PRESIDENCY

Kremlin under fire

President Yel'tsin can be forgiven for seeming confused by the current assault upon his leadership: of all places for this attack to originate, who would have expected his formerly docile procurator general and the generally supportive Federation Council to challenge his authority so dramatically? Nonetheless, the Federation Council's refusal to accept Yuri Skuratov's resignation, along with Skuratov's charges of coercion and blackmail forcing his resignation, represent one of the most serious threats to the Yel'tsin presidency.

The Kremlin's response to the challenge, if speculation is to be believed (and speculation is unusually rampant, even for Russia, right now), was to sanction the broadcast of a video purporting to be the procurator in bed with prostitutes. The tape was apparently the instrument used last month to force Skuratov's resignation. If the Kremlin anticipated a reaction of the sort that last forced Justice Minister Valentin Kovalev out of office, it underestimated the newfound strength of Skuratov's backbone. Skuratov responded by labeling the tape, "the direct result of a carefully planned provocation...linked to one of my criminal investigations." (United Press International, 1242 PST, 19 Mar 99; clari.net)

On 18 March, following the broadcast, both Yel'tsin and his chief of staff, General Bordyuzha, checked themselves out of the hospital and returned to the Kremlin, where Yel'tsin had a brief meeting with Skuratov. While Yel'tsin noted his reservations about Skuratov's "moral character," he also charged Bordyuzha with
launching a Security Council-based investigation of the video tape. (Agence France-Presse, 1034 PST, 18 Mar 99; clari.net)

In a surprising move over the weekend, Yel'tsin then fired General Bordyuzha, removing him from both his positions as chief of staff and secretary of the Security Council. The Kremlin hinted that the heart trouble which put Bordyuzha in the hospital last week was the cause of his dismissal, but alternate interpretations suggest Bordyuzha either fell victim to Yel'tsin's knee-jerk response to his perceived need to reassert himself or that it was Bordyuzha himself who "bungled" the forced resignation of Skuratov last month. (Would Yel'tsin have put the blackmailer in charge of investigating the blackmail?)

All sides in this conflict agree: There's more to come.

APPARAT

Borodin takes preemptive hospital vacation?
Joining the burgeoning ranks of the Kremlin ill, Pavel Borodin checked himself into the hospital last week, just as the procurator's return to work sparked speculation of a criminal investigation that reached deep within the Kremlin. (The Moscow Times, 17 Mar 99; nexis)

Before resigning in February, Skuratov launched a series of highly controversial investigations and raids on Russian companies, but it now seems that the most devastating allegations may come from information provided by Swiss authorities on the Swiss construction company, Mabetex. Mabetex was allegedly involved in renovations to the Kremlin, the former Gosplan offices and, other projects overseen by Borodin's Economic Management office and, according to reports, a Swiss official, Carla de Ponte, is due in Moscow this week to provide Skuratov with evidence of kickbacks to the Kremlin. (The Moscow Times, 16 Mar 99; nexis)
New chief of staff has ties to Berezovsky

Aleksandr Voloshin, who was tapped by Yel'tsin to replace Nikolai Bordyuzha as chief of staff this weekend, is a former business associate of the ubiquitous Boris Berezovsky from the Russian Car Alliance Joint Stock Society. (ITAR-TASS, 14 Dec 93; nexis) Whether or not this previous association suggests a current relationship, the appointment does reflect an attempt by the president to weaken the influence of the prime minister in the Kremlin. In the last round of apparat shuffle, Yevgeni Primakov had a notable voice in the selection of cadres, including the ousted General Bordyuzha.

At this point, no successor has been named to Bordyuzha's Security Council seat.

Russian Federation: Foreign Relations

By John McDonough and Sarah Miller

How much longer can Moscow beat that horse?

During Duma hearings on NATO expansion, Minister of Defense Igor Sergeev stated that he will take adequate measures in response to NATO's eastward advance (Radiostantsiya Ekho Moskvy, 1600 GMT, 12 March 99; FBIS-EEU-1999-0312), all in preparation for NATO's expansion which was formalized on 12 March. These messages out of Moscow, a week prior to the formal induction of the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland into the alliance, were only a few of the signals that Moscow was sending NATO and any likely future NATO members.

The recurring theme, in almost all of the public statements and debates was that NATO expansion would not bring security to Europe, only tension. A Russian foreign ministry statement spelled this out clearly, explaining that the expansion of the North Atlantic alliance "will not build trust and stability in international relations but on the contrary could lead to the emergence of new dividing lines."
Though obviously not a new theme, this was clearly a signal that Russia will fight hard to prevent any further expansion of NATO bringing the alliance even closer to the borders of the Russian Federation. This point was specifically addressed during discussions in the Duma that the anti-NATO interfactional group initiated a week prior to the formal expansion of NATO. Gennadi Zyuganov, leader of the Communist faction, and Vladimir Zhirinovsky, chairman of the Liberal Democratic Party, apparently led the debate which centered on the possibility of further expansion beyond NATO's now enlarged forum. (ITAR-TASS World Service, 1135 GMT, 4 Mar 99; FBIS-SOV-1999-0304)

In the face of NATO expansion Moscow has also stepped up its attempts to make the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) the lead security structure in Europe, thereby eclipsing NATO's role on the continent. The Russian foreign ministry highlighted this point by stating that "a dependable system for security and stability in Europe can only be created (...) by using the OSCE as the most representative and universal pan-European organization (...)." (ITAR-TASS, 0911 GMT, 12 Mar 99; BBC Summary of World Broadcasts/lexis-nexis)

While Moscow has repeatedly stressed this point, particularly since the first round of NATO expansion became a fait accompli, it has not prevented other former Warsaw Pact nations and former Soviet republics from actively pursuing NATO membership in what will become a much-anticipated "second round." Russia will clearly score a major victory in Europe if it is able to delay indefinitely a second round or completely sabotage any further NATO expansion -- a goal on which Moscow has clearly set its sights.
The Russians could add such a victory to what may become at least a minor coup if they can in fact persuade NATO to adjust the Conventional Forces in Europe (CFE) treaty. The treaty, which has been in effect since 1990, has become outdated with NATO expansion, so the Russians claim. This treaty has become Moscow's latest target with an eye to limiting NATO weapons located in the new member states.

