

WORLD

russiareport.ru

PETER LAVELLE'S WEEKLY REPORT

• Looking East, West and inward

For a good part of the past week, the media were focused on Putin's visit to China and India. A lot of print was wasted, one has to assume, out of diplomatic and media politeness. The talk of a strategic triangle including Russia, China, and India is nothing short of comical given Russia's needed and even desired turn toward the West. China and India are good customers for products produced by the former Soviet Union: weaponry and some other high-tech items.

The Christian Science Monitor's Robert Marquand in "Putin Pushes 'Strategic Triangle' with China, India," the South China Morning Post's "Scholars at Peking University Say they Regard Putin as the Leader of a Declining State that has Lost its Way" posted by Mark O'Neill and The Russia Journal's "An Indo-Russian-Chinese Alliance: What Bunkum!" by Ajay Goyal cover most of the bases concerning the meaning of Putin's Asian odyssey.

The editorial "Not-So-Fine Balance" posted by Transitions Online has a curious, if unintentional, cosmopolitan quality. On the whole, this is an interesting piece questioning how the Kremlin has used media coverage of last October's terror act in Moscow to detract from what is wrong with Russia's security forces and treatment of the media. However, claiming to take the high moral ground against government secrecy belies the behavior of other governments in the world — namely the United States in its war against terrorism. There won't be a Duma investigation of the theater crisis, but Henry Kissinger will lead the enquiry exploring why 9-11 happened. Transitions Online — out of a sense of fair play — should make known its position on America's secretive government controlled by the terminally opaque Vice President Cheney. America's "war on terrorism" is turning into a catchall for any government to invoke national security over the rule of law — even civic responsibility.

Gazeta.ru's "United Russia to Monopolize Mass Media" would be a great posting of political satire if it weren't the sad truth about the relationship between the state and the media. Some might read this article as the Kremlin's malevolent designs against a free media in Russia. I read it as the farce that it is. Both the media and the Kremlin are like two adolescents trying to figure out their individual identity. This nonsense will continue toward the phase of tragedy before reason prevails — don't hold your breath for that time to finally come.

"Waiting for a Democratic Left" by Dmitri Glinski — among the plethora of new reports posted by the PONARS folks — is simply excellent. This writer has been suggesting many of the same ideas found in this scholarly work for some time now. At the end of the day, the Communist Party of the Russian Federation has little or nothing to do with the political left. This party is only a sorry reminder of a failed past. This posting is not punditry — it is first class analysis. Keep your eye on Glinski; he is one of Russia's pre-eminent thinkers of the younger cohort.

Also coming from PONARS is "Walking on Thin Ice: Putin's Rapprochement with the United States on the Background of the Latent Anti-Americanism in Russia" by Eduard Ponarin. As a resident of Moscow for the past five years, I can tell you what is called anti-Americanism is really not much more than a sense of national insecurity. American pluralism is a difficult concept to accept for many Russians today. On top of this, Russia's identity crisis has little to do with Putin's perceived turn to the West. By the time Putin leaves the political scene, Russians will still be trying to figure out who they are.

Peter Rutland, one of my only favorites at the Jamestown Foundation, posts an intriguing piece titled "Rating Putin". President Putin's standing in public opinion polls is sky-high, at over 80%. Rutland explains that Putin is popular more because of what he has done or doing, but rather because of what he stands for. Putin and Bush seem to have at least one thing in common. To read a similar take on the "Putin phenomenon," take a look at RFE/RL's Gregory Feifer in "Analysts Say Putin's Sky-High Ratings Reflect Expectations, Illusions."

Celeste Wallander in The National Interest deserves a compliment for her "Business is Business: Russia, Trade and the 'Axis of Evil.'" Most of the bluster and illogical reasoning behind the Bush Administration's "axis of evil" is put to rest in this piece. Russia needs markets to sell its wares no different than any other country. A point that Wallander does not mention but should be cited: Russia can be a helpful intermediary for the US with countries which are beyond the pale of official interaction. Putin's Russia is open to communication and just about every country willing to listen.

Michael Lelyveld's posting "Moscow Pondering Energy-Restructuring Move" is a good example of when business and politics collide in Russia. Most of the week was dominated by international news; this article deals with the simmering conflict over what to do with Russia energy monopoly United Energy Systems. UES may be the worst run company of its size in the world. This should not surprise anyone. Anatoly Chubais is its CEO.

> For details logon to www.russiareport.ru

Interested in the latest news, analysis and information in and about Russia? Do not have the time to sift through a myriad of sources and a variety of media?

Subscribe to Russia Report
The News source for 40,000 people -
each day.

Decades of fighting leave Afghan border in dispute

By Liz Sly

Chicago Tribune

GHULDI KANDAU, On the Afghanistan-Pakistan border — Tempers were starting to fray among the Afghan tribespeople waiting at this remote border checkpoint for the Pakistani guards to allow them to cross into territory they believe doesn't even belong to Pakistan.

"You have stolen our soil and taken the land of our children," shouted Amanullah, an elderly man in his 60s who said he wanted to cross the border to fetch water from his family's well. "This is Afghanistan, and you should go back."

