Jittery moguls meet with Putin

Weeks of tension between the Putin administration and Russia's business elite seem to have eased somewhat in the wake of a Kremlin sit-down between the president and 21 of the country's oligarchs. Notably absent from the meeting were Yel'tsin "Family" members Boris Berezovsky and Roman Abramovich, as well as the recently exonerated Media-Most Chief Vladimir Gusinsky.

While the incarceration of Gusinsky brought fears of state control of the country's media to the forefront, the later moves against Norilsk Nickel and LUKoil really rattled the beneficiaries of Yel'tsin-era privatization. One of the most egregious examples of the insider-influenced sale of state property had been Vladimir Potanin's acquisition of shares in Norilsk Nickel. As Putin's law enforcement agencies conducted criminal investigations against Norilsk Nickel, the prosecutor's office sent a letter to Potanin recommending he pay $140 million to the state. Boris Nemtsov, leader of the Union of Right Forces, characterized this move as racketeering: "The essence of the letter is that Potanin should pay the money in exchange for closing all criminal cases against him." (INTERFAX, 1409 GMT, 11 Jul 00; FBIS-SOV-2000-0712, via World News Connection)

Nemtsov argued that if Putin's police intended to change the rules of the game of privatization, potentially redistributing property from rebellious businessmen to compliant ones, then stock prices would be destabilized, and foreign investment would drop off. Nemtsov urged the president to hold a meeting with the business leaders to explain his policies. Chubais echoed the call for a meeting to clarify policy and explain the actions of "overzealous law enforcement officers."
The most dramatic move was Boris Berezovsky's resignation from the Duma and condemnation of Putin's attacks on industry. "This is a deliberate campaign aimed at destroying independent big business," Berezovsky claimed. (MOSCOW TIMES, 18 Jul 00; via Johnson's Russia List) He also compared the current regime to a military junta. Berezovsky's very public grousing and decision to give up his parliamentary immunity could, of course, have a range of motivations. He is too judicious to abandon immunity if he believed it soon would be of use to him.

Eventually, Nemtsov succeeding in brokering a meeting, scheduled for Putin's return from the G-8 summit in Okinawa. Participants later seemed reassured that Putin would not seek the redistribution of property. Nemtsov seemed most confident, commenting "The president clearly and concisely said that there would be no review of the outcome of privatization." (REUTERS, 28 Jul 00; via Johnson's Russia List)

Others appeared less certain. Potanin noted that while some of his concerns had been addressed, "It is not that I have lost my fear (of the authorities) after this meeting."

The Kremlin statement, issued after the meeting, did concur with Nemtsov on privatization, but also stressed the need for changes in the oligarchs' use of state agencies and structures "to achieve their goals." (REUTERS, 29 Jul 00; via Johnson's Russia List)

Other reports mentioned the need for businessmen to become regular tax-paying citizens, suggesting either that legitimate tax policy would be rigidly enforced, or that law enforcement agencies would be pursuing tax bills aggressively, even on
previously hidden accounts. The head of the Federal Tax Police Service, Vyacheslav Soltaganov, did recently request that the president grant his agency the right to "control financial flows into and out of Russia." (ITAR-TASS, 1037 GMT, 12 Jul 00; FBIS-SOV-2000-0712, via World News Connection)

The importance of this meeting is brought into question, however, by the absence of the oligarchs thought closest to the Kremlin. While Berezovsky's absence could be seen as further protest against the administration, his recent comments suggest that he may have had his own reconciliation with Putin. While he still believes Putin has erred in his relations with the elites (and that, of course, includes the regional governors), he no longer believes Putin's actions represent an attempt to redistribute property. (INTERFAX, 29 Jul 00; via lexisnexis) Recent reports of Kremlin attempts to win state control of media outlets, including Berezovsky's shares of ORT, cast serious doubt on that conclusion however.

Berezovsky further makes the point that if Luzhkov or Primakov had won the presidential election, they would have "easily been able to imprison the entire present Kremlin administration." In an appeal clearly meant to resonate with Putin, Berezovsky called for a "wise decision" of the sort made at the end of the Soviet era, "not to make public the KGB lists." While it is just the sort of argument likely to win over the president, it is, however, an intriguing comparison of spies and informers to oligarchs and reformers.

SECURITY COUNCIL
Council to mediate military row
The president stepped into the increasingly public dispute between Chief of the General Staff Anatoli Kvashnin and Defense Minister Igor Sergeev over the status of the Strategic Missile Troops. He brought both officers into the Kremlin for a discussion of the problem, and handed the task of mediating between them to Security Council Secretary Sergei Ivanov. An upcoming council session will
deal with military reform and development through the year 2010. (INTERFAX, 0901 GMT, 15 Jul 00; FBIS-SOV-2000-0715, via World News Connection)

**MVD**

**Terrorist attacks prevented?**

In an oddly terse report, the Anti-Organized Crime Department announced that officers of the MVD and FSB had prevented a "number of major acts of terrorism" across Russia on 19 July. (ITAR-TASS, 1009 GMT, 20 Jul 00; FBIS-SOV-2000-0720, via World News Connection) According to the report, many saboteurs in several Russian cities were arrested simultaneously. Explosive devices and detonators were also seized. Further details are not being made public as more arrests are expected.

**FSB**

**Nikitin pursued again?**

Aleksandr Nikitin, the retired naval officer acquitted of charges of treason in connection with his contribution to an environmentalist group's report on radiation leakage, may soon have to answer the charges all over again. The prosecutor general's office has asked the Supreme Court to suppress the acquittal. It is unclear whether further evidence has been found in the case, as most of the information in the charges was claimed to be classified. (INTERFAX, 0936 GMT, 21 Jul 00; FBIS-SOV-2000-0721, via World News Connection)

**Russian Federation: Foreign Relations**

By Chandler Rosenberger and Sarah Miller

**Pragmatically Yours?**

Western observers have hailed Russia's new foreign policy doctrine as a pragmatic statement of national interests -- untainted, for the most part, by ideology. Pragmatism, however, is a means to an end, not an end in itself. If
Russia is still pursuing aims contrary to the interests of the United States and the West, then it hardly matters whether that is done "pragmatically" or not.

In flummoxing President Bill Clinton's half-hearted attempts to promote the American program for missile defense, Russian President Vladimir Putin has shown that Russia pragmatically can paint an inattentive White House into a corner. Missile defense, it seems, is dying a death of a thousand pragmatic cuts. When Russia so effectively thwarts a US foreign policy initiative, how it chooses to attain its goal matters less than the fact that it has won.

