet Union. The Kremlin has poured billions of rubles into modernizing the force and attempting to improve conditions. Russia’s defense budget has increased three and a half fold since 2002; according to official Russian press reports, current defense spending is the
second-largest item in the federal budget and will reach nearly 41 billion dollars this year. (15) The government has announced an ambitious eight-year plan to replace nearly half the military’s hardware and wages for military personnel increased 25 percent last year and will go up another 18 percent by the end of 2008. (16) Unfortunately, very little of the money actually has made it to the rank and file.

In the most recent move to make military service more attractive and to decrease draft evasion, the Kremlin has reduced the term of service required for draftees. Beginning with the Spring 2008 call-up (which runs from 1 April to 15 July), the term of conscription will be only 12 months. Unfortunately, like many of the Kremlin’s plans for military reform, a reduced conscription term is likely to cause more problems than it solves.

Though the conscription time has been cut in half, there are no plans to dramatically reduce the overall number of personnel in the armed services (the current number of 1.14 million will be reduced to 1.1 million by 2011 and to 1 million by 2016). (17) Conscripts drafted prior to 2007 spent two years in uniform; those drafted in the spring of 2007 will serve 18 months. This means that the Russian Armed Forces will lose two cohorts in the fall of 2008, and another two in the spring of 2009—effectively doubling the number who will have to be drafted in fall 2008 and thereafter. Though the exact numbers vary, Russian defense experts estimate that there will be an annual requirement for 400,000 to 500,000 draftees beginning in the fall of 2008. (18) While some deferment categories will be cancelled with the new draft rules, demographic studies indicate that there will still be a shortage of about 80,000 draftees in 2008. (19) And since the number of 18-year-old males in Russia is shrinking every year, the shortage will continue to increase.

In addition to conscription, the Russian military counts on a number of personnel signing extended contracts—with increased benefits—to serve for three years.
Even though these “contractors” are treated and paid much better than the conscripts, their salaries are still comparatively low by Russian standards. The military has had an increasingly difficult time fulfilling its requirement for contractors, with most commissariats reporting problems in finding people willing to sign up. In 2007, the military fell short of its goal by more than 25,000 personnel. (20) Reducing conscripts’ term of service could exacerbate this problem by making a three-year contract less attractive than serving only one year as a draftee.

In his annual address to the Russian people last October, President Vladimir Putin outlined a “grandiose” plan to upgrade and refurbish the armed forces. He promised “completely new” strategic weapons, cutting edge jet fighters, a new submarine and improved reconnaissance, communications and electronic facilities (See “The Analyst” 1 Nov 2007). But with fewer available conscripts, and fewer persons willing to sign contracts, the Russian military faces a critical personnel shortage by 2009 with no credible plan to address the problem. Grandiose new weaponry will be of little value if there are not enough soldiers, sailors or airmen to operate it.

Source Notes:
(2) Ibid.
(3) Ibid.
(5) Ibid.
(6) “Russian Prosecutor Reports Fewer Draft Dodgers,” BBC Monitoring International Reports (ITAR-TASS, in English), 5 Mar 08 via Lexis-Nexis.
(7) “Call-up Campaign for One-Year Military Service Begins in Russia,” TASS, 1 Apr 08 via Lexis-Nexis.
(8) “OSC Analysis: Russia—Reducing Conscription to 1 Year Appears Unrealistic,” Open Source Center, 20 Mar 08; OSC Analysis via World News Connection.


(10) “Spring Military Draft for 1-Year Service Starts in Russia,” Agentstvo voyennykh novostey (internet version), 1 Apr 08’ OSC Transcribed Text via World News Connection.


(13) Ibid.


(17) “Russian Armed Forces’ Strength Reduce to 1 Million by 2016,” Agentstvo voyennykh novostey (internet version), 3 Apr 08; OSC Transcribed Text via World News Connection.

(18) “OSC Analysis: Russia—Reducing Conscription to 1 Year Appears Unrealistic,” Open Source Center, 20 Mar 08; OSC Analysis via World News Connection.

(19) Ibid.

(20) Ibid.
NATO expansion debate: Victory for Russia

In mid-March, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and Secretary of Defense Robert Gates traveled to Moscow. The purpose of their trip was to lay the groundwork for this month’s NATO summit, held last week in Bucharest. A major part of the discussions between Rice, Gates and their Russian counterparts was given over to the issue of NATO expansion, specifically the possibility of Georgian and Ukrainian accession.

