REGIONAL POLITICS

RUSSIA'S FOREIGN POLICY TOWARD THE CAUCASUS UNDER VLADIMIR PUTIN

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Introduction

This paper seeks to examine Russia's foreign policy toward the Caucasus during Vladimir Putin's presidency. Moreover, the period between 2000 and 2008 was one of the most important eras for Russian-Caucasian relations under Vladimir Putin in Russia, since his presidency brought about significant changes in Russia's foreign policy. However, this study will not analyze pre-2000; instead, it will concentrate on certain facts and events that are important for understanding the period between 2000 and 2008.

When examining states' foreign policy, a number of different variables should be included in the analysis and this makes it difficult to explain the foreign policy of one state in particular. Below we have tried to explore Russia's foreign policy and foreign aims by means of psychological and other non-material factors.

Each foreign policy is derived from the state's and people's normative system, which is primarily presented in the state constitution or other official documents, or even in states' histo-

ry presentations. In Russia's case, these values are strictly linked to Russian history, when Russia was a great nation that decided all world affairs and Russians interpreted the position of the Russian state from this perspective.

Russia's instability after the collapse of the Soviet Union in the 1990s created great turmoil in Russia's foreign policy. This was because the Russian political elites were unable to form a clear national identity or define the state's national interests. They were unable to answer the old/new question of whether Russia belongs to the West or to the East.

The first group of Russian political elites under Yeltsin (Westernizers) chose a pro-Western foreign policy and defined Russia's national identity as a Western country. According to this definition, Russia tried to build good relations with the Western countries, especially the U.S, and forget the Cold War. The other wing was strongly against this view; they (Eurasianists) claimed that Russia was, is, and will always be Eurasian and a super power. Putin belonged to the latter group that tried to restore Russia's Great Power status.

Putin shifted Russia's foreign policy to a strong and certain one aimed at gaining maximum economic benefits. As Freedman says, Putin's foreign policy was aimed at strengthening the Russian economy in the hope that in the not-too-distant future Russia might regain its status as a great power.[1] Putin brought political and economic stability to Russia with his new foreign and domestic policy. So many Russians began referring to Putin as the New Russian Czar.

[1] See: R. Freedman, "Russian Policy Toward the Middle East under Putin: The Impact of 9/11 and the War in Iraq," *Alternatives*, Vol. 2, No. 2, 2003.

The Roots of Russia's Foreign Policy

The Russian state was historically not constructed as a state of the Russian nation understood as a political community in itself, but rather as an imperial aggregation of territories and people who were expected to show loyalty to the Czar.

In contrast to the experience of most other empires, where formation of the national identity of the metropolis preceded empire-building, the formation of the modern Russia nation coincided with colonial expansion. The image that most Russians had of their homeland was based on the conception of Russia as a multiethnic, rather than specifically Russian empire. This ideology was deeply enforced during Soviet times as well and Russians were encouraged to identify the Soviet Union as their homeland.[2]

In 1919, when Russia was in the midst of its Civil War, developments in the country in many ways followed the 1990s scenario. The main difference was that they were much more rapid and catastrophic than during the 1990s. In February 1917, the imperial government collapsed almost overnight, with practically no resistance. The communist regime ended in a similar way in 1991. In both of these cases, the events were celebrated as the beginning of a new era, an era of happiness and ideal democracy, with success following in all directions.[3]

When the Soviet Union fell apart in December 1991, the Russian political elites were faced with the question of whether new Russia would cast off the legacy of the Soviet and czarist past or

[2] See: G. Smith, "The Masks of Proteus: Russia, Geopolitical Shift and the New Eurasianism," *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, Vol. 24, 1999.

[3] See: A. Dugin, "Russian Nationalism Today," *Contemporary Review*, Vol. 279, 2001, pp. 29-37.

carry that legacy forward in whole or in part. The significance of Russian Question is commonly understood as a set of dilemmas about the nature of Russia's identity and its relationship to the Russian state.[4]

The question of Russia's identity—what sort of state should Russia be and what does it want?—pervaded the political discourse. Should Russia seek to "return to Europe," as many of its post-communist neighbors sought to do? Should it rebuild the Soviet Union? Should Russia be a liberal market democracy, or a post-authoritarian regime attempting to modernize along Chinese lines?

To address these questions, this study argues that national identity is a key factor in determining foreign policy behavior. Members of the political elite develop aspirations based on common historical memories. Motivated by value rationality and the need for collective self-esteem, they introduce competing national self-images into the political discourse. National self-images are sets of ideas about the country's political purpose and international status. Members of the political elite propagate national self-images in an effort to define national identity and national interests.