Russia's new foreign policy concept, signed by President Putin on 28 June and published on 7 July, is not so pragmatic as to abandon dreams of Russian influence around the globe. In its preface, the doctrine lists as one of its goals: "to achieve firm and prestigious positions in the world community, most fully consistent with the interests of the Russian Federation as a great power, as one of the most influential centres of the modern world, and which are necessary for the growth of its political, economic, intellectual and spiritual potential."

(MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS WEBSITE, 7 Jul 00; BBC Summary of World Broadcasts, via lexis-nexis)

It ought not to be forgotten that such "pragmatic" means remain in service of a national ideology that demands international prestige and influence as an end in itself. Indeed, in opposing a missile defense system that would reduce the threat of Russia's warheads, the Kremlin has maneuvered Russia back onto the world stage.

**Goodbye NMD... Hello, Arms Control**

Arriving late at the Okinawa summit, tired and distracted from Middle East peace talks, Clinton hardly had the strength to rebut heavy criticism of American plans for national missile defense (NMD). The Kremlin had laid the groundwork for its case weeks in advance, and the president chose to concede the round.
Even before he left Russia, Putin had bolstered his case against American NMD by releasing some more details of the Russian alternative: Russia's "pan-European, non-strategic antimissile defense system" could be built alongside a European program to assess threats, design early warning systems and jointly research missile technology. (ROSSIYSKAYA GAZETA, 12 Jul 00; FBIS-SOV-2000-0712, via World News Connection)

On his way to Okinawa, President Putin used trips to China and North Korea to strengthen his brief further. In Beijing he picked up the endorsement of a major nuclear power not invited to the G-8 summit. (INTERFAX, 18 Jul 00; FBIS-SOV-2000-0718, via World News Connection) In Pyongyang, on the other hand, he gathered assurances from President Kim Il Sung that North Korea posed no danger to the West, particularly if Western nations helped it develop rockets for satellite delivery.

By the time of the summit, in other words, negotiations over NMD had reached an impasse. In hopes of derailing American plans by arguing in favor of the stability the 1972 ABM Treaty guaranteed, Russia proposed developing a workable, international system that is just as "illegal" as any American one. In the name of adhering closely to the ABM Treaty, the Americans remained far more cautious, and promoted -- however halfheartedly -- a system that probably would not meet its stated aims. Worse, despite its supposed fealty to ABM, the US system has been widely opposed.

After bilateral meetings, Clinton and Putin signed a declaration that shifted the emphasis from defense back to arms control agreements. The joint declaration, a mere restatement of the thin points of agreement reached in Moscow in June, committed the White House and Kremlin to "making progress in further reduction of nuclear weapons arsenals, preservation and strengthening of the ABM Treaty and counteraction to new challenges to international security." (ITAR-TASS,
Clinton also accepted documents outlining Putin's plan to reach START-III, which entailed continued adherence to the ABM Treaty and reduction of each sides' arsenals to 1,500 warheads. (INTERFAX, 1420 GMT, 21 Jul 00; FBIS-SOV-2000-0721, via World News Connection)

Russia had already defined changes to the ABM Treaty as a threat to international security, and had promised to abandon arms control negotiations if it felt the treaty had been violated. By returning to the arms control course, the US administration effectively abandoned all attempts to counter Russian opposition to missile defense with a strong campaign of its own. Indeed, the president was so far off his game that he was even unwilling to object to Russia's support for North Korea's missile development, purportedly meant to allow it to launch satellites. (INTERFAX, 21 Jul 00; FBIS-SOV-2000-0721, via World News Connection)

**Kinder, gentler?**

The international argument, in other words, had come full circle. Missile defense had been given new impetus in 1998, when North Korea launched a rocket over Japan, supposedly a test of satellite delivery but seen at the time as an overt threat to the West. Now that Clinton and Putin are back talking about arms control and even taking North Korea's plans for "satellite launches" seriously, the tough-minded aims of the Kremlin's "pragmatic" methods ought to be clear.

In some sense it is "pragmatic" to negotiate rather than bluster, and to tangle one's opponent in a net of agreements rather than stare him down with knives drawn. The new, "pragmatic" Kremlin, however, has achieved its old aim. When Washington is coerced into agreeing that North Korea might have a legitimate need for powerful rockets, it is clear that the missile defense game is truly up. Does it really matter whether the United States lost this round to "pragmatic" Russia rather than a bellicose one?
**Peace treaty at last?**

After a whirlwind Asian diplomatic tour in July, Russian President Putin will head back to the East in early September for his first official diplomatic visit to Japan since assuming the presidency. With only a month until the visit -- to be held in Tokyo from 3-5 September -- and only five months until the self-imposed deadline for completing a Russo-Japanese peace treaty arrives, all eyes will be focused on the summit's outcome. (AP, 1510 GMT, 23 Jul 00; via lexis-nexis) Until then, the question remains: Could Russia and Japan actually sign a peace treaty within the year?

Russo-Japanese diplomatic efforts over the past few years suggest that peace treaty negotiations are usually heavy on rhetoric but lacking in substance. Since Yel'tsin and Hashimoto met in 1997 and set the year 2000 as a deadline for a peace treaty, efforts have been stymied by uncompromising attitudes on the status of the Kurile islands. The Japanese government continues to make conclusion of a peace treaty by 2000 conditional on the resolution of the Kurile islands territorial issue. This has been the Japanese stance since the 1993 Tokyo Declaration, which stated that a peace treaty would be signed after the territorial issue was concluded, and the 1998 Moscow Declaration, which officially specified the year 2000 as the target date. (See The NIS Observed, 13 Jan 99) Meanwhile, the Russian government has been unwilling to compromise on the Kuriles, refusing to relinquish the islands. Barring any significant compromise by the Russians on the issue, the upcoming summit has about as much chance of resolving the matter as any previous meeting.

Since Putin's meetings with Mori and Hashimoto in the spring of 2000, the Russians have avoided addressing the topic with the Japanese, suggesting that the new president had yet to decide his negotiating stance. At the G-8 summit and the ASEAN Regional Forum held in late July, Russian and Japanese diplomats again avoided the topic altogether, indicating that neither side was prepared publicly to address the long-standing dispute. However, the upcoming
summit could mean that, despite previous bickering, the parties are prepared to negotiate the issues in a manner that would allow them to control the substance and outcome of the negotiations for the benefit of their domestic audiences.

Possible economic gains constitute perhaps the only significant reason why Russia and Japan might put aside some of their differences and conclude a peace treaty. But even without such an agreement, Russia and Japan have gradually improved their economic relations over the past few years. As a case in point, the 1998 Moscow Declaration placed more emphasis on developing economic relations than resolving the territorial issue. The declaration included several economic cooperation agreements such as documents on joint cooperation in energy, tourism, telecommunications, the environment and investment, indicating that, while the Kuriles remain Russian, the two countries have not ruled out economic cooperation.