Russia’s policy on NATO was elucidated by Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, who told the press (and presumably the US delegation), that the alliance’s expansion was reminiscent of the “assimilation of Cold War Blocs.” In Lavrov’s view, NATO expansion would have a “seriously destructive impact” on US-Russian relations. (1)

Several days before the NATO summit, Lavrov granted an interview to Izvestia, in which he addressed again Russia’s concerns vis-à-vis NATO and the US. He claimed that “Washington is intruding into the post-Soviet space ever more actively…” with Ukraine and Georgia being only “the most graphic examples.” (2) Bringing those two countries into NATO, Lavrov insisted, would result in a “substantive negative geopolitical shift.” (3) Moreover, expansion would result in consequences: the “closest ties of hundreds upon hundreds of Russian and Ukrainian enterprises in the military-industrial sector will, of course, be reviewed,” as would the question of energy sales. Finally, Moscow, so Lavrov stated, would
ask itself serious questions about the “reliability of these partners” from the “viewpoint of our security.” (4)

NATO’s summit began in Romania on 2 April, and lasted until 4 April. As was to be expected, the question of new members’ entry through the Membership Action Plan (MAP) dominated discussions.

On 4 April, Putin addressed the NATO-Russian council, airing his views on the alliance’s future plans. Although Putin’s remarks had not been published in full at the time of writing, the President reportedly urged NATO’s leadership to hear Russia’s concerns, and to “engage in an honest dialogue.” (5) “None of the global players—Europe, the United States or Russia,” Putin claimed, “is interested in returning to the past.” (6) Putin flatly laid out the viewpoint that “the emergence of the powerful military bloc on our borders” would constitute a “direct threat to Russia’s security,” and repeated the maxim used by Lavrov in relation to the ABM shield during talks in Moscow with Rice and Gates, that “it’s the potential, not intentions that matter.” (7)

On the opening night of the summit, NATO’s foreign ministers conducted a meeting that was “bad-tempered,” with Rice and Germany’s SPD Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier reportedly at odds. Steinmeier aired the view that Georgia would not be fit to join the MAP until it resolved the “frozen conflicts” over Abkhazia and South Ossetia. (8) Steinmeier’s comments apparently reflect the German view that Putin’s successor, Dmitri Medvedev, should be given a breathing space to settle into office, without having a fight on his hands. (9) The German stance was supported by the French government: Foreign Minister Francois Fillon stated that France was not in favor of the MAP because “we think it is not the right response to the balance of power in Europe.” (10) France and German clearly are working on the assumption that NATO expansion would aggravate the Kremlin unnecessarily.
Given the fact that NATO operates on a consensus basis, these opinions meant that Georgian and Ukrainian membership in the alliance effectively was vetoed. The US gained an apparent concession however, in that the decision on the MAP is to be reviewed in December. (11) In light of NATO’s decision, President Putin’s aforementioned comments must be viewed as a victory speech.

Realistically, the question must be asked: what will change by December? If the German and French views prevail, Georgia and Ukraine will remain outside the alliance’s circle of protection, at least until there is a change of viewpoint (or governments) in Paris and Berlin.

**Afghanistan: ISAF transit**

A major national security issue for both the US and NATO, Afghanistan and the fight against international terrorism featured prominently on the NATO summit’s agenda. The question of how to supply and maintain US and ISAF forces in Afghanistan has been debated for some time.

Negotiations between Russia and NATO have been ongoing for “almost a year,” and there are three possible supply routes, all of which could best be described as circuitous. (12) The first proposed rule extends from Poland or “any Baltic country,” through Belarus, Russia, Kazakhstan, and Uzbekistan to Afghanistan. The second route goes through Russia, down the Caspian Sea coastline through Turkmenistan, while the third possible route runs from St. Petersburg, down the Volga river to the Caspian, and thence by train through Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan to Afghanistan. (13) According to an “unnamed Moscow-based military-diplomatic source,” the European contributors to the Afghan mission are “more interested in the Northern route, which goes through Russia and other Central Asian countries.” (14)

On the last day of the NATO Summit, President Putin met with NATO Secretary General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer. The two leaders exchanged letters on the
question of ground transit through Russia for ISAF supplies. NATO’s letter to Russia reportedly contains the undertaking that ISAF members agree to abide by the “transit order set by Russia.” (15) The Russian letter meanwhile, defines which routes and border crossings ISAF is permitted to use. (16) At the time of writing, it is not clear exactly on which route agreement has been reached. However, the fact that some reports mention ground transit likely means the first, Northern route has been chosen.

It must be said that NATO’s willingness to negotiate with Russia on the entirety of a transit route sets a worrying precedent: de facto, NATO is recognizing Russia’s right to make decisions about the territory of the Baltic and Central Asian Republics and ignoring those countries’ own sovereignty. Moreover, the fact that supplies will cross Russian territory potentially allows the Kremlin to meddle in NATO’s Afghan mission, making ISAF effectively reliant on Russian beneficence.

Permitting the transit routes on its soil may be a calculated Russian negotiation attempt vis-à-vis the MAP for Georgia and Ukraine: we will assist your mission in Afghanistan…you may use our railroads, our roads and our border crossings. In return, forget Georgia and Ukraine.

