

Behind The Lines!

Spring 2007

COLD WAR 2.0

The spring thaw approaches and the bear begins to stir once again, growl, and stretch its massive physique as it seeks to satisfy its appetite after the long winter sleep. PA3MAX!

Russia is not ready to be swept into the dustbin of history. Not while the Janus-faced autocrat Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin vigorously promotes Russia's new role as a rapidly re-emerging formidable player in the international political game. **Emboldened** by the growing consumer demand for Russia's enormous oil and natural gas resources, we are witnessing a suddenly revitalized post-Soviet state that has begun to light up the screens in a number of world capitals. Intelligence agencies and think tanks are once again reassessing their predictions and projections for a country that is notorious for its mercurial behavior.

The opening gambit was the G8 summit hosted by Putin in his hometown St. Petersburg last July where he seized the initiative to announce that Russia was back on the world stage and would pursue its own brand of democracy. This new assertiveness on the international front is paired with the Kremlin's increasingly vigorous and reactionary control of the domestic media to suppress any criticism of the Putin administration. As an example, the contract murders of the journalist Anna Politkovskaya in Moscow for her critical views of the war in Chechnya and the former KGB agent Alexander Litvinenko in London followed in October and November 2006 respectively. Moscow's recent decision to deliver the formidable TOR-M1 advanced anti-aircraft missile defense system to Iran over vigorous U.S. protests further punctuates Russia's new hard-line relationship with the United States.

Lest there be any doubt about his intentions, in February 2007 Putin moved swiftly to solidify his position on both the international and the domestic fronts:

- At the security conference in Munich he blatantly and pointedly rebuked the United States for its unilateral approach to world affairs;
- A few days later he showed the Russian flag during his historic visit to Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Jordan as a symbolic counterpoise to the U.S. presence in the Middle East; and
- Returning to Moscow Putin made the surprise announcement that his former KGB cohort Minister of Defense Sergei Borisovich Ivanov was being elevated to First Deputy Chairman of the Russian Federation with obvious implications for securing his own continued personal influence on Russian politics beyond the approaching presidential election in April 2008.

Recent arrogant suggestions that Russia may abrogate the Intermediate and Shorter-Range Missile Treaty signed by Reagan and Gorbachev in 1987 signal a new and more aggressive posture towards the U.S. and the West. In the political world of *quid pro quo*, the next surprise from Putin's seemingly erratic, but well-calculated ploy may well be operational nuclear missiles in the Russian exclave of Kaliningrad Oblast' on the Baltic Sea in response to the U.S. decision to place defensive missile systems in Poland and the Czech Republic.