Although it is impossible to predict the economic impact that a peace treaty could have on Japanese investment in the Russian Far East, it seems likely that it would only augment the current levels of Japanese economic investment.

Russian Federation: Domestic Issues and Legislative Branch

By Michael Thurman

FEDERAL ASSEMBLY

Governors agree to leave Federation Council

The Federation Council finally has given in, after weeks of fighting the Kremlin and the Duma. With a 119 to 18 margin of approval, the regional governors and heads of regional parliaments who sit in Federation Council at present have
agreed to leave in favor of permanent regional representatives whom they will select.

Article 95, section 2 of the Constitution states that, "two deputies from each subject of the Federation shall be members of the Federation Council: one from the representative and one from the executive bodies of state authority." (www.russianet.ru). Since the manner in which this was to be accomplished was not specified, former President Boris Yel'tsin decided that each region's governor and the head of its parliament would sit in the Federation Council.

President Putin does not like this arrangement. He claimed that the governors and heads of regional parliaments could not possibly do both jobs well, so he suggested a series of alternatives. The bill just ratified by the Federation Council is the product of this process.

According to the bill, the Federation Council will no longer consist of governors and heads of regional parliaments; instead, the governors and parliaments will each select someone to represent them in the Federation Council, thereby keeping within the provisions of the Constitution and establishing an appointive cadre of Federation Council members more amenable to the president's wishes.

The governors will be able to appoint whomever they wish, and each regional parliament will nominate a candidate, whom the governor then would appoint. Ideally the terms of office for these new members will coincide with the parliamentary session, or the governor's term in office, but provisions exist for the members' removal in the same way in which they were appointed. (INTERFAX, 0847 GMT, 26 Jul 00; BBC Summary of World Broadcasts, via lexis-nexis)

Surely requiring that governors and heads of regional parliaments also sit in the Federation Council was a silly system and needed to be changed, however, this new arrangement is not much better. More important than concern over the
governors' busy schedules is Putin's desire to get a grip on all levers of power within the federation -- especially those levers as independent as the previous Federation Council system had been.

According to Nikolai Fedorov, president of the republic of Chuvashia, the governors' approval of the law helps to create a climate unhealthy for democracy. "Today, the atmosphere in the society is such that the will of the emperor, the will of the president, is already the law. And the opinion of a Kremlin bureaucrat is more important than the constitutional stance of the Federation Council," he warned. (THE GAZETTE, 27 Jul 00; via lexis-nexis)

Andrei Piontkovsky, director of the Independent Institute of Strategic Studies in Moscow, agrees: Such a "reform" removes the governors' responsibility for federal policy, he notes, giving such powers instead to persons who are not directly elected or answerable to voters. (THE GAZETTE, 27 Jul 00; via lexis-nexis)

REGIONS

PACE slaps Russia with feather
The Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE), ostensibly set up to monitor and defend human rights, seemingly is unable to evict Russia, whose brutal conduct in the Chechen war is widely acknowledged and who by PACE's own admission has violated the association's treaty commitments. Instead of standing by the lofty ideals with which it was constructed, PACE continues to make tiny squeaking noises which, not surprisingly, Russia is ignoring. (For an earlier look at the weak-handed policies of the Council of Europe, see The NIS Observed, 24 Apr 00)

The most recent installation in the poor showing of the Parliamentary Assembly is tellingly titled, "Conflict in the Chechen Republic -- Follow-up to Recommendations 1444 (2000) and 1456 (2000) of the Parliamentary Assembly
Resolution 1221 (2000)." The new resolution -- using the same terms that have failed to impress the Kremlin heretofore -- states that, unless Moscow makes "substantial, accelerating and demonstrable progress" towards improving its conduct in Chechnya, Russia would face expulsion. It seems that Russia continues to remain in the Council of Europe not because its actions have changed, but, disconcertingly, because the Council of Europe's definitions of Russian human rights abuses seem to have shrunk.

For instance, the Council of Europe's very own human rights commissioner, Alvaro Gil-Robles, stated last week that he wanted the Russian PACE delegation to return, after its members left voluntarily citing discrimination and Western bullying. Gil-Robles explained that "Russia is an important country for the Council of Europe." (EKHO MOSKVY, 1425 GMT, 24 Jul 00; BBC Summary of World Broadcasts, via lexis-nexis) Although his exact meaning is unclear, Russia's "right" to sit in the organization is apparently more important than the rights of individuals the organization has sworn to protect.

More seriously, Gil-Robles also noted with approval, and apparently without further thought, that human rights conditions have improved in Chechnya. He cites as evidence the opening of a human rights office. "I find it very important that civilians have a chance to immediately report to bureau representatives about the violation of human rights they have experienced," Gil-Robles said. "I know the bureau has achieved certain results. Innocent people are freed from the captivity they found themselves in," he continued. (INTERFAX, 23 Jun 00; via lexis-nexis)

The man is either naive or willfully ignoring the facts. That it should not occur to a commissioner of human rights that his perceived "improvement" was brought about by the bloody extermination of much of the Chechen population is not only dumbfounding, it borders on the complicitous. With such defenders of human rights, who needs violators?
The Collective Security Treaty: at what price?
"Terrorism" is described as the most pervasive threat to Russia and the CIS, according to the most recent meetings of the Collective Security Treaty (CST) members, but what will be the price for this "regional system of collective security"? Chechnya has given the world ample insight into the lengths to which Russia will go to protect its own soil from "terrorists," but it remains to be seen how far Russia will extend itself to "protect" the CIS Collective Security members' territory from that same threat.

At their 25 July meeting of the chiefs of the General Staffs of the Collective Security Treaty in Moscow, the CST members addressed the practical measures needed to ensure the safety of their borders. (ITAR-TASS, 1321 GMT, 25 Jul 00; FBIS-SOV-2000-0725, via World News Connection) The chiefs, charged with implementing the system of regional collective security to which the CST members agreed at their 25 May meeting in Minsk, did not publicize the outcome of their meeting, however, indicating that practical implementation of the system will be more difficult to achieve than their "anti-terrorism" rhetoric suggests. In essence, the states face practical challenges which will be extremely difficult to combat even if the member states were to give up a measure of independence -- by allowing Russian troops to occupy their soil -- to implement the system. (See The NIS Observed, 21 Jun 00)

Beyond implementation rhetoric, the CST members first will have to admit the immensity of the project at hand. The problem facing the CST member states is pervasive and changeable, and will require large amounts of funding and cooperation to combat. CST member states already have undertaken operations
to curb the amount of drugs and arms that flow across their borders, but these efforts clearly are not sufficient. (See NIS Observed, 12 Jul 00) And although the CST members have singled out Afghanistan as the major conduit of drugs, arms and other illegal activity, the states must also come to terms with threats from within their own borders.