National self-images are candidate national identities at play in the political debate at any given time. Like national identities, national self-images consist of ideas regarding a state's international status and its political purpose. They entail prescriptions regarding what the country should be and do, in other words, the country's substantive national interests and its desire to behave in a particular way in its external relations.[5]

National identity is impossible to separate from history; but even more so, it is impossible to separate from what each country chooses to focus upon within its history. Selection and interpretation of history, used to bolster national identity, greatly affects how each country orients its foreign policy; while foreign policy, in turn, is very much about protecting national interests and projecting them on an international scale.

Foreign policy depends upon a shared sense of national identity which, in turn, determines other important issues, such as which states are viewed as friends or enemies, what national interests are, and what the state's aspirations are. States act as "power projectors." These actors act outside of their legal territory with the goal of affecting the world order and are laden with ideological assumptions.[6]

If one national self-image succeeds in dominating public discourse over time, it becomes institutionalized not only in the form of domestic laws, regulations, and symbolic and governmental structures, but also as stable expectations of rights, privileges, jurisdictions, obligations, and norms of behavior in relations with other states and among domestic societal actors. The ideas it entails about the state's international status and political purpose become national interests—values to be upheld, defended, and projected.

Other national self-images will continue to exist and be debated in the political discourse, but unless they displace the dominant national self-image in appearing to offer historically appropriate and practical means to fulfill aspirations, and thus enhance collective self-esteem, they are unlikely to be salient for the majority and therefore unlikely to shape national interests.[7]

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[4] See: A. Ingram, "Broadening Russia's Border? The Nationalist Challenge of the Congress of Russian Communities," *Political Geography*, No. 20, 2001, pp. 197-219.

[5] See: J. Legro, "The Transformation of Policy Ideas," *American Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 44, No. 3, 2000, pp. 419-432.

[6] See: H. Houweling, M.P. Amineh, "The Crisis in IR-Theory: Towards a Critical Geopolitics Approach," in: *Central Eurasia in Global Politics: Conflict, Security and Development*, ed. by H. Houweling, M.P. Amineh, Brill Academic Publishers, Leiden, Boston, 2005, pp. 9-16

[7] See: W. Citrin, B. Duff, "The Meaning of American National Identity: Patterns of Ethnic Conflict and Consensus," in: *Social Identity, Intergroup Conflict, and Conflict Reduction*, ed. by R.D. Ashmore, L.J. Jussim, D. Wilder, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2001, pp. 71-100.

National identities and interests rest on two pillars, political purpose and international status.[8] These pillars consist of sets of ideas, one referring primarily to the internal features and mission of a state and the other to its external position, rights, and obligations.

Political purpose encompasses beliefs about the appropriate system of political and economic governance for one's country and whether this system is also universally appropriate. Political purpose includes ideas about what values, principles, traits, and symbols characterize the country and what values and principles should govern relations between countries. It also involves ideas about what the country's national mission is, if there is one. For instance the United States might have the political purpose of "promoting political and economic freedom at home and abroad." The Russian Federation might have the political purpose of "becoming a Western country" or "protecting all Slavs" or "restoring the Soviet Empire."

The second pillar on which national identity rests is international status. International status includes questions of ranking and of the positioning of one's country in an imagined international hierarchy of political, military, social, and economic power. Such ranking involves evaluations of the material power possessed by oneself and all other parties. Status includes immaterial factors as well. For example, citizens of the United States often claim that their country is the "leader of the free world." International status involves ideas about the proper position, respect, deference, rights, and obligations that one's country should be accorded, based on the groups one believes it belongs to; not only the amount of material power it does or does not have, but also its purpose indicates whether a country is a status-seeker or a status-maintainer with regard to a particular issue or a group. A country that seeks to join the group of advanced industrial countries or the group of "civilized countries" is a status-seeker, whereas a state that recognizes itself as being an advanced industrial country or a civilized country is a status-maintainer.[9]

The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 inflicted great damage on the prevailing Soviet identity and produced for many a sense of loss. According to constructivism, this period of identity crisis should have motivated the Russian political elites to find new bases of collective self-esteem in ways that promote their particular values and yield multiple ideas of the post-Soviet national self-image.[10] The post-Soviet period offers ample evidence of the Russian political elites' search for a new basis for national self-esteem.