"Ignore him, he is mentally disturbed," said Lt. Idrat, the commander of guards, who like many local Pashtun tribesmen uses only one name. "You can see on the map that we are in Pakistan."

But the other tribesmen insisted that the old man was perfectly sane. During the past two decades of civil war, they said, Pakistani troops have gradually shifted their border checkpoints westward, occupying about 5 km of Afghan territory and leaving Amanullah's well in a different country. Others have been similarly affected.

"Last year my house was in Afghanistan, but this year it is in Pakistan," complained Omar Khan, a farmer in his 40s. "Even though the soldiers know me, still I have to beg them to allow me to go home."

This is just one small dispute among many starting to erupt along Afghanistan's historically troubled border with Pakistan. At various points along the 2,250-km frontier, Afghan government officials and local residents say, Pakistan has taken advantage of the past two decades of civil war to encroach upon Afghan territory, moving checkpoints inside Afghanistan by up to 10 km in some places.

Many of the incursions took place during the Afghans' war against the Russians, others during the chaotic reign of the mujahedeen government in the early 1990s, said Gen. Samiullah Qatra, who is in charge of border forces at the Interior Ministry in Kabul. The most recent encroachments



BRITISH SOLDIERS patrol on the outskirts of Kabul. With 4,800 international peacekeepers deployed in the Afghan capital alone, President Hamid Karzai faces difficulty in resolving complaints of border disputes with Pakistan.

occurred during the chaos that surrounded the collapse of the Taliban last year, he said.

"According to the information we have gathered, Pakistani troops have occupied between 5 and 10 km of Afghan soil in different locations all along the border. During these past 25 years of war, they have moved inside gradually, but because there was no stable government, no one did anything about it," he said.

Now that Afghanistan has a new government that is seeking to extend its sovereignty into every corner of the country, Afghans are clamoring for the land to be returned to them. In recent weeks, tribal delegations have been streaming into Kabul from border regions to complain to President Hamid Karzai about alleged Pakistani incursions, government officials say. According to one group of elders from the eastern province of Nangahar, Pakistani troops visited their village six months ago and offered to provide schools and wells if they agreed to become part of Pakistan.

"We want Karzai to tell the Pakistanis to stay away. We are the children of the soil of Afghanistan and we will not allow Pakistanis to occupy our land," said Enayatullah, the leader of the group. After two decades of civil war, Afghanistan's fragile new government is hardly in a position to engage in a border dispute with Pakistan. Karzai, who is struggling to extend his authority beyond Kabul, has repeatedly said that he

wants friendly relations with all neighboring countries.

Pakistan denies the allegations and insists there is no question over the demarcation of the border. "Pakistan has not moved any checkpoints and it has not taken any Afghan territory," said government spokesman Maj. Gen. Rashid Qureshi.

The problem of the shifting checkpoints is stirring up ancient animosities that predate the existence of Pakistan, clouding the already-embittered relationship between Kabul and Islamabad. The two countries nearly went to war twice in the last century over border disputes, and more recently, anti-Pakistan sentiments have been running high among ordinary Afghans, who blame Pakistan for backing the rise of the Taliban.

One problem is that no one seems too sure exactly where the border is. Known as the Durand Line, after the British cartographer who marked out the northwestern frontier of British India in 1893, the line severed in two the traditional territory of the Pashtun tribe. The British never managed to tame the frontier region, and most Pashtuns simply ignored the border.

Or it may simply be that memories of where the original border lay have faded. "It is true that there is no exact border between Pakistan and Afghanistan, so I cannot tell you whether the people are right or wrong," acknowledged Qatra. ■

Vietnam mafia boss ready for trial

The Associated Press

HANOI, Vietnam — After months of searching, a reputed Vietnamese mafia boss has finally found two lawyers willing to represent him in a massive vice and corruption trial, local media reported Monday.

Lawyers Nguyen Cam, head of the Haiphong Lawyers' Association, and Le Van Kiem, from the Ba Ria-Vung Tau Lawyers' Association, have agreed to defend 55-year-old Truong Van Cam, better known as Nam Cam, at the request of his family, said

Thanh Nien (Youth) newspaper.

Nam Cam's family had been searching in vain to find lawyers willing to take on the alleged mafia boss's case since he was arrested last December on charges of murder, gambling, extortion and fraud.

Attorney Nguyen Cam told the newspaper that "My main concern is how to protect the defendant in accordance with the law. If I was scared, I would not dare to defend him." Earlier, local media reported that attorneys contacted by the family had refused although his family promised a hefty payment.

The case is seen as a major test of

Vietnam's commitment to fighting corruption within the government and the Communist Party. Nam Cam is believed to have headed a giant underworld empire that operated virtually untouched in Ho Chi Minh City for nearly a decade thanks in part to bribes paid to countless police officers and government and party officials.

The scandal has resulted in Vietnam's largest criminal case ever — 156 defendants, including several top ranking government officials. They face sentences ranging from several years in prison to the death penalty. ■