Russia clearly wants to lead the charge against "terrorism" in the CIS, but Moscow's real intentions have yet to be seen. Furthermore, questions still remain about the economic and logistical feasibility of such an undertaking and the price that the CST members will have to pay for Russian "protection." (NEZAVISIMOYE VOYENNOYE OBOZRENIYE, 7 Jul 00; FBIS-SOV-2000-0707, via World News Connection) Probably even more importantly, if the CST does begin to crack down on "terrorism," human rights questions certainly will creep into the picture, just as they have in Chechnya.

Newly Independent States: Western Region

By Tammy Lynch

Westward ho!
Will Ukraine's future point eastward or westward? It is no secret, of course, that Ukraine's leaders would like the country to pursue a westward course. Given Ukraine's geographic, historic and economic position, however, this is not an easily available option. Consequently, the country has diligently followed its "safe zone of peace and stability" foreign policy, based on friendly relations with all its neighbors, and designed primarily to facilitate contact with NATO while not angering Russia. While practical, this policy nevertheless has condemned the country to remain in a type of political limbo, introducing often nebulous policies designed to keep all options open while not upsetting its neighbors, instead of moving forward. As the country has waited for a signal from Western countries and organizations that it will be welcomed, it has attempted to maintain an
unsteady balance between East and West, carefully avoiding committing itself to either course.

In the last year, however, Ukraine’s relations with the IMF soured and the European Union initially rejected its requests for attention. Most importantly, the country’s energy situation worsened as its debts to Russia climbed. For a time, it looked as if Ukraine was in significant danger of lurching back to Russia, thus losing whatever balance it had achieved. Then came Poland.

During a Russian-Polish presidential meeting on 10 July, Russian President Vladimir Putin proposed to Polish President Aleksandr Kwasnieski that a gas pipeline be constructed from Russia to Slovakia via Poland, in order to bypass Ukraine. According to Gazprom head Rem Vyakhirev, this would eliminate Ukraine's unsanctioned siphoning of gas from a Russian gas transit line running through the country. Ukraine does not dispute that its industries have stolen 10 billion cubic meters of gas from that Russian gas line so far this year. Authorities insist, however, that they will somehow pay Russia for that gas. Moreover, they point out that building a new pipeline bypassing Ukraine would result in a significant loss of energy for the country, since Russia now pays Ukraine transit fees for the current pipeline in the form of gas.

While President Kwasnieski’s response to Russia's proposal was neutral at first, within days Poland had rejected it. "We do not want gas transit through Poland to harm Ukraine's interests. We cannot accept the routing (of the pipeline) according to Russia's proposal," Polish Economic Minister Janusz Steinhoff announced. (REUTERS, 21 Jul 00; via America On-line) Ukrainian Energy Minister Serhiy Yermilov responded jubilantly, "Today, the Polish side confirmed its resolute position on the strategic partnership with Ukraine. I am particularly happy because we clarified the issues that threatened Ukraine's economic interests. And I also say that the Ukrainian side will keep its obligations."
With that, the partnership between Ukraine and Poland that had been growing steadily reached a new level. After centuries of often violent acrimony between their two peoples, Poland has now become Ukraine’s solid link to the West. This link was further strengthened by a Polish proposal that could very well offer Ukraine a concrete way to break Russia’s economic hold. Steinhoff suggested that the two countries review the possibility of Ukraine buying gas from a pipeline being constructed from Norway to Poland. That pipeline will bring 10 billion cubic meters of gas yearly to Poland beginning in 2004. Poland, however, will use only half that amount, and must find buyers for the rest. Ukraine was understandably interested in this proposal.

This idea, combined with both the reworked Ukraine-Turkmenistan agreement that will provide the country with gas from that source at a significantly cheaper rate than from Russia and the movement toward completing two new Ukrainian nuclear reactors, could signal the beginning of the end of the Russian energy stranglehold on Ukraine. If this is in fact the case, Ukraine may finally be able to direct its foreign policy in the direction its leaders have wanted to go all along. For the first time since 1991, we may be able to talk about Ukraine moving steadily forward instead of balancing awkwardly between East and West.

**BELARUS**

**No word on Zavadsky; many words from opposition**

Almost a month after the disappearance of ORT cameraman Dmitri Zavadsky, Belarusian authorities have made little progress on the case. Unfortunately, this comes as no surprise to anyone. Once a personal cameraman for President Alyaksandr Lukashenka, Zavadsky apparently has been under the watchful eye of the Belarusian Special Services since he left Lukashenka’s employment to begin working at the Minsk bureau of ORT Russian television.
When Zavadsky's car was found deserted at the airport where he was to meet ORT correspondent Pavel Sheremet, there was little question as to what had happened. "In the context of the situation in the country," said Sheremet, "I have no doubts that my friend and colleague was taken by the Belarus security services under order from Lukashenko." (AGENCE FRANCE PRESSE, 9 Jul 00; via lexis-nexis) Sheremet speaks from experience; both he and Zavadsky were arrested in 1997 for "illegally crossing a border" while filming a report on lax Belarusian border controls. They were both convicted; Sheremet's full sentence was suspended, while Zavadsky served three months in prison. According to Sheremet, their arrests, the increasing number of opposition members who have gone missing, and now Zavadsky's disappearance, underscore the difficulty of opposing Lukashenka. "It is physically dangerous for politicians and journalists who upset the regime to work in Belarus," he said.

Lukashenka, of course, vehemently denies this, suggesting that "Dima [Zavadsky] is a wonderful guy. He posed no threat to Belarusian special services, and Belarusian special services have never committed such acts and will never commit them." (BELARUSIAN RADIO FIRST PROGRAM, 1600 GMT, 21 Jul 00; BBC Summary of World Broadcasts, via lexis-nexis) Later, no doubt to impress upon others the depths of his feelings on the issue, Lukashenka noted, "We will find Dimitri for certain, and I will wring the guilty by the neck. I will personally wring the neck of the one who kidnapped Zavadsky." (INTERFAX, 1347 GMT, 21 Jul 00; FBIS-SOV-2000-0721, via World News Connection) These statements must have been comforting to Zavadsky's family.

As Lukashenka was promising to wring someone's neck in the future, he continued to do so figuratively in the present -- to his political opposition. Lukashenka remains indignant at Western suggestions that the upcoming fall parliamentary election be held based on fair, transparent and understandable
rules. Staying true to Lukashenka form, these elections will be held his way or no way. His way, of course, means only his supporters can win.