The majority of Russians regretted the collapse of the Soviet Union and the independence of the Soviet republics from Soviet/Russian rule,[11] setting them up to view their current position as one of loss and to aspire to regain what had been lost.

Russia's quest for a great power status has a long historical pedigree. Shared memories of Russia's past status as a great power—whether global, European, or Eurasian—created a core aspiration among most political elites to retain or regain that status. The U.S.S.R.'s status as a great power was not discredited. Almost all the political elites viewed Russia's past status as a great power positively and as a core facet of the Russian identity.[12]

Post-Soviet Russian political elites were clearly split over what Russia's national identity should be in the aftermath of the collapse of the Soviet Union. They evinced little agreement about Russia's

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[8] See: J.G. Ruggie, "International Regimes, Transactions, and Change: Embedded Liberalism in the Postwar Economic Order," *International Organization,* Vol. 36, No. 2, 1982, pp. 379-415.

[9] See: A.L. Clunan, *The Social Construction of Russia's Resurgence, Aspirations, Identity, and Security Interests*, The Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, 2009.

[10] See: Ibid, pp. 39-50.

[11] See: P. Escobar, "Russia's Liberal Empire," available at: [Asia Times.com], 2005.

[12] See: J.S. Kullberg, *The End of New Thinking Elite Ideologies and the Future of Russian Foreign Policy*, Mershon Center at Ohio State University, Columbus, 1993.

political purpose or sources of national self-esteem beyond the great power status. Russian political elites proposed a myriad of new types of social order for post-Soviet Russia. Many have characterized this split as a renewal of the nineteenth century debate in the Russian intelligentsia between the Westernizers and the Slavophiles.

The Westernizers

The Westernizers were a group of intellectuals that followed a school of thought with a much longer tradition in Russian history. They emerged at the beginning of the 19th century as a reflection of the French Revolution and Napoleonic wars. It should not come as a surprise that many Russian army officers who were exposed to the West by the nature of their service during the Napoleonic wars admired liberalism and were followers of enlightenment and romanticism. The most visible political manifestation of Westernization was the Decembrists' coup attempt in 1825.

The philosophical origins of the Westernizers were in rationalism, the notion of modernization, and belief in progress. Their goal was to modernize Russia along the lines of other European state. Westernizers shared a belief in the need for radical social change and argued in favor of political activism. They demanded liberalism and secularism. Petr Chaadaev was one of the founding fathers of this school of thought.[13]

In terms of its thinking about political systems, Russia was perceived as a backward Eastern despotic state which should reject despotism and develop a parliamentarian political system with civil rights. While other schools—the Slavophiles and Eurasianists—glorified the past, the Westernizers neglected it as empirical.

Between 1990 and 1993, multiple national self-images came into being. The first among them was the Western national self-image, liberal internationalism. When Russia appeared as an independent entity in 1991, the new political leadership led by Boris Yeltsin, Egor Gaidar, and Andrei Kozyrev resoundingly embraced a Western and liberal internationalist self-image for Russia. However, this national self-image was not the only one available to the political elites.

The Liberal Westerners conception was the official political discourse from 1990 to 1992. This typology accepts the boundaries of Russia's new political homeland and is based on the idea of promoting a civic nation and creating a united identity and commitment to Russia as a political community.[14]

The Western national self-image blames Russia's negative status in the group of great powers on an internal failure; Russia's lack of Western political and economic credentials and the destructive legacy of the Soviet militarized economy and its messianic mission. However, it shares with all the other self-images the belief that the West, particularly the United States, does not treat Russia in keeping with its status.[15]

For Westernizers, the aspiration is to more fully join the West and Europe, including its military alliances, and to be part of the club of Western market democracies. Russia's great power status is dependent on its transformation into a stable, prosperous democracy.

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[13] See: N. Pirumova, V. Antonov, *Russia and the West: 19th Century*, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1990.

[14] See: G. Smith, *The Post-Soviet States: Mapping the Politics of Transition*, Oxford University Press Inc., New York, 1999.

[15] See: G.W. Breslauer, *Personalism versus Proceduralism: Boris Yeltsin and the Institutional Fragility of the Russian System*, ed. by V.E. Bonnell, G.W. Breslauer, Westview Press, 2000, pp. 35-58.