In a series of talks conducted in Vienna early in March, representatives from 30 countries worked on changes to the 1990 (CFE) treaty. (Agence France-Presse, 1946 GMT, 10 Mar 99; lexis-nexis) What the end result of the negotiations will be remains to be seen, but apparently there was progress as far as the Russians were concerned. According to statements issued on 9 March, Moscow was pleased with the direction in which the talks were moving. (Interfax Russian News, 10 Mar 99; lexis-nexis)

This probably translates to the Russians at least being allowed to keep extra forces in the treaty area under the rubric of "flank" and "peace-keeping" forces. Plans are to have a final agreement before the NATO conference scheduled to be held in the US in April.

**Moscow working on UNSCOM replacement**

As the world's attention was focused on NATO expansion and the alliance's ongoing negotiations avert a clash between Yugoslavia and NATO, Moscow continued to pursue the dissolution of the United Nations Special Commission (UNSCOM) in Iraq. UNSCOM (and its chairman, Richard Butler), which has not conducted inspections in Iraq since late last year before US and UK strikes were initiated, has suffered from repeated attacks from Moscow. The latest assault, which has been mild compared to the attack mounted by Russia's ambassador to the UN in January, appears to be designed simply to keep up the pressure to dismantle UNSCOM.
Russian foreign ministry officials on 5 March reiterated accusations that UNSCOM was involved in "Spying" operations with Butler's full knowledge. The ministry statement said that "Moscow, like many other capitals, finds it necessary to step up efforts to develop a new monitoring mechanism to guarantee reliable and impartial control over Iraqi military programs." Apparently Moscow is playing a lead role in developing a new mechanism for inspections in Iraq which have been initiated in the UN Security Council disarmament evaluation group for Iraq. (Interfax, 1536 GMT, 5 Mar 99; FBIS-SOV-1999-0305)

**Jubilee!**

As the celebration of the "50th Jubilee of Russian Chinese Diplomatic Relations" approaches, it seems that there may actually be something to celebrate. (ITAR-TASS, 0946 GMT, 16 Mar 99; FBIS-CHI-99-0316) Indeed, diplomatic relations have been flourishing for many months. The two countries have stood together on several key international affairs issues, including Iraq, Kosovo, the US-Japanese Defense Pact, and now, the wider US Theater Missile Defense (TMD) issue. Together, they represent what has been described as the "Non-West Bloc." This sterile verbiage is much less offensive to the ear in which Cold War blocs still resonate, but the message is clear: Russia and China will continue to stand together against the West on issues that threaten regional security. Russia, for one, is not shy about involving other states in this bloc, specifically India and North Korea. Although the "Strategic Triangle" suggestion elicited no response from Delhi when it was proposed a few months ago, relations with China and North Korea improve daily. At recent high-level talks in Pyongyang, discussion was topped by collective security and TMD concerns. (CNN On-line ITAR-TASS, 17 Mar 99)

With the success of the summit still sweet, Russia and China have coordinated their reaction to the proposed US TMD system. Their "unanimous" concurrence on this issue is fed by fears of a new arms race and the inevitable strain that it would place on East-West relations. (CNN On-line AP, 11 Mar 99) The
strengthening of Sino-Russian diplomacy is certainly accelerating, and the opportunity to coordinate policies against the West is proving to be the best fuel.

Russian Federation: Domestic Issues and Legislative Branch

By Michael Thurman

REGIONS

Legislation coordination board established in the justice ministry

Responding to the need to bring regional legislation into line with federal law, the justice ministry has established a Federation Component Acts of Legislation Administration whose purpose is to review the legislation of individual regions.

Justice Minister Pavel Krasheninnikov announced that around one-third of all legislation in the regions "is not in line with the Russian Federation Constitution and legislation." Evidence of discrepancies between federal and regional legislation will now allow the justice ministry to order a miscreant region to rectify the mistake. If the region should refuse to comply, the justice ministry could appeal to the General Prosecutor's Office, the Ministry of Antimonopoly Policy and Support for Entrepreneurial Activity [sic]. (Rossiyskaya gazeta, 25 Feb 99, p. 1; FBIS-SOV-1999-0225)

As helpful as creating yet another bureaucracy agency might seem, the problem with regional legislative compliance has less to do with monitoring than it does with a lack of respect the regions have come to have for federal authorities. After the regions were effectively cut loose from federal support in the wake of the currency crisis of last year, they have been more occupied with keeping their own leaky boats afloat than they have with constitutional reforms. If the Russian Federation wishes to remain a single state de facto as well as de jure, it will have
to bring the regions to heel. Right now, trust on all sides is lacking and that is, after all, the glue that holds societies together. All the federal government can do is make and remake its bureaucracy to show the regions, the world, and perhaps even itself, that it is doing something.