Understanding this perhaps better than any Western organization could hope to do, a coalition of opposition parties announced last week that it will boycott the election. "If we do not win the autumn campaign of boycott, if we do not explain to the people the real state of things, then we can lay a wreath at the grave of sovereignty and democracy," the United Civic Party's Anatoly Lebedko said. (REUTERS, 0940 GMT, 30 Jul 00; via America On-line) One can only hope that, for his eloquence, Lebedko is not condemned to join Zavadsky, wherever he may be.

Newly Independent States: South Caucasus

By Miriam Lanskoy

AZERBAIJAN
Phantom mujahidin
In its "Patterns of Global Terrorism" report released on 11 July, the US Department of State claimed that Azerbaijan "served as a logistic hub for international mujahidin with ties to terrorist groups, some of whom supported the Chechen insurgency in Russia." (www.state.gov)

The statement is wildly inaccurate as well as counterproductive as far as US interests in the Caucasus are concerned. Although Russian spokesmen have asserted (without adducing any evidence) that mercenaries transit certain CIS countries including Azerbaijan, and that Chechen fighters undergo medical treatment in Azerbaijan, no one has alleged anything resembling the state department claim. However, when the US creates an opportunity, it would be a shame not to jump on it. So, suddenly 1,500 mujahadin poised on Azerbaijan's border with Dagestan were "discovered" by the Russian Security Service. (ITAR-
The state department retracted its allegations on 20 July without explaining how the error had occurred or amending the text of the report on its web page. The department did now admit that Azerbaijan has taken all necessary measures to prevent terrorism and has cooperated with international anti-terrorism efforts. (INTERFAX, 20 Jul 00; via lexis-nexis)

Usually, phantom mujahidin are the imaginings of Kremlin propagandists. The likes of Yastrzhembsky or Manilov make outrageous statements about vast international terrorist networks in the employ of religious zealots, depicting thousands of foreign fanatics making their way to Chechnya. With the Kremlin drumming up anti-Muslim sentiment at every opportunity perhaps it's not surprising, but still extremely unfortunate, that the US state department was caught up in these fantasies.

Was independence worth the bother?
It's not enough that Azerbaijan was unfairly stigmatized by the US Congress with Section 907 (barring aid to Azerbaijan, but not to Armenia) and erroneously accused by the state department of harboring "international mujahidin." Now the US Department of State and OSCE Office of Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) are meddling in the minutiae of the Azerbaijani electoral process, thus seriously exacerbating internal political tensions.

On July 31 the opposition renewed its threaten of boycott which, if implemented, would invalidate the election and announced a mass raly for August 5. Last week the wrangling over the election law reached a fever a sharply worded statement from the US state department was issued on 24 July, calling on the Azerbaijani authorities to amend the electoral law in line with opposition demands. (www.usinfo.state.gov)
The reaction of the Azerbaijani government was restrained, with the head of the public and political department of the Presidential Executive Staff, Ali Hasanov, saying that "Azerbaijan respects the statement by the US State Department and regards it as an effort aimed at strengthening cooperation between the authorities and the opposition." The spokesman of the ruling New Azerbaijan Party, Siyavush Novruzov, put the matter more bluntly: "If Azerbaijan acts at any state's bidding (...) there would have been no point in leaving the USSR and gaining independence." (TURAN, 1440 GMT, 25 Jul 00; via BBC Summary of World Broadcasts, via lexis-nexis)

How did it come to this?
The present standoff caps months of complex negotiations over minutiae concerning the composition of the Central Electoral Commission (CEC) and the electoral law. On 5 July the Azerbaijani parliament passed an election law and a separate law on the CEC. The rules governing the CEC were accepted by all parties: the government, the opposition, and the ODIHR. The CEC would be comprised of 18 members with the governing party, independent deputies, and opposition parties appointing 6 representatives each.

However, the electoral law did not obtain international endorsement and remained the object of dispute, with the opposition parties demanding several amendments. When parliament hesitated to amend the electoral law, the opposition began a boycott of the CEC. On 21 July after the CEC was unable to form a quorum for its first two meetings, the ODIHR issued a statement reiterating its criticism of the election law and calling on the opposition to participate in the CEC. On the same day, the Azerbaijani parliament altered the CEC legislation, lowering the requirements for a quorum and changing the composition of local electoral commissions. The opposition representatives did join the CEC on August 1, but continue to threaten a boycott of the elections unless the electoral law is amended.
The changes to the CEC law prompted the US State Department to issue its 24 July statement, saying "On July 21 Azerbaijan's parliament acted to change the law of the Central Electoral Commission (CEC) in an apparent effort to eliminate the obligation that the government cooperate with the opposition...." How can the government cooperate with the opposition, if the opposition is engaged in a boycott? Unlike the ODIHR, the state department in its pronouncement laid all the blame on the government and did not encourage the opposition to return to the CEC.

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In the particular political landscape of present day Azerbaijan, increasing the number of seats distributed according to party lists would benefit the opposition. At present the various opposition parties have been unable to arrive at a mutually acceptable list of 25 top personalities. The Musavat and the Popular Front have determined separately the composition of their respective slates. The AFP youth congress in particular was marred by violence when the supporters of the two top rival leaders, Abulfaz Elchibey and Ali Kerimov actually came to blows. (RFE/RL CAUCASUS REPORT, 27 Jul 00) In fact, the chairman, Elchibey, who was president until 1993, has been in Turkey, ostensibly for medical attention, for the last several weeks. He affirmed his intention to participate in the elections after his prolonged absence and his previous boycott of elections spawned rumors
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country that is trying to stand up to Russian bullying in the region.

Newly Independent States: Central Asia
By Nicholas Burk

AZERBAIJAN
Phantom mujahidin
In its "Patterns of Global Terrorism" report released on 11 July, the US
Department of State claimed that Azerbaijan "served as a logistic hub for
international mujahidin with ties to terrorist groups, some of whom supported the
Chechen insurgency in Russia." (www.state.gov)

The statement is wildly inaccurate as well as counterproductive as far as US
interests in the Caucasus are concerned. Although Russian spokesmen have
asserted (without adducing any evidence) that mercenaries transit certain CIS
countries including Azerbaijan, and that Chechen fighters undergo medical
treatment in Azerbaijan, no one has alleged anything resembling the state
department claim. However, when the US creates an opportunity, it would be a
shame not to jump on it. So, suddenly 1,500 mujahadin poised on Azerbaijan's
border with Dagestan were "discovered" by the Russian Security Service. (ITAR-
TASS, 1843 GMT, 19 Jul 00; FBIS-SOV-2000-0719, via World News
Connection)
The state department retracted its allegations on 20 July without explaining how the error had occurred or amending the text of the report on its web page. The department did now admit that Azerbaijan has taken all necessary measures to prevent terrorism and has cooperated with international anti-terrorism efforts.