Slavophilism

Slavophilism developed during the nineteen century and represented the Russian theoretical response to Western liberalism.[16] The philosophical foundation of Slavophilism was built as a reaction to the Western experiences. This school of thought consequently wanted to avoid the mistakes that the West made in its development, and not necessarily to reject everything Western; from that perspective they argued that Russia should pursue a different development path—a third way.[17]

Slavophiles argued that the West does not share the historical path that Russia is following. It was argued that Russian people "preferred the road of inner truth—the Christian moral organization of life within the framework of the peasant community—to the external truth—Western-type political and legal organization of society."[18]

Precisely due to these differences Slavophiles did not see the world as one, but as divided. Therefore, Russia was not part of the West, but a counterpart to it. This positioning of Russia based on the older theological concept of Russia as the third Rome.[19] In this concept, Russia was perceived as the only truly Christian state, the heir of Jerusalem, Rome, and Constantinople. The Slavophiles thought that this gap between Russia and the West existed due to different spiritual principles. They believe that Russia's mission is to lead the Slavic or Eastern Slavic world in reviving and preserving its cultural autonomy vis-à-vis both the secular West and the non-Christian world. Therefore Russia's role is that of a moral great power, a counterweight to the secular European great powers, and the leading power in the Eastern Slavic lands. Russia should also assume the role of protecting the Slavic brethren.

The proper role and mission are found in the czarist past, when "Orthodox messianic" (Moscow is the Third Rome) was the spirit of the state system. This type of self-image views the post-Soviet lands outside of Russia where Russian-speakers predominate to be Russian territory, while the other self-images characterize the entire Near Abroad as Russia's rightful sphere of influence.

Eurasianism

The theoretical framework examined in this study of Russia's political culture and foreign policy grew out of opposition to the Westernizers and is known as the school of Eurasianism. This school of thought emerged in 1920. Although opposed to communism, they held out hope for the new Soviet regime, since it had reconstructed the Russian empire after the long civil war.[20]

Eurasians argued for the emergence of a Eurasian federation and for the adoption of dual identities. This school of thought has its philosophical origins in German idealism, although not in Kantian, since they were against cosmopolitanism, but specifically for Hegelian idealism, which advocates the concept of a governing state. Therefore statism is one of the main features of Eurasianism. This patrimonial authoritarianism spilled over into Russia's foreign policy and Russia is only inter-

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[16] See: *A History of Russian Philosophy: From the Tenth through the Twentieth Centuries*, ed. by V. Kuvakin, Vol. 1, Prometheus Books, New York, 1994.

[17] See: V.V. Zenkovski, *Russian Thinkers and Europe*, J.W. Edwards' Publishers, Michigan, 1953, p. 48.

[18] *A History of Russian Philosophy: From the Tenth through the Twentieth Centuries*, Vol. 1, p. 152.

[19] It was with the marriage of Ivan III with Zoe Paleologus, the niece of the last emperor of Constantinople on 1 June, 1472 that Muscovy began to think of itself as the only true heir of Byzantium (see: M.B. Petrovich, *The Emergence of Russian Panslavism 1856-1870*, Columbia University Press, New York, 1956, p. 5).

[20] See: J.H. Billington, *Russia in Search of Itself*, Woodrow Willson Center Press, Washington DC, 2004.

ested in participating in the international community if relations can be managed by the Russian government.

The strong component of this school presented its critique of the West. The Eurasians were against a communist government in the U.S.S.R., but they were also against that the policy the West was pursuing. They argued that the West was only interested in subordinating and exploiting Russia. Therefore the West would not confront communism, but should help Russia become more like the West.[21]

According to the Eurasianists, Russia's battle for world domination is not over. The essential prerequisite is that Russia should not think of itself as a regional power or as a nation state, but as a new Eurasian empire. The new empire would be fighting to lead a planetary and supranational system based on fundamental solidarity of the third world with that part of second world that rejects the program of the "rich north" and its globalizing processes.[22]

With respect to its responsibilities, Russia should be Eurasia's regional policeman. Its lack of presence in the Near Abroad, specifically with respect to the growing hostilities in the Caucasian region, has created the existence of a potential threat to Russia's own internal security. Above all, it was felt that Russia should intervene to ensure de-escalation of the conflicts that could imperil Russian interests or spill over into Russia proper. This included concern over the escalation of disputes in civil-war-torn Georgia, in particular the secessionist struggles in South Ossetia and Abkhazia. In keeping with this line, Moscow began talking about the need to deploy Russian troops in the Near Abroad for the purpose of peacekeeping.[23]

This school of thought tends to focus on military might, diplomatic skill, and cultural attractiveness and contains a quasi-messianic national mission that goes beyond building state power. Most commonly, Russia's Eurasian mission is to act as the bridge between East and West.