**Yel'tsin makes changes in presidential appointments**
President Boris Yel'tsin has appointed Vladimir Chistyakov as presidential representative to the Novgorod Region and Leonid Semergey to the Volgograd Region. He also removed Vyacheslav Bembetov from the Republic of Kalmykia, as well as Vitali Spiridonov from the Krasnodar Territory. (ITAR-TASS World Service, 1630 GMT, 2 Mar 99; FBIS-SOV-1999-0302)

The system of presidential representatives is an interesting one. Intended to serve as the president's five senses in each of the federation's 89 regions, the representatives increasingly find themselves subject to the mercy of their appointed region. On one hand, the representatives are meant to coordinate the administration of federal policy locally by interacting with the field officers of the numerous members of the federal bureaucracy, while on another level the presidential representative is to liaise between regional officials and the federal center. At times these roles work at cross-purposes. Often the presidential representative is cut off from information from within the regions, as he is (rightfully) viewed as being a spy from the center with a briefcase full of worthless federal legislation which made little sense in Moscow and is completely ludicrous in the provinces where it was supposed to be applied. The representative is similarly put under pressure by the president to fix problems which are simply beyond his capacity. It is not a job anyone should envy.

**POLITICAL PARTIES**
**Yabloko steadies itself for elections and becomes a party**
For the first time since its inception, Grigori Yavlinsky has decided to move his organization from the status of "movement," which allows participants to remain
members of other parties, to a "party," which allows membership in Yabloko only. Perhaps smelling blood in the water, public opinion polls show that Yavlinsky's years-long strategy of opposition to almost everything is about to pay off, and Yavlinsky is readying his troops for action. He, and perhaps Yuri Luzhkov, the popular mayor of Moscow and the head of the exciting new party, Fatherland, are poised to make a good showing in the next Duma, and perhaps presidential, elections. This new party is for those who "can no longer vote for Yel'tsin but still do not want to vote for [Communist Party leader Gennadi] Zyuganov," said Yavlinsky. ("Kommersant," 3 Mar 99; BBC Summary of World Broadcasts)

This transformation comes with risks. Three of the five Social Democratic Party members belonging to Yabloko have already left the party, and it is possible that others will find association with Yavlinsky untenable in their home districts. But on the other hand, a more hierarchical structure might make for tighter party discipline, a necessary condition for a successful run for office.

MEDIA

Duma adopts law on mass media moral standards

Without the blessings bestowed on the modern Russian family by the television "V" chip available elsewhere, the Duma has proposed an old-fashioned remedy for uncomfortable or inconvenient information -- censorship. Of course it travels under the name of morality, much as it does in many parts of the world, but without a strong history of media independence, this law may have an especially chilling effect in Russia.

The bill also envisions an ominously titled Supreme Council empowered to define morality, identify violations, and punish with a series of fines. Especially worrisome is that the council, far from being independent from political pressure, is constituted from it. The president, the justice ministry or either house of the Federal Assembly may request the council to provide analysis of the moral content of the federation's media. This last task implies a potentially intrusive
monitoring power which could easily be used to control who says what on the air or in print.

The Supreme Council will be a permanent state body, made up of 12 members: three each appointed by the president, the Duma, the Federation Council, and by the government. (ITAR-TASS World Service, 1219 GMT, 10 Mar 99; FBIS-SOV-1999-0310)

Citizens organize to oppose new media law

Even as the Duma attempted to return the free press to the control of the political ideologues, glimpses of a civil society could be seen with the Russian Pen Club's voiced opposition to the law.

Communist-allied actor and filmmaker Nikolai Gubenko said "morality is the truth" and the media warping of the "truth" endangers the very "braces" holding society together. "To narrow this process, put it into some bureaucratic frames, means trying to establish control, in fact censorship, of the live process of the development of society."


Russian Federation: Armed Forces

By LCDR Fred Drummond

Will the real Russian stealth fighter please stand up?

In an earlier issue of Editorial Digest (1 February 99) we wrote about the public debut of MiG's Project 1.42, the so-called MFI (from the Russian initials for
multipurpose combat fighter). Notable in the flurry of Russian press releases on
the plane was a charge by Moskovskie novosti that the aircraft shown was not
the actual stealth MFI but instead an earlier design used as an engine testbed.
Since that time, more pictures of the aircraft have appeared along with a host of
western press reports. It seems that the doubters may be on to something.

Western media reports ranged from reprints of Russian press releases to outright
skepticism of the aircraft along the lines of Moskovskie novosti. The US
publication Air Force Magazine, published by the Air Force Association (an often-
times unofficial outlet for US Air Force policies and statements), stated flatly that
the Russian aircraft which has been touted as the "equivalent to the stealthy
USAF F-22... does not exist." (Air Force Magazine, March 1999) It called the
aircraft that was shown a testbed for new engines.

Noted aviation writer Bill Sweetman, in a short article in Popular Science
magazine, doubted Russian officials' claims that the aircraft was as stealthy as
the US F-22, barring some unlikely Russian breakthrough in stealth technology.
(Popular Science, April 1999) Sweetman also mentioned that the "new" aircraft
wasn't very new. As we pointed out in our article, even the Russians admitted the
aircraft shown was designed "15 years ago," an eternity in aircraft design and
development, as a comparison with US stealthy fighter designs of the YF/F-22,
YF-23, and the various Joint Strike Fighter (JSF) designs shows.