Source Notes:
(1) See The ISCIP Analyst, Volume XIV, Number 10 (27 March 08)
(2) “Russian Foreign Minister Interviewed on International Issues,” Ministry of Foreign Affairs Website, Moscow, in English, 1 Apr 08; BBC Monitoring via Lexis-Nexis.
(3) Ibid.
(4) Ibid.
(6) Ibid.
(7) Ibid.
Central Asia: Crux and crucible of Sino-Russian energy relations

2006: “The Year of Russia in China,” was an auspicious year for Sino-Russian relations. President Vladimir Putin and his Chinese counterpart, Hu Jintao, paid state visits to one another’s capitals and pledged to broaden strategic and political cooperation between the two nations. Although in the last half-decade their bilateral relations had been defined by Russian arms sales to China and joint military exercises carried out under the banner of the six-nation Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), in 2006 their relationship took on a civilian aspect, with energy deals promoted as the centerpiece of the two countries’ celebrated partnership. Enroute to Beijing for the opening ceremonies of the Sino-Russian jubilee, Putin remarked upon the central role that energy would
play in shaping the countries’ future bilateral relations: “Cooperation in the energy sphere is one of the most important elements of Russian-Chinese trade and economic relations. It is growing successfully and has good potential in the long term.” (1) That potential yet has to be realized. Fine sentiments aside, China’s surging demand for energy supplies has been answered by Russian commitments that, for the most part, remain numbers on paper and dotted lines on maps indicating “Russian Proposed Oil and Natural Gas Pipelines to China.” (2)

Two years ago, in the age of good intentions, Russia promised to boost its hydrocarbon exports via new trunklines projected to link Siberian oil and gas fields directly to China. The plan was hardly novel. In 2000, the founder of Yukos, Mikhail B. Khodorkovsky, pushed for a privately financed pipeline to China in an effort to break through bottlenecks caused by Russia’s decrepit pipeline network and the intentionally ambiguous export schedules set by the state-owned oil transport monopoly, Transneft. However, Khodorkovsky’s plans were thwarted when he was arrested on charges of fraud, embezzlement and tax evasion. Yukos was dismantled and sold off to Kremlin insiders, a process in which China played a significant role by supplying the Russian state-controlled oil company Rosneft with a $6 billion loan toward the purchase of Yukos’ biggest oil-producing unit, Yuganskneftegaz. According to the New York Times, the $6 billion loan was backed by Rosneft's promise to supply a total of 48.5 million tons of crude oil to China, an arrangement that underscored China’s indifference to the source of its energy volumes, so long as the volumes were delivered. (3) This is just the sort of pragmatism that Moscow appreciates, although perhaps it should have been understood as a cautionary note of what was to come, when energy volumes from Russia came up short. Although Russia remains the third-largest supplier of crude to China, behind Saudi Arabia and Angola, (4) the vast percentage of that supply is transported by rail, a mode of transit that is costly and inefficient. Russian natural gas exports have yet to reach China, due to a lack of eastward-oriented pipelines and an apparent lack of political will to put them in place.
In the meantime, China has turned to Central Asia to meet its energy needs. In this regard, the SCO has served as a useful mechanism to facilitate trade and investment arrangements with the other four member states, excluding Russia: the Republic of Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz Republic, the Republic of Tajikistan, and the Republic of Uzbekistan. Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan both have signed on to joint ventures with China’s National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC) to share in the construction and operation of oil and gas pipelines that will channel the two countries’ hydrocarbon output to downstream Chinese markets. (5) The first stage of an oil pipeline linking Kazakhstan to China came online in July 2006; its inauguration was attended by the Kazakh Prime Minister, Karim Masimov, who hailed the project as “the first world-class export pipeline built by independent Kazakhstan.” (6) In a droll turn of events, Gazprom Neft, the oil arm of Russia’s energy giant, has resorted to funneling its China-bound oil shipments through Kazakhstan this year, for want of a direct line of its own. (7)

Early this year, Moscow claimed that China is not ready for a natural gas market. “China does not have as yet a developed infrastructure for the gas market, nor there is [sic] the market,” said Viktor Khristenko, Russia’s minister of industry and energy. (8) Unmoved by Moscow’s equivocations, China has approached Turkmenistan to contract for supplies of natural gas. In July 2005, China sealed an agreement with Turkmenistan on oil and gas cooperation with a $24 million low-interest loan. (9) That deal was followed by a contract signed in 2007 allowing China to develop vast gas fields in Turkmenistan’s Bagtyyarlyk region. (10) This emerging energy partnership marks the first step toward a Central Asia – China natural gas pipeline to carry Turkmen gas volumes across Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan to northwest China. (11) The Central Asia – China gas pipeline deal represents a coup for the CNPC in that it will be China’s first trans-border pipeline dedicated to natural gas transit, and it has been touted as a power play for Central Asian states that now have an equity stake in a gas export route independent of Russia’s Gazprom. (12)
These arrangements pose a threat to Russian regional hegemony over energy transit routes, carefully crafted into Central Asian accords signed in May 2007. While westward-flowing transit routes through the Prikaspiisky trunkline remain securely under Moscow’s control, new vectors have begun to stretch eastward, leaving Russia out of the picture. China’s activism in the region poses a number of challenges to Moscow. First, Russian investments in East Asian-oriented transport infrastructure may be wasted if China is able to secure adequate volumes of natural gas and oil from Central Asian suppliers in the near term. Second, Russia is discovering that it is highly dependent upon Central Asian, primarily Turkmen, natural gas volumes to meet its present commitments at home and in Europe. Third, and perhaps most dangerous of all, Russia faces the threat of losing its traditional status as power-broker in Central Asia.