All of these ideas are built upon a notion that is central to Eurasianism, which is Russia being a distinct culture, neither East nor West, with a stabilizing role as a bridge state between the two. In order to maintain this equilibrium, Russia must retain its *derzhava* or great power status. This, in turn, is directly impacted by re-integration with the Near Abroad, so Russia can reacquire its historical borders.[24]

This self-image is a blend of orthodox communist and Russian nationalist programs. Therefore history forms the primary baseline for Russia's national identity and its national mission. Restoration of the former Russian and Soviet Empire is the core aspiration entailed in this self-image. According to this messianic national self-image, Russia's borders should at a minimum be restored to those of the Soviet Union. The preferred methods of restoration are economic and political coercion. Unlike the neo-communist type, membership is ethnically ascribed and ethnic Russians are the natural and rightful leaders of Russia, while other nationalities should assimilate.

The Russian leadership is very adamant that Russia was, is, and will remain a great power in world affairs. This great power status is achieved primarily in relation to the former Soviet republics; particularly those that are now members of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). For Russia, the CIS is within Russia's sphere of influence as close neighbors who share a very deep historical relationship.[25]

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[21] See: N.S. Trubetzkoy, *The Legacy of Genghis Khan and Other Essays on Russia's Identity*, Slavic Publications, Michigan, 1991, p. 244.

[22] See: A. Dugin, op. cit., pp. 80-85.

[23] See: G. Smith, "The Masks of Proteus: Russia, Geopolitical Shift and the New Eurasianism," pp. 65-75.

[24] See: A.P. Tsygankov, "From International Institutionalism to Revolutionary Expansionism: The Foreign Policy Discourse of Contemporary Russia," *Mershon International Studies Review*, Vol. 41, No. 2, 1997, pp. 247-268.

[25] See: I. Oldberg, *Great Power Ambitions under Putin*, ed. by R.E. Kanet, Palagrave Macmillan, New York, 2007, pp. 13-30.

Russia's foreign policy under Putin toward the Near Abroad proves that he was following the Eurasian idea. His pressure on the Caucasus and Central Asian countries to become more integrated and dependent on Russia, disagreement with the presence of the rest of the world in the region, especially the Western countries and NATO, and trying to use three-dimensional tools (economic, political, and military) to punish countries which have tried to be more independent of Russia, are all indicators of Putin's Eurasian school of thought, which is combined with pragmatism.

From Yeltsin to Putin: A Shift in Russia's Foreign Policy

In 1999, Yeltsin rapidly moved Putin up the ladder, from Director of the FSB to Secretary of the Security Council, to acting Prime Minister in August 1999 and, finally, to acting President when he resigned in December 1999. The young, vigorous, sober Putin, such a contrast to the aging, sick, and at times drunk Yeltsin, campaigned as a patriot and stabilizer, promising to restore Russians' pride in their nation and military, to win the war in Chechnia, to enhance Russia's place in the world, and to improve daily life by revitalizing the economy. To a population made poorer by the August 1998 economic collapse, frustrated by NATO's expansion and the actions in Kosovo, and scared by terrorist bombings, Putin's message was what they were looking for and he won his first term as President in March 2000.

In their struggle to define Russia's post-Soviet identity and interests, the Russian political elites shared the aspiration of retaining the historical great power status of czarist and then Soviet Russia. They never settled, however, on the key element of national identity—the question of Russia's political purpose. This lack of agreement centered on a marked ambivalence about the extent to which one source of Russia's national self-esteem—its historical status as a global great power—was commensurable with a political purpose that entailed becoming more Western rather than maintaining a "uniquely" Russian identity. As a result, what passed for Russian national identity in the 1990s and through the first Putin administration remained largely based on status-maintenance vis-à-vis the United States rather than a more rational assessment of Russia's capabilities and opportunities in the post-Cold War world.

During the first and crucial phase, 1991 to 1993, of the Russian political elites' struggle to define their country's new identity and set of national interests, the initially dominant Western national self-image—liberal internationalism—fell from grace, primarily because its prescription for Russia's international role did not correspond to the great power aspirations that the majority of the Russian political elites accepted as historically legitimate. Even though most of the political elites remained positively inclined toward the West and favored markets and democracy, they rejected the second-class status and negative depiction of Russia's historical distinctiveness implicit in the liberal internationalist self-image.[26]

From the perspective of most of the Russian political elites, the liberal internationalist Westernizers failed to pass history and this damaged the legitimacy of the Western national self-images and prevented them from dominating the political discourse long enough to become Russia's national

[26] See: A. Rahr, "Atlanticists versus Eurasians in Russian Foreign Policy," *RFE/RL Research Report*, 29 May, 1992, pp. 17-22.

identity. Their perceived failures led to personnel and policy changes as well as to strengthened advocates of statism.