In looking at the pictures of MFI, it is highly unlikely that the MFI is what the
Russians claim. It most probably is a one-off testbed aircraft. The MiG design
bureau has a history of developing singular- or limited-run designs to test new
ideas and systems. These experimental aircraft often incorporated many features
or components of regular production aircraft, one reason being that it is cheaper
and quicker to use as much "off-the-shelf" product as possible rather than to start
off with a clean sheet of paper. (For further information on MiG designs, see MiG:
Fifty Years of Secret Aircraft Design, by R.A. Belakov and J. Marmain; English-
language edition published by the US Naval Institute Press.) The MFI shown smacks of this origin. The nose in sideview is essentially a MiG-29 cockpit to which a flattened, somewhat ovigal nosecone is attached. (The nosecone in fact resembles that of the US F-16.) The twin vertical tails look remarkably like that of the Sukhoi Su-25. The US has also produced aircraft in this manner, culling components from the inventory of US aircraft. The experimental X-29 was based in part on the F-5, and the so-called Stealth fighter (actually an attack aircraft), the F-117, is a new shape encompassing tried-and-true components from a variety of other aircraft.

What the photos of the MFI reveal is that the design is not stealthy: The shape is all wrong. Basic understanding of stealth technology and design philosophy, which really means a basic knowledge of physics, casts serious doubt on Russian assertions of the plane's reputed stealthiness. Just a few examples will suffice. It has a large air intake on the underside of the fuselage: Even if treated with radar absorbent material (RAM), it will produce a noticeable radar reflection. Likewise, the aircraft's wing leading and trailing edges are not aligned with each other. A successful stealth design aligns leading and trailing edges, in all aspects, with each other. This is because there will always be some order of magnitude of radar reflection from an aircraft, and radar energy is reflected or transmitted from trailing edges in addition to the primary returns from energy hitting the leading edges of an aircraft. Minimizing the number of directions that reflect radar energy will travel from the aircraft reduces its radar signature. The B-2 is a great example of this concept. It is essentially a flying diamond that directs any reflected radar energy away from the aircraft's flight path. The MFI does not follow this design practice. Superficially the MFI resembles the Eurofighter, a stealthy design, but closer comparison shows how "unstealthy" the MFI must be. There are too many angles, too many inherent radar reflectors.

So what is the aircraft shown? Most likely it indeed a flying testbed, used in the development of new engines, radar and weapons systems, and the like. The
question remains, where is the "real" Project 1.42? Have the Russians actually built the stealthy MFI? Is it just a paper airplane? Moskovskie novosti's charges that the aircraft shown was part of a ploy to get increased funding for further development of an F-22 challenger is much more believable than statements coming from the MiG bureau or the Russian government.

For the West, the significance of all this is that the Russians are far from developing, much less producing, an effective challenger to the F-22. Where the Russians may be on to something is in the continued development of systems that may pose threats to western aircraft, stealthy and otherwise. Their rubles (or should we make that dollars) would be better invested in upgrading their S-300 surface-to-air missile family and the S-400 follow-on.

**More on S-400**

In a very informative article by Nezavisimoe voyennoe obozrenie, more details on the S-400 Triumf surface-to-air missile system were revealed. (Nezavisimoe voyennoe obozrenie, No. 6, 19-25 Feb 99) Apart from discussing some more technical details on the system, the article was noteworthy in discussing broader-range issues such as employment philosophy and the intended targets of the system. The author is obviously well-versed in the topic of air defense, noting that the S-400 system's exceptionally long-range intercept capability is necessary to counter the long-range stand-off weapons the West has deployed over the years. Mentioned specifically were the US AGM-84 SLAM (an air-launched, long-range attack missile), the French ASMP nuclear armed missile and the conventional warhead Apache missile.

With the current S-300 system, the launch platforms of these weapons were at risk of being shot down. This isn't the case with follow-on Western missiles such as the US JASSM (Joint Air to Surface Standoff Missile), which the article also mentions; the greater range of the S-400 is needed to defend against the launching aircraft, as well as to shoot down support aircraft such as jammers and
command and control platforms. Generally, these large support aircraft orbit at
distances outside the maximum SAM engagement envelopes. Development and
deployment of the S-400 may put those aircraft at higher risk than they are today.
The author is also following the US press (Aviation Week, Popular Science, and
others), as he discusses the possibility of seeing high-altitude, hypersonic aircraft
within two or three decades; the S-400 would theoretically be able to target them.
More immediate-term threats, though, include stealthy cruise missiles and
ballistic missiles.

In our article from last issue (Editorial Digest, 16 February 99) we mentioned that
the long range of the S-400 would make it in effect an antiballistic missile system.
The Nezavisimoe voyennoe obozrenie article spoke to that point, with the
reporter noting that the S-400's "anti-missile potential... has been increased to
within limits established by the ABM treaty." Another interesting fact revealed is
that one of the S-400 missile variants may become the "standard long-range
weapon of [Russian] Air Force fighter aircraft."

Bottom line: the S-400 system is a well-thought out replacement or upgrade for
the S-300 family and indeed most, if not all, of the earlier Russian SAM systems.
Some radar components have just started testing, and the missiles have yet to
be produced. The article did include a picture of what the paper captioned as the
Triumf TEL (transporter-erector-launcher) -- it appears to be an S-300PMU (SA-
10) TEL. This makes sense, as the S-400 would logically incorporate as many
components as possible from the S-300 family. Such an approach would enable
the Russians not only to integrate easily the S-400 into the inventory, but also
would help to facilitate upgrading export S-300 systems. As always, money is the
biggest challenge with which the S-400 designers must cope. The system is
being pursued, and bears watching.