Signs that Russia is losing its grip on the region already are emerging. An infusion of petro-wealth brought by the Central Asian republics’ parity stake in new pipeline networks has emboldened their governments to name their own terms of engagement in the energy game. In March of this year, the republics of Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan united in their resolution to raise the price they charge for natural gas exports to European standards. Central Asian energy has become the prize in a new match of the proverbial “Great Game,” played out this time between Russia, the traditional patron in the region, and China, a flush newcomer.

What began as a Sino-Russian strategic partnership has devolved into a competition for energy and influence in which Russia stands to lose a great deal. 2006 was hailed as “The Year of Russia in China,” followed in 2007 by “The Year of China in Russia.” This year, the two countries meet in the middle, where neither is host nor guest, but both are opponents.

Source Notes:
(1) Kramer, Andrew E., “For China, a long wait for Russian gas supply,”
International Herald Tribune, 13 Jul 06 via
(2) “Russian Proposed Oil and Natural Gas Pipelines to China,” Energy
Information Agency, Apr 07 via
(http://www.eia.doe.gov/emeu/cabs/Russia/Maps.html).
(3) Arvedlund, Erin E., “China Helped Oil Company in Russia Buy Yukos Unit,”
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(http://www.nytimes.com/2005/02/02/business/worldbusiness/02yukos.html).
(4) Oil exports to China, ranked by country: Saudi Arabia (24.71 million tons),
Angola (23.45 million tons), Russia (21.13 million tons). Figures taken from the
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(http://www.uofaweb.ualberta.ca/chinainstitute/).
(5) “The pipeline to China: to be continued,” China Institute, 21 Feb 08 via
(http://www.uofaweb.ualberta.ca/chinainstitute/).
(6) Ibid.
(7) “Gazprom Neft asks to send more oil to China,” Reuters, 12 Mar 08 via
(http://www.reuters.com/article/GCA-Oil/idUSL1276756220080312).
(8) “Gas talks with China not simple – Khristenko,” Organization of Asia-Pacific
News Agencies, 24 Jan 08 via China Institute
(http://www.uofaweb.ualberta.ca/chinainstitute/).
(9) Kupchinsky, Roman, “Russia: Gas Export Plans Dependent on Central Asia,”
RFE/RL, 28 Mar 06 via
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(10) Whitmore, Brian, “Central Asia: Behind the Hype, Russia and China Vie for
Region’s Energy Resources,” 22 Mar 08 via
(http://www.rferl.org/featuresarticle/2008/03/584864DC-0805-4A5E-B878-
EDD3E9255760.html).
(11) Dongyi, Chen, “CNPC injects capital for advancing Central Asia – Chinagas
pipeline,” Xinhua News Agency, 24 Mar 08 via China Institute
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Newly Independent States: Caucasus

By Robyn Angley

GEORGIA

Parliamentary election season

With the opposition’s hunger strike at an end, attention is shifting to the parliamentary elections scheduled for May 21. The opposition parties, never particularly unified and subject to constant reconfiguration, have shifted, for the moment, to a nine-party format in order to contest the elections. Two opposition parties, the Republicans and Shalva Natelashvili’s Labor Party, have decided to campaign separately (although the Republicans are wavering whether to join the opposition bloc). Indicative of the challenge of bringing together so many disparate parties (and of the dependence of Georgian politics on personalities) is the nine-party opposition bloc’s party list. The list is topped by former opposition presidential candidate Levan Gachechiladze, Davit Gamkrelidze (New Rights Party), Konstantine Gamsakhurdia (Freedom Party), Zviad Dzidziguri (Conservative Party), Koba Davitashvili (Party of People). (1)

The opposition parties are hoping to loosen the ruling party’s hold of on parliament. Saakashvili’s United National Movement has exercised an extraordinary amount of power in the current parliament and pushed through reforms, sometimes without debate, which likely would have met opposition in a more diverse legislative climate. Currently members of the ruling party chair 12 out of 13 parliamentary committees, with the remaining chairmanship going to Nikoloz Lekishvili, who was elected by an initiative group. Including the deputy
chairpersons, of the 37 chair and deputy chair positions documented on the parliamentary website, all but three are occupied by proclaimed ruling party members, while the other three are held by MPs elected by initiative groups. (2)