Advocates of Eurasian statism gained increasing influence, especially with regard to foreign policy, but Westernizers, particularly democrats, remained vocal in the political discourse and influential in economic policy throughout the post-Soviet period. After 1998, clear signs of Russia's policy failures highlighted the policy failures of the Westernizers and shifted the political discourse in favor of the Eurasian statists. The triple shock of Russia's financial default in August 1998, Russia's marginalization in the 1999 Kosovo war, and the 1999 incursion of Chechen rebels in Dagestan focused the elites' attention on the correspondence between competing national self-images and current conditions.

From 1999 to 2008, even before Putin moved to limit opposition after 2004, his national self-image of statist began dominating the political discourse and defining Russia's national interests. Its dominance lay in its correlation with the elites' aspirations and the perceived success Putin was able to achieve in carrying it out, success that owed much to the rising price of oil, the 1998 devaluation of the ruble, and the consequent swelling of government coffers and increase in domestic import substitution.

Policy toward the former Soviet republics emerged as one of two key tests of the historical legitimacy of liberal internationalism, the other being policy toward the West. The Westernizers were criticized on all sides for being slow to realize that the former Soviet republics, as new entities of international relations, should be the top priority of the Russian Foreign Ministry, since they formed the historical basis for Russia's status as a great power and its distinctiveness as a Eurasian, rather than Western or Eastern, power.

Putin and the Great Power Status

Recognizing the limits of available resources, Putin reduced the country's unnecessary and costly presence around the world and concentrated on its immediate neighborhood. Perceiving itself as a regional superpower, Russia strived to stop degradation of its influence and rebuild its power position across the ex-Soviet periphery via economic, political and military instruments, since the Kremlin considered regional predominance to be vital for the maintenance of its great power status in the world. Therefore Putin closed the bases in Vietnam and Cuba and emphasized the vital importance of economic growth in consolidating and strengthening the Russian state as a great power.

A system of "guided democracy" emerged in Russia. The state became the focal point of all the decision-making processes. The market economy was to develop under the supervision of the state. Large corporations were forced to subordinate themselves to national and state interests. There was to be no government takeover of the industrial and financial groups of the oligarchs, the state, however, attempted to replace the directors of the oligarchs' corporations with loyal managers. In the energy sector, the state was also to secure the largest part of the profits from the export business. A kind of state-capitalism was emerging in Russia. Only in this manner did Putin think he could master the problem of corruption, develop social programs to protect the poor, secure long-term economic growth, and strengthen the country outwardly.[27]

[27] See: A. Rahr, "Between Reform and Restoration: Putin on the Eve of His Second Term," *CIS-Barometer* (Korber Department, Berlin), No. 35, February 2004, pp. 2-5, available at [www.dgap.org.].

In contrast to Yeltsin, the Eurasian statists, including most prominently Vladimir Putin, sought with some success to put forward economic criteria as the basis for Russia's comparison with the West.

For a statist like Putin, the goal of global great power status required Russia's integration into global economic and political institutions, but not its subordination to the West. The statists therefore advocated a national interest in cooperating with the West in order to join the global economy and maintain Russia's great power status on that scale.

Many observers considered that the post-9/11 cooperation between Russia and the U.S. in removing the Taliban regime from Afghanistan and Putin's apparently Europe-first approach was a strategic option for Moscow that was meant to close a "black chapter" in relations with the West. In line with this stream of thought, President Putin's policies in 2001 indicated that he wanted to reconstruct Russia's identity and foreign policy.[28]

While unveiling Putin's strong desire for inclusion in the international community and selective engagement with the West, this approach fails to capture the aspects of great power thinking which guided his strategy from the very beginning. In his "manifesto," Putin mentioned *Derzhavnost*[29] as one of the traditional values on which Russia's revival in the 21st century should be based. Therefore, for Putin, Russia can be revived and successfully developed only as a great power recognized and respected in the world. With this in mind, integration and internationalization began playing a double role in Putin's strategy. The "public diplomacy" tool was designed to prove Russian "normality" and defuse any suspicion of the international community with regard to the possibility of facing a resurgent and very aggressive Russia; it was to facilitate Russia's economic modernization and be used as a means to recover the ground the country had lost in some sectors of the world economy.[30] Along with the already mentioned rhetoric of integration and particular course of internationalization, Putin vigorously pursued a strategy of power concentration.