Newly Independent States: CIS
By Sarah Miller

Bye, bye Boris, redux

March madness, Russian style: With Primakov on vacation and Berezovsky in Azerbaijan, President Yel'tsin caught up on some lingering business. Yel'tsin's unilateral decision to remove Boris Berezovsky from his position as CIS executive secretary followed weeks of interpersonal discord between Berezovsky and the prime minister. (See Editorial Digest, 15 February 1999) Georgian President Eduard Shevardnadze and Uzbek President Islam Karimov lodged the most outspoken disapproval of Yel'tsin's decision, saying that personal differences and an inappropriate Duma resolution prompted it. (RFE/RL Newsline, 10 Mar 99)

Regardless of who prompted the ouster and for which reasons, Yel'tsin's action further confirms Russia's chokehold on all CIS decision-making. Ivan Rybkin, who is charged with CIS responsibilities, outlined his understanding of the dismissal procedure early in February: "The purely formal aspect of the question is that the Executive Secretary is appointed by a consensus vote, or by agreement -- they usually meet behind closed doors -- by the presidents of the CIS countries. How it will be this time...I don't know." (Ekho Moskvy, 1236 GMT, 10 Feb 99; FBIS-SOV-1999-0210)

Berezovsky's ouster is not surprising, but the timing certainly could be better. Only last week, Yel'tsin accepted Primakov's suggestion to hold the CIS Heads of State summit -- postponed since October -- on 2 April. (Russia Today, ITAR-TASS, 17 Mar 99) This much-anticipated summit is an important one since several key issues will be discussed, including the Collective Security Treaty and CIS reform efforts. Azerbaijan and Uzbekistan are slated to withdraw formally from the Collective Security Treaty at that time and, unless amendments are made to the provisions on border security among others, Georgia may withdraw as well. The treaty does little to boost CIS collective security, but it has
preoccupied member states and prevented discussion of the larger issues: CIS reform and economic integration. The summit is the perfect opportunity to advance the discussion of reform plans, but collective security and the election of a new executive secretary may steal the show instead.

Newly Independent States: Western Region

By Tammy Lynch

UKRAINE

Welcome back to the Money Store

It now appears almost certain that the IMF soon will resume lending to Ukraine. The organization granted a $2.2 billion Extended Fund Facility loan last September, but only delivered two tranches totaling $336 million before funding was halted. At the time, IMF representatives criticized the country for failing to fulfill a long list of agreed-upon structural reforms. Now, however, many of those reforms have been completed.

In a statement released on 16 March, the IMF praised Ukraine for its recent fiscal and structural reform, and announced that its representatives would recommend that the organization's executive board release the third tranche of the EFF loan. That tranche is reported to be around $150 million. (Deutsche Presse-Agentur, 2106 CET, 16 Mar 99; nexis, and Xinhua General News Service, 1731 EST, 16 Mar 99; nexis)

The last two hurdles to a resumption of lending were apparently overcome when the Kuchma administration lowered the trading corridor for the hryvnya from 2.5-3.5 to the dollar to 3.4-4.6 to the dollar (for background, see ISCIP Digest, 15 February 99) and then reorganized the structure of the government's executive ministries. The lowering of the trading corridor allowed the government to stop using its cash reserves to "prop up" the currency, while the ministry
reorganization, announced just this week, will lower the number of ministries from 21 to 18. According to ITAR-TASS, the ministries for information, science and technology, and family and youth affairs will all be eliminated. (ITAR-TASS, 15 Mar 99; nexis) It is not clear from the government's announcement, however, what new bodies may be created to fulfill the current functions of these ministries.

Meanwhile, since its de facto devaluation on 9 February, the currency has performed significantly better than some western financial pundits had predicted. When the trading corridor was lowered, some observers suggested that the currency's value could quickly drop as much as 35 percent. By the end of February, however, it had lost just under 5 percent of its value, trading at 3.6 to the dollar. (Agence France-Presse, 26 Feb 99; nexis)

Love makes the world go 'round
Apparently, the Kuchma administration has been perfecting its tightrope-walking skills. During the month of March, the government has managed to integrate itself deeper into the CIS, while maintaining strong support for -- and ties to -- NATO.

First, on 3 March, the parliament voted to join the CIS Interparliamentary Assembly, something that it had refused to do repeatedly in the past. The measure needed 226 votes to pass, and garnered 230. It provoked rancorous debate, which culminated with members of the nationalist Rukh party rushing forward in an attempt to steal the microphone, thus preventing Speaker Oleksandr Tkachenko from announcing the vote. (Deutsche Presse-Agentur, 1237 CET, 3 Mar 99; nexis) The measure was supported by both President Leonid Kuchma and Prime Minister Valeriy Pustovoytenko, perhaps in an election year bow to the power held by Speaker Tkachenko. Around the time of the vote, there was also a marked increase in Kuchma administration rhetoric on the importance of ties between Russians and Ukrainians.
Just ten days later, however, the administration jumped back on its tightrope and released several statements in support of NATO. A statement issued by the foreign ministry on 13 March said, "We hope that the open accession of new countries to NATO will contribute to security and stability in Europe ... and to the further promotion of the ideals of democracy and liberty on our continent." (ITAR-TASS World Service, 2234 GMT, 12 Mar 99; BBC Summary of World Broadcasts/nexis) Later, Vladimir Gorbulin, secretary of the security and defense parliamentary committee and a supporter of President Kuchma, said it was "too early" for Ukraine to join NATO, but that the country had every right to do so. (Xinhua General News Service, 1231 EST, 18 Mar 99; nexis) The administration also praised the success of the NATO-Ukraine Special Partnership Charter, which was signed in November of 1998. (For further background, see ISCIP Digest, 16 November 98.)