Despite the seeming “don’t trust anyone over 40” mentality of the current government, several of the committee heads have considerable experience. Elene Tevdoradze, who maintained her position as chair of the Committee on Human Rights after Shevardnadze’s resignation, is the oldest committee leader at the age of 70 and one of three female committee chiefs. Several other committee chairs are also holdovers from the Shevardnadze years, among them former Mayor of Tbilisi and Prime Minister Nikoloz Lekishvili and former Ambassador to Germany Konstantine Gabashvili. Despite the famed youth of many of Georgia’s new leaders, the average age of Georgia’s current parliamentary chairpersons is 48.6. (3) Within the committees, the affiliations of the various committee members are more diverse than the leadership. The 21-member Budget and Finance Committee, for instance, has only 12 ruling party members.

The popularity of the opposition in Tbilisi offers a likely possibility that the next parliament will have a more developed opposition than in the immediate post-Rose Revolution euphoria. However, the extreme diversity of the nine-party opposition makes successful cooperation on issues other than attacking President Mikheil Saakashvili or Speaker of the Parliament Nino Burdjanadze extremely unlikely. Nonetheless, even the presence of a more vocal opposition in the next parliament would be an improvement in Georgia’s political process.

**NATO MAP denied, but eventual membership held out**

The NATO summit in Bucharest failed to result in a Membership Action Plan (MAP) for Georgia, although the alliance did state that both Ukraine and Georgia will become NATO members at some point and set December as the next time that Georgia’s progress would be assessed. (4) President Saakashvili has
painted the summit as a foreign policy success despite the failure to achieve the long desired MAP, welcoming the statement that Georgia will eventually be a NATO member as an even bigger achievement. The decision followed on the heels of indications by both France (or, at least, the French Premier) and Germany that they would not support a decision to award a MAP to Georgia; for the French Premier, at least, the decision was based explicitly on not disturbing the “balance of power” between Europe and Russia. (5) The Bucharest summit is further evidence of Russia’s new effort to achieve ascendancy on the crest of its energy sector and strong executive.

**Saakashvili offers new Abkhazia plan**

Saakashvili’s campaign to solve Georgia’s separatist conflicts took a new turn when he presented a proposal on 28 March offering to negotiate with Abkhazia on everything but “the disintegration of Georgia.” (6) Among the specifics offered in the plan were the creation of the post of Vice President of Georgia, to be filled by an Abkhazian; the right to veto legislation related to Abkhazian issues, including its status and language rights; the declaration of a joint Georgian-Abkhaz free economic zone in the Gali district; and international involvement to guarantee Abkhaz minority rights, including the recasting of Russia’s role in the process. (7)

De facto Abkhaz president Sergei Bagapsh dismissed the plan as an attempt by Georgia to gain favorable publicity in advance of the NATO Bucharest summit. (8)

**Source Notes:**
(3) Author's calculation based on biographical data and committee data available on Parliament of Georgia website via 
(4) “NATO decisions on open-door policy,” NATO website, 3 Apr 08 via 
http://www.nato.int/docu/update/2008/04-april/e0403h.html.
(5) “France against Georgia’s MAP,” Civil Georgia, 1 Apr 08 via
(6) “Georgia offers new peace plan for Abkhazia,” President of Georgia website,
29 Mar 08 via http://www.president.gov.ge/?l=E&m=0&sm=1&id=2569.
(7) Ibid.
(8) “Sokhumi rejects Tbilisi’s proposal as ‘PR stunt,’” Civil Georgia, 29 Mar 08 via

Newly Independent States: Central Asia

By Monika Shepherd

Turkmenistan looks south to expand energy exports

Although Turkmen President Gurbanguly Berdymuhamedov’s presence at the recent NATO summit in Bucharest was remarkable in and of itself, given his predecessor’s hell-bent determination to shun participation in any and all international organizations and treaties, the most noteworthy aspect of his visit may be one of the meetings he held on the summit’s sidelines and its subsequent results.

On April 3, just prior to the opening of the summit, Berdymuhamedov conducted separate meetings with Presidents George W. Bush and Hamid Karzai. His meeting with Bush mainly seemed to be dedicated to exchanging assurances of goodwill and promises of cooperation in Turkmenistan’s oil and natural gas industry. President Bush told the Turkmen president that the United States continues to view Turkmenistan as a very significant partner in both
bilateral and regional cooperation efforts and called on Berdymuhammedov to deepen his country’s partnership with the US. Berdymuhammedov, for his part, assured the American president that his government is committed to developing multiple export routes for the country’s oil and gas to the world market. (1) However, no concrete proposals were discussed.