(INTERFAX, 20 Jul 00; via lexis-nexis)

Usually, phantom mujahidin are the imaginings of Kremlin propagandists. The likes of Yastrzhembsky or Manilov make outrageous statements about vast international terrorist networks in the employ of religious zealots, depicting thousands of foreign fanatics making their way to Chechnya. With the Kremlin drumming up anti-Muslim sentiment at every opportunity perhaps it's not surprising, but still extremely unfortunate, that the US state department was caught up in these fantasies.

**Was independence worth the bother?**

It's not enough that Azerbaijan was unfairly stigmatized by the US Congress with Section 907 (barring aid to Azerbaijan, but not to Armenia) and erroneously accused by the state department of harboring "international mujahidin." Now the US Department of State and OSCE Office of Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) are meddling in the minutiae of the Azerbaijani electoral process, thus seriously exacerbating internal political tensions.

On July 31 the opposition renewed its threaten of boycott which, if implemented, would invalidate the election and announced a mass raly for August 5. Last week the wrangling over the election law reached a fever a sharply worded statement from the US state department was issued on 24 July, calling on the Azerbaijani authorities to amend the electoral law in line with opposition demands.

(www.usinfo.state.gov)

The reaction of the Azerbaijani government was restrained, with the head of the public and political department of the Presidential Executive Staff, Ali Hasanov,
saying that "Azerbaijan respects the statement by the US State Department and regards it as an effort aimed at strengthening cooperation between the authorities and the opposition." The spokesman of the ruling New Azerbaijan Party, Siyavush Novruzov, put the matter more bluntly: "If Azerbaijan acts at any state's bidding (...) there would have been no point in leaving the USSR and gaining independence." (TURAN, 1440 GMT, 25 Jul 00; via BBC Summary of World Broadcasts, via lexis-nexis)

**How did it come to this?**

The present standoff caps months of complex negotiations over minutiae concerning the composition of the Central Electoral Commission (CEC) and the electoral law. On 5 July the Azerbaijani parliament passed an election law and a separate law on the CEC. The rules governing the CEC were accepted by all parties: the government, the opposition, and the ODIHR. The CEC would be comprised of 18 members with the governing party, independent deputies, and opposition parties appointing 6 representatives each.

However, the electoral law did not obtain international endorsement and remained the object of dispute, with the opposition parties demanding several amendments. When parliament hesitated to amend the electoral law, the opposition began a boycott of the CEC. On 21 July after the CEC was unable to form a quorum for its first two meetings, the ODIHR issued a statement reiterating its criticism of the election law and calling on the opposition to participate in the CEC. On the same day, the Azerbaijani parliament altered the CEC legislation, lowering the requirements for a quorum and changing the composition of local electoral commissions. The opposition representatives did join the CEC on August 1, but continue to threaten a boycott of the elections unless the electoral law is amended.

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Newly Independent States: Central Asia

By Nicholas Burk

After Shanghai-5: Waiting for the Wahhabis

One year ago, a band of Islamist rebels calling itself the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) invaded the Kyrgyz southern province of Batken. The intention was to invade Uzbekistan and overthrow the secular regime of Islam Karimov, who has declared "Islamist terror" to be the number one threat facing the state. Since then, members of the Shanghai-5 essentially have created a security system in Central Asia -- with Moscow taking the lead, and Central Asia and Beijing playing the role of the supporting cast. With Uzbekistan increasingly prepared to participate in the forum, the Shanghai-5 pits Central Asia (minus Turkmenistan), Russia, and China against...Wahhabi terrorism. The latter supposedly comprises the Taliban, Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, militant Uighurs, Chechens, Osama bin Laden, Khattab, and other shadowy groups and persons with their eyes on the Fergana Valley. In May, Russia threatened to attack targets in Taliban-controlled Afghanistan. Now, in August, one more spark could make the Shanghai-5 the dominant security system in Central Asia for the foreseeable future.

IMU: the most likely spark

The trigger for a major operation in Central Asia against Islamist groups could come from a number of sources. Most likely to precipitate action by the Shanghai-5 is another incursion by the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan. In early July, a border post on the Kyrgyz-Tajik border came under attack from what Kyrgyz military officials believe to have been the IMU, preparing to invade Uzbek
territory via Batken province one year after its first attempt. (AFP, 7 Jul 00; via lexis-nexis)

Four days later, Kyrgyz authorities detained three more Uzbeks they claimed were scouting Kyrgyz territory on behalf of IMU leader Juma Namangani. (INTERFAX, 11 Jul 00; via lexis-nexis) The IMU is an organization consisting of perhaps 2,000 men, although the UN secretary-general's representative, Ivo Petrov, also warns that some of the 6,000 demobilized Tajik fighters may be prime candidates to join such a movement. (VOICE OF THE ISLAMIC REPUBLIC OF IRAN, 18 Jul 00; FBIS-NES-00-0719, via World News Connection)

Finding employment for these bedraggled fighters is paramount, according to Petrov. Islam Karimov's crackdown on moderate Islamic groups in his own country is no help, either. In fact, Karimov's harsh suppression of Islamic expression has helped to make the IMU a more dangerous organization by shutting out all other forms of resistance to his regime. However, the IMU may ultimately be less concerned with forming an Islamic state in Uzbekistan than in stirring up enough instability to secure its firm hold on Central Asian drug trading routes. (JANE'S INTELLIGENCE REVIEW, 1 Jul 00; via lexis-nexesis)

Friends of the IMU: Arab-Afghans, militant Kyrgyz, and Islamist Uighurs
The IMU appears to have questionable "sister organizations" which have been active in the past month. For example, Uzbek security forces allegedly arrested an assistant of bin Laden sidekick and Chechnya mastermind Khattab. The man under question, Shukhrat Balikov, reportedly made some startling confessions. Khattab's Afghan camps consist of 1,500 fighters calling themselves "Warriors of Islam," poised to overthrow the Uzbek state. Is Warriors of Islam just another name for the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan? Apparently not: Balikov was attempting to find IMU leader Tahir Yoldashev to acquire money from him to subsidize the Chechen war. (ITAR-TASS, 15 Jul 00; FBIS-SOV-2000-0715, via
World News Connection) Khattab has denied even knowing Balikov, and added that he was puzzled at the explanation offered by Uzbek and Russian authorities, since such a crossing into Uzbekistan would be "foolish" considering there are easier ways to travel through the region. (BBC SUMMARY OF WORLD BROADCASTS, 18 Jul 00; via lexis-nexis)

Also, some 300 Kyrgyz "future extremists and wahhabites" are reportedly training in Pakistani-run camps in Kyrgyz territory, according to the Kyrgyz military establishment. (INTERFAX, 17 Jul 00; FBIS-SOV-2000-0714, via World News Connection) It is not clear if this group is affiliated with either bin Laden or the IMU. If Pakistan's Internal Security Services (ISI) are in fact responsible for these camps, this would represent an impressive reach -- beyond Afghanistan and into the sovereign territory of a Central Asian state.