**One step closer to Nairobi**

Former Ukrainian Prime Minister Pavel Lazarenko could soon be looking for a new country, now that the United States has officially refused his request for political asylum. As reported in the 1 March ISCIP digest, Lazarenko was arrested in New York City when he tried to enter the country using an invalid visa. He is currently wanted in both Ukraine and Switzerland for a number of charges, including embezzlement.

Lazarenko claimed that he suffered "persecution" in Ukraine, and asked for political asylum. Curiously, the request came shortly after Ukraine formally requested his extradition.

The INS has not yet ruled on Lazarenko's contention that his life would be in peril if he were extradited, so no decision has been made on Ukraine's extradition request. Because of this "fear" for his life, Lazarenko has asked that he be allowed to remain indefinitely in the United States. Thankfully, Lazarenko's campaign for president of Ukraine seems not to have been affected. "I am still
the official candidate from the Hromada Party to the presidential elections," he wrote from the detention center where he is being held. (ITAR-TASS, 5 Mar 99; nexis) He has so far not explained how he would run Ukraine from San Francisco, the city where his family is now living.

BELARUS
Police reprisals escalate
The outlawed election preparations of the disbanded parliament have apparently begun to concern President Lukashenka. The Belarusian KGB has markedly increased its "pressure" on opposition figures, and some of those opposition figures have begun talking publicly about possible mass arrests. Not only have a number of newspapers recently been "searched" by the KGB, but six members of the opposition Central Commission for Presidential Elections have been visited and "warned" by KGB representatives against participating in the outlawed election. (Belapan, 1605 GMT, 13 Mar 99; nexis) In addition, over a dozen opposition members have been arrested, questioned and released.

On 17 March, the home of one of the heads of the Helsinki Human Rights Committee was ransacked, and police confiscated a number of documents relating to the upcoming election. (Belapan, 17 Mar 99; nexis) Just days earlier, on 11 March, Victor Honchar, chairman of the Election Commission, was released from "detention" after 10 days in captivity. Honchar claimed that he was repeatedly beaten in prison, but confirmed that his commission will press on with its plan to hold the presidential election on 16 May. (For further background on Honchar's arrest, see the 1 March ISCIP Digest.)

While the opposition members continue to move forward, they do so with very little attention from the West. With the exception of an OSCE offer to mediate between President Lukashenka and the disbanded parliament, there have been few statements from world leaders about the situation. This apparently concerns Honchar, who has begun asking publicly for Western support.
Yes to nukes!
President Aleksandr Lukashenka said recently that, because of the expansion of NATO, "the security of Russia's borders is in question," and he is willing to do his part to deal with the situation. In the interest of "our common fatherland," he said, "nuclear weapons could be returned" to Belarus. (Interfax, 25 and 26 Feb 99; nexis)

Lukashenka's statements are actually not new. He has repeatedly complained about the previous administration's decision to "bow to Western pressure" and become a nuclear-free state. Because of that nuclear-free status, 80 nuclear missiles were returned to Russia, and all strategic missile launch sites were scheduled to be destroyed by 2001. (Interfax, 26 Feb 99; nexis) In 1997, however, Lukashenka announced that the missile launch sites would not be destroyed.

Russia, for its part, is downplaying Lukashenka's focus on military responses to NATO. Several Russian sources have denied any plan to re-deploy strategic missiles on Belarus' territory. The country has in the past, however, supported Lukashenka's decision not to destroy its strategic missile launch sites.

MOLDOVA
Who says prisoners can't vote?
Moldova finally has a new government, and all the country needed to get it was a little help from an imprisoned deputy.

On 4 March, 51 members of the Moldovan parliament voted to confirm the new cabinet put together by Prime Minister-designate Ion Sturza, and Sturza began work. Unfortunately, the parliament has 101 members, so the constitutional court ruled the vote invalid. (ITAR-TASS, 6 Mar 99; nexis) At that point, because of
large divisions in the ruling coalition, it seemed that the government might fail to receive approval.

However, on 12 March, the parliament voted again, and this time approved Sturza's cabinet with 52 votes in favor. The difference was the vote of deputy Illie Ilasku, who is currently serving time in a Tiraspol prison for various Transdniestr-related charges. Ilasku requested in writing that his vote in favor be counted, and provided the one-vote margin of victory for the administration. (Interfax, 12 Mar 99; nexis) Sturza's opponents have vowed to protest the vote once again at the constitutional court, but their challenge will most likely fail.

The approval of Sturza and his cabinet clears the way for a resumption of lending from both the IMF and the World Bank. The cabinet represents both change and stability, as only four of 17 cabinet ministers were replaced; the ministers of state, economics and reform, transport and communication, and trade and industry. (Interfax, 0930 GMT, 4 Mar 99; nexis)

Newly Independent States: Caucasus

By Miriam Lanskoy

AZERBAIJAN
Looking for friends in NATO
In response to the mounting military aid from Russia to Armenia, Azerbaijan has sought to strengthen its ties to NATO, in particular to the US and Turkey. Over recent months the Azeris have publicly invited the US and Turkey to establish military bases on their territory. In connection with the present crisis in Kosovo, the Azeris demonstrated their goodwill and their utility as allies by detaining a Russian cargo plane carrying six MiG-21 jet fighters which the Azeris presumed were en route to Yugoslavia. (The Washington Times, 23 Mar 99) Russian authorities responded that the aircraft belonged to Kazakhstan and were bound
for Slovakia. On 29 March Azerbaijani President Heider Aliev announced that the cargo plane would be returned to its Russian owners, but avoided commenting on the fighter planes. (RFE/RL Newsline, 30 Mar 99) On an earlier occasion, the Azeris volunteered to send soldiers to Kosovo as part of a peacekeeping mission.