The Turkmen president’s meeting with Afghanistan’s Hamid Karzai, on the other hand, produced more tangible results, focusing on plans for the construction of the Trans-Afghan Pipeline (TAP) and a proposal to link already existing regional railway lines with each other, in order to facilitate direct rail transport between the two countries. (2) The TAP has been under discussion for over a decade. According to the original proposal, once the pipeline was operational, it would carry natural gas from Turkmenistan’s Dawlatabad fields across Afghanistan to Pakistan. The security risks associated with the project made investors leery of signing on to it and caused the project to stall for a number of years, but the proposal once again seems to be picking up momentum. The three stakeholder countries formed a development partnership in May 2002 and seven months later the Asian Development Bank (ADB) completed a feasibility study positively assessing the project. Even so, there were doubts that the TAP would be financially feasible without India’s participation in the project, due to fears that Pakistan would not be able to provide sufficient demand for the gas. Consequently, in February 2003, India was invited to join the project. (3)

Now, a little over five years later, India finally has signed on to the project during Indian Vice President Mohammad Hamid Ansari’s visit to Ashgabat on the heels of Berdymuhammedov’s return from the NATO summit and his meeting with Karzai. Ansari met with President Berdymuhammedov and various other Turkmen officials, including Deputy Prime Minister for Oil and Gas Tachbardy Tagier and ended his visit by signing a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) to collaborate with the Turkmen government in the further development of its oil and gas industry. Ansari’s Ashgabat trip was the first leg of a journey that also
included a visit to Kazakhstan, another country known for its hydrocarbon riches. (4) Ansari’s eagerness to collaborate in new oil and gas deals no doubt stems from the fact that India must import 70% of its energy needs and is seeking new suppliers. (5) The Central Asian countries’ vast petroleum resources are a logical choice in this quest, if the knotty problem of export routes can be solved.

The TAP (now, with India’s participation, the TAPI) would be of great benefit not only to the countries currently involved in its implementation, but potentially also to other gas-rich countries, such as Kazakhstan. Central Asia suffers from insufficient export outlets for its hydrocarbon resources and both Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan have been searching for ways to transport more of their oil and gas to the world market. Currently, both countries must rely too heavily for their liking on the old Soviet pipeline network, which carries their exports to Russia, thereby subjecting themselves to Russian transit fees and, until recently, below-market prices for their oil and gas. A reasonably stable and secure Afghanistan would create a climate amenable for the construction of the TAPI, perhaps attract additional investors to underwrite the project, and would allow far more opportunities for regional trade and economic collaboration. This may help to explain why neither Berdymuhammedov nor Uzbekistan’s President Islo
Karimov raised any objections when Russia’s soon-to-be outgoing President Vladimir Putin somewhat cavalierly offered NATO ground transport routes not only across his own country’s territory, but across Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, as well. At present, NATO is seen by many as the guarantor of security and stability in Afghanistan, a security and stability which is craved as much by Afghanistan’s neighbors as by President Karzai himself.

Recent months have witnessed moves by Iran, Afghanistan, and India to court various of the Central Asian leaders and secure their cooperation for projects linking their electricity grids and railway lines, for the construction of more highways and hydropower stations and, of course, for the development of their hydrocarbon industries. Although it is highly unlikely that any of the Central
Asian leaders would want to risk alienating Moscow, their tolerance for Russia’s often less-than-sincere investment promises may be wearing thin, prompting them to look south. It is true that both the Kazakh and Turkmen governments have agreed to work with Russia to build a second natural gas pipeline along the Caspian seacoast in order to transport Turkmen gas to Russia via Kazakhstan, (6) however they also continue to discuss alternate routes with representatives from Europe, Turkey, and East and South Asian countries.

In late March, President Berdymuhhammedov presided over an energy conference in Ashgabat at which he announced that his government is implementing an “open door” policy toward foreign energy investors. He went out of his way to embolden investors from the US, Europe, and East Asia because companies from those countries can be relied upon to put forth “interesting initiatives that meet foreign requirements”(7) – perhaps a reference to the American government’s insistence that new pipeline routes be developed that are not under Russian or Iranian control. Whether or not Russia remains as Turkmenistan’s single most important economic partner, Berdymuhhammedov seems to understand that his country can not flourish without significant participation from foreign investors. During Niazov’s reign, even the most basic aspects of the country’s infrastructure (the electricity grid, water supply and sewer system, natural gas pipeline network, paved roads, primary school system, health care system) were neglected, forcing the residents of many towns to live in highly unsanitary and poverty-stricken conditions. (8) In order to generate sufficient revenue to rectify this situation, Turkmenistan will need the income from such projects as the TAPI and its neighbors to the south and east seem well-placed to step in and lend their support to this and any number of other investment projects. Should Russia’s economy eventually also be affected by the recession threatening the United States and other western countries, the Russian government may be forced to default on its existing investment commitments, such as the Caspian gas pipeline, leaving the door open for further collaboration between the Central Asian states and the countries of South and
East Asia. A retreating Bear may find several greedy Dragons nipping at its heels.