Moreover, one can never discount the Uighurs. Authorities in Bishkek clamped down on a new rebel group this month consisting of 10 Uzbek, Turkish, Kyrgyz, and Chinese citizens. The goal of these Islamist Uighurs, according to Kyrgyz Interior Minister Amurbek Kutuev, was to topple the authorities of the Shanghai-5. (INTERFAX, 10 Jul 00; FBIS-SOV-2000-0710, via World News Connection) For a movement that has failed to dislodge Xinjiang from China, setting sights on Russia, China, and Central Asia would be clearly preposterous.

The Taliban: always a dependable enemy

Russia's threats to bomb the Taliban can be interpreted as an ever-present "last resort" option. (FOREIGN REPORT, 6 Jul 00; via lexis-nexis) Even if the IMU threat or its equivalents fizzle, the Taliban is always willing to provide the agitation which may lead to military action. In the past two months, rumors have circulated that the Taliban occasionally shells targets in Uzbek territory, or that Uzbek planes fly sorties over Taliban-territory. If an important Uzbek location were attacked by Taliban artillery, or an Uzbek fighter-bomber were to be shot down by a Stinger missile, the repercussions could be massive -- especially now
that Russia and Uzbekistan are beginning to conduct joint military operations, starting with air defense. (INTERFAX, 11 Jul 00; FBIS-SOV-2000-0711, via World News Connection)

The Taliban has also made important gains on the ground. Its armed forces have captured strategic Nahreen district, a supply line linking Tajikistan to a key Afghan Northern Alliance base in the Panjshir Valley. (AFP, 30 Jul 00; via lexis-nexis) Moreover, as if to play on the fears of the Shanghai-5, the Taliban threatened to respond "tit-for-tat" to any collective action by the organization. (ITAR-TASS, 26 Jul 00; via lexis-nexis) Yet how can the Taliban regime respond "tit-for-tat" to any action of these countries (including Uzbekistan)? An infantry assault on Central Asian territory is far-fetched. Summoning the help of the Arab-Afghans, IMU, and other Central Asian terrorist groups in a crusade against the Shanghai-5 would require a level of cooperation and integration between these groups that probably does not exist. Most likely, the Taliban could shell Central Asian villages close to the Afghanistan border or attempt to shoot down intruding fighters. The biggest weapon in the Taliban arsenal that would stimulate conflict, however, may be rhetoric.

**An emerging South Asian angle?**

Further complicating this situation is the possibility that tensions between India and Pakistan could open a Central Asian arena between the two nations. Pakistan's Internal Security Services have long been viewed as a supporter of the Taliban and related guerrilla activities. Indeed, the Taliban emerged from the refugee camps of Pashawar. China has long been concerned over Pakistani training of militant Uighurs. And, as pointed out above, Kyrgyzstan has claimed that rebel camps in its territory are Pakistani-run.

India also remains wary of the influence of Pakistan's ISI, especially in the conflict over Kashmir. In what could be a dramatic addition to the forum, India has indicated an interest in joining the Shanghai-5, and President Putin affirmed
that he would be open to adding more members to the club. (THE HINDU, 6 Jul 00; via lexis-nexis) India already is fearful that, because of ISI influence in Nepal, that country is becoming a haven for ISI-backed activities. (INDIA TODAY, 3 Jul 00; via lexis-nexis) A role for India in the Shanghai process may be applauded by Russia, China, and the Central Asian states. After all, who else is better suited to counter Pakistani elements in Wahhabism? If a collective military action by the Shanghai-5 solidifies the organization as a security entity, India’s continuing interest in the pact should be monitored.

**What is to come?**
There seems to be little doubt that Pakistan's ISI bolsters rebel Islamic movements in the region. Certainly, Osama bin Laden's Arab-Afghans are a rugged fighting force, and the IMU managed to hold ground in Kyrgyz territory for nearly two months in 1999. Undoubtedly, there is also a "mix-and-match" element to these Islamist movements: Some Uighurs could well be training in Afghanistan, on their way to Chechnya. At the same time, it cannot be forgotten that last spring Juma Namangani was safely escorted to Taliban territory with Russia's help. Shukhrat Balikov's story is questionable -- perhaps even his identity. And it is hard to imagine that the phrase "Shanghai-5" is widespread in the Islamist Uighurian lexicon.

An invasion by the IMU into southern Kyrgyzstan is likely to elicit collective action within Central Asia, possibly accompanied by airstrikes against Taliban territory. Internal operations could also attempt to weed out other groups in the Central Asian republics. It is possible that the borders of some republics would be altered de facto by these operations -- Uzbekistan may be inclined to hang on to Tajik or Kyrgyz territory in this event. If conflict does not come from within Central Asia, the Taliban always is a prime candidate for preemptive strikes. When the dust clears, the world may be introduced to a collectively acting Shanghai-5 -- with India possibly entering the fold.
Is NATO's door half-open, or half-closed?

The alliance's much-touted "open door" policy, and the hopes of aspirant states, have taken a few knocks in the past couple of months, and some confusion on where the applicant states stand is quite comprehensible. Some signals have been less than encouraging, but the "open door" remains... ajar.

Representatives of nine countries -- Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Bulgaria, Romania, Slovakia, Albania, Macedonia and Slovenia -- signed an appeal urging NATO to extend invitations to join the alliance at the next summit in 2002. The Vilnius Declaration reaffirmed the path each country was taking toward acceptance into the alliance, and recognized the importance of accession to both NATO and the European Union (EU), "the two pillars of the Euro-Atlantic community." (BALTIC NEWS SERVICE DAILY REPORT, 1600 GMT, 19 May 00)

While the West by and large reacted favorably to the statement, NATO Secretary-General George Robertson responded to the Vilnius Declaration with appreciation and a warning. The declaration, Robertson said, "is a striking example of how NATO's commitment to keeping the door open to new members is fostering cooperation and growing commitment to NATO's own vision of a Euro-Atlantic area based on democracy, peace, prosperity and fundamental rights." However, he also made sure to note the alliance's need to "get the NATO-Russia relationship back on track." (BALTIC NEWS SERVICE DAILY REPORT, 1000 GMT, 19 May 00) Given Russia's frequently voiced opposition to the inclusion of the Baltic states in the alliance, it is unclear which of NATO's two apparently contradictory goals will prevail. Unfortunately, it appears as though appeasing Russia's demands has begun to supersede offering security to the Baltic states.
Putin's reiteration in June of a "red line" for NATO enlargement drew a spirited attack from Lithuania. Such attempts to keep the Baltic states out of NATO, the statement reads, remind the world how "such a line was drawn by Molotov and Ribbentrop and what had happened as a consequence of this." (BALTIC NEWS SERVICE DAILY REPORT, 1600 GMT, 20 Jun 00) The German chancellor, who visited the Baltic states in June, did not rise to the bait. Small wonder.