CHECHNYA

Who's trying to aggravate matters?

Chechen President Aslan Maskhadov ordered his military to shoot down any aircraft that violates the republic's borders. The Chechen security minister, Ali Atgeriev, explained the presidential decision by saying that Russian planes have overflown parts of Chechnya on several occasions over the last few days. (Agence France-Presse, 1208 GMT, 29 Mar 99; nexis) Russia has resorted to displaying its superior air power to indicate its displeasure with Chechnya on several occasions since the end of hostilities in 1996, yet this instance is more troubling as it comes on the heels of three particularly disruptive and violent incidents.

Russian officials issued stern threats after the federal interior ministry representative in Chechnya, Gen. Gennadi Shpigun, was abducted on 5 March. In language reminiscent of the pre-invasion days, Interior Minister Sergei Stepashin told journalists that the "most rigorous measures" could be applied against the kidnappers and that law enforcement officials could act within the boundaries of the Russian Federation. Russia certainly retains the force capability in the North Caucasus to realize these threats. When the Russian military withdrew from Chechnya, the units relocated to other bases in the North Caucasus. Thus, tens of thousands of men and hundreds of vehicles are now stationed in nearby cities like Vladikavkaz and Mozdok. In the ensuing weeks, however, Kremlin officials softened their rhetoric and seemed to back away from a military solution. On 24 March the Chechen authorities announced that six persons had been arrested in connection with the kidnapping; still, the general
remained in captivity. (Interfax, 1045 GMT, 23 Mar 99; BBC Summary of World Broadcasts/nexis)

The bombing of an outdoor market in the North Ossetian capital Vladikavkaz on 19 March claimed 51 fatalities and over 100 casualties. No group took responsibility for the blast and possible scenarios proliferated quickly. Such explanations include: an Ingush reprisal against the bombing of an Ingush village a week earlier, and certain Russian factions trying to forestall a planned meeting between Maskhadov and Russian Prime Minister Yevgeni Primakov. Usually the latter explanation is offered by Chechen authorities, but in this case it came from none other than Stepashin, who said that the bombing in Vladikavkaz and, the third violent act, the attempted assassination of Maskhadov are "links in the same chain" and "the aim of these acts of terrorism is to snap the delicate thread of cooperation that exits between Moscow and Grozny." (ITAR-TASS, 1615 GMT, 21 Mar 99; BBC Summary of World Broadcasts/nexis)

Newly Independent States: Central Asia

By Monika Shepherd

UZBEKISTAN

Tashkent bombings produce wave of arrests and accusations

The official interpretation of the series of bomb explosions (according to the reports, there were at least six and possibly as many as eight explosions) which occurred in Uzbekistan's capital city on 16 February is that they were intended to assassinate President Karimov and to destabilize the country politically. (Agence France-Presse, 1349 GMT, 16 Feb 99; nexis) The Uzbek government has identified a rather vague coalition of Islamic extremist groups and opposition activists from the outlawed Erk (Freedom) Party (an offshoot of Uzbekistan's first opposition party, Birlik or Unity, which appeared in 1989 and enjoyed legal status until 1992) as the main agents behind the bombings. President Karimov has
repeatedly stated that this unlikely alliance was provided with support from terrorist groups based in Chechnya, Tajikistan, Kazakhstan, Pakistan, and Afghanistan. (Agence France-Presse, 1217 GMT, 23 Feb 99; nexis, and Uzbek Television First Channel, 1630 GMT, 1 Mar 99; The British Broadcasting Corporation/nexis)

All of the so-called Islamic extremists are said to have ties to either Wahhabi or Hezbollah groups, including groups such as the "Uzbekiston Islom Harakati" (Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, said to have Wahhabi ties) and the Hezb-e Tahrir-al-Islomii (Islamic Freedom Party), which Interior Minister Zakir Almatov accused of organizing a "Hezbollah militia." (Agence France-Presse, 1217 GMT, 23 Feb 99; nexis, and TASS, 18 Mar 1999; nexis)

By 23 February at least 35-40 people had already been arrested, all of whom were said to belong to radical religious groups. (RFE/RL Newsline, 23 Feb 99) Since then, dozens more have been detained, including not only local Muslim leaders, but also human rights activists and Erk Party sympathizers. On 26 February Vitali Ponomarev, the acting director of the Society for Assistance of Human Rights in Central Asia, told journalists that he believed at least 500 people had been arrested in connection with the 16 February bombings in Tashkent. (RFE/RL Newsline, 1 Mar 99)

Many human rights officials believe that the Uzbek government is using the Tashkent bombings as an excuse to crush any remaining signs of opposition to President Karimov's policies. Using methods reminiscent of Soviet law enforcement practices, the Uzbek police have detained not only people who are thought to be directly involved with the opposition, but also their family members. President Karimov has appealed to a number of foreign governments to assist him in his search for the main organizers of the bombings, all of whom are thought to have fled the country. Thus far, Russian, Kazakh, Kyrgyz, and Turkish law enforcement personnel have cooperated in arresting and extraditing a
number of suspects to Uzbekistan. However, up to now the only evidence that the Uzbek government has produced in order to verify its claim that the bombing was organized by Erk Party leaders and Muslim militants is an interview with three young men who claim to have been coerced into joining terrorist training camps in Turkey and Chechnya. These men also claim that the camps were run personally by Muhammad Solih (the Erk Party's founder). Given the fact that the men did not actually recognize Solih when he visited the camps, but were told by others who he was, this is hardly incontrovertible proof of Solih's involvement. (Uzbek Television First Channel, 1630 GMT, 1 Mar 99; The British Broadcasting Corporation/nexis) Furthermore, without material evidence of these alleged eyewitnesses' claims, or of the Uzbek government's charges against Erk and various unofficial Muslim groups, there is no reason to believe any of the allegations which President Karimov's administration has made as to the identity and motives of the bombers.