Source Notes:
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Newly Independent States: Western Region
By Tammy Lynch

UKRAINE
NATO summit a precarious win for Ukraine
Ukraine’s leaders traveled to the Bucharest NATO Summit hoping, but not expecting, that the country would be granted a Membership Action Plan (MAP). It appeared that Russian opposition to NATO membership for Ukraine and Georgia meant that the two countries would receive little more than vague expressions of friendship. But instead, the two allies left the Summit with a promise of eventual NATO membership and the possibility of a MAP within a year.

In its statement, the Alliance could not have been more clear: “NATO welcomes Ukraine’s and Georgia’s Euro Atlantic aspirations for membership in NATO. We agreed today that these countries will become members of NATO.” Moreover, “Foreign Ministers have the authority to decide on the MAP applications of Ukraine and Georgia.” (2) President Viktor Yushchenko called the wording in the NATO communiqué a “victory” that “exceeded our hopes.” (3)

In particular, the last sentence allows NATO to approve a MAP outside of normal summit proceedings – an unusual occurrence and a major win for Ukraine and Georgia. By allowing foreign ministers to make the official final decision, the Summit is removed as a target for Russian lobbying on the issue, and the timetable for agreement is fluid.

Without this provision, the earliest Ukraine could hope for another consideration of a MAP would be April 2009. President Yushchenko now hopes that the MAP may be reconsidered during a foreign ministers’ meeting in December 2008. Although President Putin attended the April summit, it is less likely that Russia’s Foreign Minister would be invited to the December meeting.

Not unexpectedly, opposition leader Viktor Yanukovych ignored NATO’s promise that Ukraine will enter the Alliance. Instead, he hailed the decision to refuse Ukraine an immediate MAP, claiming that his party’s opposition was decisive. “Our protest was heard,” Yanukovych said, by leaders who understood “the
dangerous consequences of the destruction of the balance of power” in Europe. (4)

Perhaps. But perhaps not. During the press conference announcing the communiqué, NATO Secretary General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer declared unequivocally, “Ukraine and Georgia will become members of NATO.” According to journalists in attendance, the Secretary General repeated this sentence twice, outside the bounds of the communiqué, to a “surprised press corps.” (5)

Polish President Lech Kaczynski also seems determined to see Ukraine granted a MAP in December. On 10 April, Kaczynski threatened to continue blocking negotiations over a new EU-Russia Friendship Treaty if Ukraine and Georgia are not given a definitive timetable for NATO entry. “I must tie these two issues together even though I would prefer not to,” he said. (6) Kaczynski’s commitment to assist Ukraine in its aspirations to join NATO is not only a tactical endeavor; improving Polish-Ukrainian relations as a way to increase Poland’s regional status is an important plank in his party’s platform. (NOTE: At press time, Kaczynski attempted to backtrack slightly on his remarks, saying that he wanted “discussions.”)

US Ambassador to Ukraine William Taylor underscored the US view of NATO’s commitment to Ukraine in an editorial following the summit. “While the North Atlantic alliance did not offer Ukraine an immediate Membership Action Plan (MAP),” he wrote, “every one of NATO’s leaders joined together to make a much more important commitment: Ukraine can join NATO as soon as it is ready. The door is not only wide open, the table is set with a place for Ukraine already reserved.”

Taylor also made it clear that the US supports a December approval of a MAP. “Ukraine’s request to begin that process … will be reviewed by NATO’s foreign ministers this December. If they agree, as most NATO countries did last week,
the membership process will begin. The leaders have already stated where it will end.” (7)

Of course, Ukraine is assured of nothing, even though the wording of the communiqué was explicit and the country has a number of committed allies. First, Ukraine must undertake the reforms necessary to earn a place in NATO. Then, the public must approve NATO membership in a referendum. And finally, NATO members must live up to their word. One or all of these issues easily could doom Ukraine’s stated path to the Alliance.

Still, the decision has exposed the weakness of opposition to NATO as a political tool within Ukraine, which may suggest that the country is not as polarized on the issue as it seems.

The NATO communiqué and comments by Ukraine’s Western allies appear to have stunned Ukraine’s anti-NATO political forces into silence, at least temporarily. With the exception of Yanukovych’s statement, there has been little response to NATO’s promise. The staged protests that accompanied President Bush’s pre-summit visit are missing. The media is calm, albeit frustrated, and the people are going about their daily business.

Yanukovych and his Party of Regions also have found little traction over the NATO issue among their electorate. In a poll of voters by the respected Democratic Initiatives Foundation prior to September 2007’s parliamentary elections, only 4.4 percent of those surveyed named accession to NATO as an important issue (voters were given a list of 36 issues, out of which they were asked to choose their top ten). NATO accession placed 34th out of 36th in the list.