During his trip to Riga, Gerhard Schroeder refused to make a clear statement of Germany's stand on the Vilnius Declaration in regards to NATO membership, although he reiterated his country's support for Baltic accession to the EU. This is hardly surprising, since German signals on NATO aspirants have been quite mixed of late. Walter Kolbow, the state secretary of the German Ministry of Defense, caused an uproar when he stated in Tallinn that Russian consent would be needed before the next round of NATO enlargement. "We need to make it clear to Russia that NATO is a guarantor of collective security and has no aggressive plans towards any country," he said. "The relations between NATO and Russia were disrupted after the Kosovo conflict but now we again sit at the same table," he added, "Russia's participation in European security processes is important." (BALTIC NEWS SERVICE DAILY REPORT, 1300 GMT, 19 Jun 00) Germany's defense ministry hastily denied that Russia would have a veto in NATO affairs. Yet this situation is quickly becoming a matter of semantics.

The biggest knock came during a visit to London by Vytautas Landsbergis, speaker of the Lithuanian parliament. Landsbergis learned from Bruce George, chairman of the British House of Commons defence committee, that, despite George's own wholehearted support, doubts were being raised among alliance members about the prudence of an invitation to the Baltics to join NATO. The reasons behind the doubts cited, however, are patently spurious: 1) That the newest members to the alliance have yet to prove that this accession was successful and productive; 2) that the Kosovo crisis proved how difficult gaining
consensus of an already large alliance could be; 3) and that Poland, because of its size, was seen as a useful ally by the West, as opposed to Lithuania, which is significantly smaller and had the added disadvantage of once having been part of the Soviet Union. (BNS, 1606 GMT, 13 Jul 00; FBIS-SOV-2000-0713) It seems clear that such objections have been drummed up to provide a way for the West to save face and bow to Russia's continued opposition, while not appearing to give a non-member direct veto power over NATO decisions.

While Western officials go in search of a collective backbone, one official from a non-NATO member was willing to be more direct. A Finnish member of the European Parliament, Ilkka Suominen, was quoted as saying that Baltic admittance to NATO "would not be good" for Finland, due to the possible security ramifications of Russia's opposition. (BNS, 1807 GMT, 7 Jul 00; FBIS-SOV-2000-0708, via World News Connection)

It is noteworthy that, as the West hurries to reassure the world that Russia poses no danger, countries immediately adjacent have quite a different perception.

**Oh, the humanity!**

Having seen how efficacious the continued repetition of fact-deprived statements can be, Russia continued to rail against perceived abuses of human rights in the Baltic states, particularly in Latvia. Indeed, in mid-July Russian government sources reported that Latvian authorities continue "flagrant human rights violations against some of its population" and enforced "assimilation of non-Latvian ethnic groups." (INTERFAX, 1315 GMT, 14 Jul 00; FBIS-SOV-2000-0714, via World News Connection) However, lately few countries have been willing to allow such accusations to remain unchallenged. At the end of May, a statement from Portugal, the presiding country of the EU, issued during the OSCE permanent council meeting in Vienna rejected Russia's claims of alleged human rights violations, and rebuked Moscow for its behavior. "During the last few months Russia, using very sharp statements, has expressed reproaches to
Latvia and Estonia. Such policy is not only unproductive but is simply unacceptable for modern Europe," the statement reads. (BALTIC NEWS SERVICE DAILY REPORT, 1600 GMT, 25 May 00) The Lithuanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs subsequently announced that it was adding its voice to the EU appeal urging Russia to end its attacks against Latvia.

US Deputy Secretary of State Strobe Talbott also recently characterized Russian accusations about the Baltic countries as groundless. Talbott was reacting negatively to Russian claims that Latvia's recent spate of prosecutions against war criminals was an indication of neofascism. (BALTIC NEWS SERVICE DAILY REPORT, 1300 GMT, 7 Jun 00)

Latvia wasn't the only country taking hits from Moscow, however. Russian Deputy Prime Minister Valentina Matvienko linked Russo-Estonian relations to the manner in which Russians living in Estonia perceive their situation. "Lack of regulation of their status, restrictions to their rights as an ethnic minority serve as the main obstacle today to a stable and progressive development of the Estonian-Russian relations," she said. (BALTIC NEWS SERVICE DAILY REPORT, 1600 GMT, 3 Jul 00) While Matvienko clearly was speaking with an assumption of rights abuse, weeks earlier the German chancellor had viewed Estonia's domestic situation in a different light altogether, and praised "Estonia's readiness to conciliation and co-existence" with regard to its ethnic Russian minority. Schroeder characterized this willingness as humanistic for a country whose culture and language have been endangered for centuries. (BALTIC NEWS SERVICE DAILY REPORT, 1300 GMT, 6 Jun 00)

Another bone of contention between the three Baltic states and Russia is Moscow's refusal to acknowledge the forced occupation of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania in 1940. Partly in response to a 1994 referendum, and at the initiative of Landsbergis, the Lithuanian Seimas passed a resolution calling for compensation by Russia for damage done during decades of Soviet occupation.
While Moscow at first did not seem to know how to respond, with some officials saying they would ignore the resolution while others decried it, eventually an interesting course was chosen: denial. Valery Ostanin, a member of the Russian Duma Committee on Security, told an ITAR-TASS correspondent, "There was no occupation of Lithuania: the decision to join the Soviet Union in 1940 was taken by the republic's government." Moreover, Lithuania should be grateful for the years of Soviet ... um, interest... since billions of rubles had been invested during the post-war years to ensure its economic development, to build ports and a nuclear power station, he added. (ITAR-TASS, 0520 GMT, 22 Jun 00; FBIS-SOV-2000-0622, via World News Connection)

This is one falsehood that is receiving short shrift, at least: The US Senate adopted a resolution commending the Baltic states for their role in the disintegration of the USSR and for the implementation of political and economic reforms. The resolution includes a statement that the Soviet Union occupied the Baltic countries in 1940 and forcibly incorporated them into the USSR, a clear refutation of Moscow's recent stance that Lithuania voluntarily entered the Soviet bloc. (BALTIC NEWS SERVICE DAILY REPORT, 1000 GMT, 16 Jun 00)

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