Russia's main foreign policy preoccupation was preserving the statute of a freestanding actor in the international system and recognizing the CIS space as a sphere of its vital interests. Adopting this perspective, the post-9/11 cooperation with the U.S. was regarded rather as a tactical move in order to tackle security problems on its southern flank and gain more leverage across the entire CIS space than a long-term strategy to align with the West. Putin could not prevent U.S. military deployment in Central Asia, therefore it was easier to adopt a cooperative attitude rather than to oppose it. In this regard, some commentators expressed the opinion that Putin's performance after the 11 September attacks was praised perhaps beyond merit, because it was the quickness of response rather than the quality of cooperative effort that made the difference. Putin, preoccupied with his country's great power status, instantly saw a chance to increase international ratings by making a few symbolic gestures and did not spoil this chance by untimely bargaining.[31]

More than that, by assuming a cooperative attitude toward U.S. intervention in Afghanistan, Russia sought to position itself as a great power in the "global war on terror," presumably by fighting inter-

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[28] See: I. Zevelev, "Russian and American National Identity, Foreign Policy, and Bilateral Relations," *International Politics*, Vol. 39, No. 4, December 2002, pp. 447-465.

[29] Great-Powerness, this means that Russia was and despite temporary difficulties will remain a great power.

[30] This is a strategy very similar to the one promoted by minister of foreign affairs in czarist Russia Aleksandr Gorchakov. In a report addressed to Alexander II, Gorchakov presented the main priorities of Russian foreign policy between 1856 and 1867; they included overcoming isolation, creating favorable conditions for internal reforms, and minimizing the risks of Russia's involvement in wide-scale war operations. For more on the similarities between Gorchakov's and Putin's foreign policy approaches, see: F. Splidsboel-Hansen, "Past and Future Meet: Aleksandr Gorchakov and Russian Foreign Policy," *Europe-Asia Studies*, Vol. 54, No. 3, May 2002, pp. 389-390.

[31] See: P. Baev, "Putin Reconstitutes Russia's Great Power Status," *PONARS Policy Memo*, No. 318, November 2003, pp. 2-3.

national terrorism in the Northern Caucasus. From the Kremlin's perspective, such a move was to provide international legitimacy and support for the so-called "anti-terrorist campaign" in Chechnia and the future Russian government's tough responses to terrorist threats inside the country, as well as beyond its borders. In addition, the U.S. operation against the Taliban regime and terrorist networks opened a window of opportunity for Russia to diminish, if not totally neutralize, the threat of radical Islam spreading from Afghanistan to Central Asia and the Caucasus. By supplying the U.S. with information and the Northern Alliance with arms and other equipment, Russia contributed to the removal of a significant source of threats and in this way managed to improve the fragile security in its soft underbelly.

Russia's Foreign Policy Toward Armenia and Azerbaijan

As noted above, Russia under Putin tried to regain its great power status as its national identity. To do this, Russia has to retain its influence within the former Soviet Union borders, especially in the Caucasus; in contrast, the top priority of the countries in the region is striving to retain their independence. These two types of national identity, independence and great power status, determine the type of relations between Russia and the three South Caucasian countries. Georgia seeks its independence by establishing close relations with the West and joining NATO, Armenia is trying to remain on Russia's side because of its conflicts with Azerbaijan, and Azerbaijan is trying to balance between the West and Russia and is more or less inclined toward the West and Turkey.

Russia's self-perception has been influential in defining Russia's foreign policy toward the Near Abroad. For centuries, Russia has considered its mission to be unification of a vast Eurasian land mass under the dominance of a unique Russian civilization. As a natural extension of this consideration, almost all Russians seem to have the visceral feeling that the Southern Caucasus is and ought to remain politically inseparable from Russia.[32]

Regarding these aims, Russia has tried to control the region by means of a three-dimensional tool comprised of the following components: economic—an energy; military—peacekeeping mandate; political—support of ex-Soviet leaders and maintenance of the status-quo.