In Donetsk, the bedrock of Party of Regions support, only 0.8 percent named the issue as important. Instead, a majority of the country was concerned about the
overall condition of the economy, the need for increased wages and pensions, and unemployment. (8) Likely because of this and other polls, the Party of Regions did not campaign heavily on the NATO issue in 2007. In fact, while Yanukovych was Prime Minister in 2004, he approved an internal NATO MAP strategy which called for the country to work toward receiving a MAP in 2008.

It is unclear whether Party of Regions leaders are truly against NATO membership at this point, or whether it is merely a convenient tool with which to differentiate themselves from their political competitors. Regardless, the electoral results of the Party of Regions show that the party’s support has remained constant over three elections – elections in which the party has been both for and against NATO membership. Should the electorate continue to show little interest in the issue—despite the efforts of the opposition to use the issue for political gain—Yanukovych and his allies will likely abandon (or significantly lessen) their anti-NATO rhetoric. This may have started to occur already.

However, Russia’s opposition is consistent. Speaking on Ekho Moskvy radio, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov responded strongly to NATO’s communiqué. “We will do all we can to prevent Ukraine’s and Georgia's accession into NATO and to avoid an inevitable serious exacerbation of our relations with both the alliance and our neighbors,” he said. (9)

The statement quickly caused plenty of exasperation in Ukraine’s Foreign Ministry. “I believe statements that have been made over the past couple of days show that they [in Moscow] continue to fail to understand us as a state,” Foreign Minister Volodymyr Ohryzko said. “They still don’t want to see us as an independent, sovereign and a democratic country.” (10)

Ohryzko also was responding to comments reportedly made by Russian President Vladimir Putin in a closed meeting during the summit. Russian daily Kommersant quoted an undisclosed diplomatic source as hearing Putin claim
that Ukraine “is not a state.” The claim has not been confirmed or denied by the Kremlin.

In response to Putin’s reported remarks, Prime Minister Yulia Tymoshenko suggested that tension in general is rising in Ukraine’s relations with Russia because Ukraine is finally asserting itself. “If this was really said, it indicates the utmost irritation with the fact that Ukraine has begun to defend its own national interests, defend its independence, and build its own strategy,” she said in remarks she termed her “personal view.” (11)

Whether Putin’s remarks were made at all, or made in some other form, US leaders felt the need to defend Ukraine’s and Georgia’s independence. Granting the two countries MAPs, President George Bush said at the Summit, “would send a signal to their citizens that if they continue on the path of democracy and reform, they will be welcomed into the institutions of Europe,” he said. "And it would send a signal throughout the region that these two nations are, and will remain, sovereign and independent states." (12) Ambassador Taylor’s editorial, meanwhile, ended with a point that most earlier had assumed was understood: “Ukraine is an important European country — sovereign and independent,” he wrote. (13)

Some within Russia apparently need that reminder – on 9 April, Moscow Mayor Yuri Luzhkov suggested that Russia should pull out of its Friendship Treaty with Ukraine. The treaty recognizes Ukraine’s current boundaries. (14) This is an old refrain for Luzhkov, who has said repeatedly that the Crimea should be Russian territory. Prior to this week, Luzhkov’s most recent statements on the subject were made in February 2007, leading Ukraine’s Security Service to attempt to question the Mayor on charges of inciting separatism. (15)

In either an unintended coincidence or a well-timed response to Russia’s statements, Ukraine’s parliament on Wednesday overwhelming ratified the
country’s WTO accession protocol, with 411 out of 450 MPs voting in favor. (16) Ukraine will become a member of the WTO thirty days after notifying the organization of the ratification.

Ukraine may now sit on working groups examining the membership applications of WTO aspirants – including Russia. Any WTO country also can demand a bilateral agreement with an aspirant as a condition of approving its membership. Although Ukraine suggests it will not impede Russia's WTO accession, the tool to do so technically will be available in 30 days. Interestingly, the parliament was given until 8 July to ratify the protocol. Unusually for “last-minute” Ukraine, the country completed this requirement three months early.

Source Notes:
(1) Bucharest Summit Declaration: Issued by the Heads of State and Government participating in the meeting of the North Atlantic Council in Bucharest, 3 Apr 08 via www.nato.int.
(2) Ibid.
(3) “NATO appeases Russia, Ukraine,” Kyiv Post, 10 Apr 08 via kyivpost.com.
(4) ForUm, 17:00 CET, 4 Apr 08, via www.for-ua.com.
(5) “NATO appeases Russia, Ukraine,” Kyiv Post, 10 Apr 08 via kyivpost.com.

(11) “Tymoshenko comments on Putin´s tough statements about Ukraine,” 17:02 CET, 9 Apr 08 via www.unian.net.


(14) “Moscow Mayor: Ukraine's joining NATO to complicate issue of Crimea ownership,” UNIAN News Agency, 1625 CET, 4 Apr 08 via www.unian.net.


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