Several other theories have been put forth to explain who might have organized the bombings. According to one of these rumors, it was the Russian government which carried out the bombings in order to pressure President Karimov to reconsider his recent decision to withdraw from the CIS Collective Security Treaty. Another theory is that the recently dismissed first deputy prime minister, Ismoil Djurabekov, who is also purported to have strong links to Tashkent's organized crime network, may have been behind the attacks. (The Moscow Times, 18 Feb 99; nexis) In an interview broadcast on Iranian radio, the chairman of the outlawed Birlik Party, Abdurahim Polat(o), suggested yet another possibility: namely, that it was President Karimov's own administration which carried out the bombings. (Voice of the Islamic Republic of Iran, 1530 GMT, 17 Feb 99; The British Broadcasting Corporation/nexis) As farfetched as this hypothesis might sound at first, it is not completely unreasonable. The bomb attacks have provided a legitimate excuse for government forces to crack down on all opposition sympathizers and for the imposition of stringent controls on the movements and activities of Uzbekistan's residents, especially within Tashkent.
These types of actions might not have been so easily tolerated by the country's citizens and foreign residents, without the shock and panic produced by the bombings. With parliamentary and presidential elections approaching in late 1999 and early 2000, respectively, President Karimov's administration may have been searching for a way to neutralize any group which could seriously challenge the current government's hold on power.

Whether there is any truth to Mr. Polat's theory, it is quite plausible that those who organized the bombings received some degree of assistance from members of Uzbekistan's security and law enforcement services, considering the magnitude and complexity of the operation. Within a two-hour period, bombs were detonated at six separate sites throughout the city. These sites include the Cabinet of Ministers' building in Independence Square (Mustaqillik maidoni), the interior ministry headquarters, the new Uzbek National Bank building, a movie theater in Independence Square, the area near the airport, and the street on which the Turkmen, Tajik, Belarusian, and Georgian embassies are located.

It is not yet clear precisely what type of explosive devices were used; some reports describe all of the explosives as car bombs, whereas other accounts state that at least two bombs had actually been placed inside one or two government buildings. (Manchester Guardian Weekly, 28 Feb 99, p. 3; nexis, and The Associated Press, 17 Feb 99; nexis)

Installing explosive devices inside either the Cabinet of Ministers or the interior ministry headquarters would have been an extremely difficult and risky venture, due to the tight security normally practiced at both places. The scope of the operation would have also required a substantial amount of careful planning and coordination well ahead of the date for which the actual attacks were scheduled and a fair number of people must have been involved. The more time and personnel are required to carry out terrorist activities, the greater the likelihood that their plans will be detected by the authorities. (See Coup d'Etat: A Practical
Handbook, by Edward Luttwak: Knopf, 1969) These facts alone suggest that the perpetrators of the attacks may have had a considerable amount of help from government officials close to the president, and/or from members of the security services. Without such assistance, it would have been very difficult to obtain access to detailed and up-to-the-minute information regarding President Karimov's plans and movements on 16 February. Judging by the fact that the explosion at the Cabinet of Ministers' building missed the president's car only by a matter of seconds, his attackers must have been able to follow his movements quite closely.

Another significant piece of evidence was announced by President Karimov himself, a few days after the bombings. The president informed journalists that one of the suspects being sought in connection with the attacks, Ulughbek Bobojonov, had been seen inside the Cabinet of Ministers' building six times prior to 16 February, allegedly with the permission of an unnamed deputy prime minister. The president did not mention what Bobojonov's connections to the deputy prime minister might have been, and refrained from accusing the deputy prime minister of deliberately aiding those responsible for the bomb attacks. (AP Worldstream, 1245 Eastern Time, 23 Feb 99; nexis) Should irrepressible evidence emerge that members of the Uzbek government were indeed involved in the attacks, the deputy prime minister might make a useful scapegoat.

Perhaps the most crucial question is how a car bearing armed men and explosives was able to breach the security cordon in front of the Cabinet of Ministers' building, just prior to the president's arrival in Independence Square. Normally, police officers prevent regular traffic (both vehicular and pedestrian) from using any of the roads along which the president is expected to travel and bar access to the entire area surrounding the main government offices well before the president's arrival. Therefore, it is quite surprising that the bomb-laden car was able to come anywhere near the Cabinet of Ministers' building, unless
the president's attackers were working in collusion with members of the security services, or were law enforcement officers themselves.

In view of the above-mentioned facts, it is curious that President Karimov was so quick to accuse Erk Party members of planning and implementing the bomb attacks. Neither Erk nor Birlik has any history of using violence to achieve its aims; on the contrary, these two parties' representatives have consistently attempted to work with the Uzbek government to introduce a greater degree of democracy and respect for human rights in their country, even after both parties were banned. Furthermore, although various "radical" Muslim groups in Uzbekistan have been charged with committing a range of violent acts, from vandalism to murder, there is doubt as to the validity of many of these charges. Most of the "Wahhabis" who have been arrested and are currently serving prison sentences were convicted for possessing either narcotics or illegal weapons. This is a far cry from planning and carrying out six closely timed bomb attacks in heavily guarded areas of the capital. Finally, considering how closely many Muslim leaders and their communities are watched in Uzbekistan, it seems likely that the security services would have caught wind of their plans.