Intervening in the Near Abroad to ensure that conflicts do not spill over into Russia, peacekeeping troops are a particularly important tool used by the Russian Federation in neighboring countries that have active conflicts. The peacekeeping mandate also ensures that Russia is able to strategically promote its own interests and meddle in the affairs of sovereign states.[33]

Under Putin, Russia's relations with the states in the region were strongly colored by "spillovers" of the Chechnia war and the emerging U.S. engagement and support of a Caucasus more independent of Russia. In October 2003, Putin said that "the transformation of the Caucasus region into an area of stability and economic cooperation is our most important common goal" and that "Russia is willing to continue acting as a peacekeeper in the settlement of conflicts in the Transcaucasus region together with its partners in the CIS."[34]

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[32] See: D.E. Mark, "Eurasia Letter: Russia and the New Transcaucasus," *Foreign Policy*, No. 105, Winter 1996-1997, pp. 144-145.

[33] See: H.H. Almond, *Peacekeeping: Russia's Emerging Practice, A Return to Imperialism?* ed. by U. Ra'anan, K. Martin, St. Martin's Press, New York, 1995, pp. 33-65.

[34] Y.E. Daniel, "Armenia, Azerbaijan Appear to Edge Closer to Karabakh Peace," *Eurasia Insight*, 20 May 2005.

Overcoming an epoch of normative disarray, Russia under Putin adopted the role of an autonomous and self-asserted international actor struggling to rebuild its faded greatness. In these circumstances, the CIS space not only has enough substance, but also significant psychological value for the Russian ruling elite. The rebirth of the "CIS project" meant, from the normative point of view, the reproduction of Russia's centuries-old great power identity and the desire to maintain strategic independence in relations with other power centers. In practical terms, the renewal of the CIS initiatives implied Russia's pro-active engagement to maintain the highly challenged status-quo on its periphery. While fortifying its position, the Kremlin intended to keep its own backyard safe from "unauthorized" interference of outside powers in the CIS space.

Suppressing the almighty oligarchs of the Yeltsin era and placing trustworthy people in large state or even private companies, Putin backed Russian business's major takeovers of strategic sectors in the CIS space and often used state monopolies to punish disloyal leaders of the ex-Soviet republics. Rapid "militarization" of the power elites under Putin also influenced Russia's military strategy in the CIS space.

In response to the West's major interference in Russia's sphere of influence (the Color Revolutions, NATO expansion…), the administration resorted to one longstanding Russian diplomatic practice from Soviet foreign policy known as linkage. Linkage contends to compensate for weakness in one area by applying pressure in other areas where they have an advantage. For example, Russia saw Western support as a threat to Russian interests. Western arguments about democracy were seen as simple rationalization for engineering an intolerable geopolitical shift in its sphere of influence. Unable to respond in Ukraine, the Russians immediately responded with providing weapons assistance to Syria, which the U.S declared a state sponsor of terrorism and a looming threat to Israel.[35]

Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict, the Main Factor in Russia's Relations with Azerbaijan and Armenia

Russia's relations with Azerbaijan and Armenia have been strongly affected by the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Both Armenia and Azerbaijan are aware of Russia's important role in this matter, which is of top priority for both countries because of their independent status after the demise of the Soviet Union; therefore each of them has tried to enlist Russia's support on this issue.

Russia's foreign policy toward these countries is determined by its great power status and economic factors, especially energy transformation. Russia sees energy domination in the region as one of the most important factors for its re-emergence as a great power on the international arena. On the other hand, Azerbaijan has tried to use energy resources and transformation as a leverage for achieving greater independence from Russia and drawing closer to the West.

The Nagorno-Karabakh conflict has been one of the most persistent violent ethnic conflicts since the demise of the U.S.S.R. (of course an analysis of the reasons for this conflict is beyond the scope of this paper). In 1988, large demonstrations followed in Armenia after the U.S.S.R. refused to trans-

[35] See: G. Friedman, "Moscow's Missile Message," *New York Post*, No. 27, 2005.

fer Nagorno-Karabakh to Armenia. Initially, Russia took the Azeri side but later switched its support to the Armenians.

The Nationalist Popular Front of Azerbaijan was established as a response to the Armenian claims to have the Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Region transferred to Armenia. The Elchibey government gave prior importance to developing relations with Turkey. The government and the population in general tried hard to dissociate themselves from Russia and the Russian legacy. Understandably, the policy of "Turkification" angered Russia and Iran, inducing them to seek rapprochement with each other and to improve bilateral relations with Armenia. This situation led to Russia's support of Armenia.

The Azerbaijani government rejected ratification of Azerbaijan joining the CIS. During this period, Azerbaijan's relations with Russia were at their worst, for which Elchibey and his weak government had to pay a high price. The day after Elchibey refused to join the CIS Treaty on Collective Security, as a result of double attacks from Karabakh and Armenia, the so-called Lachin corridor was opened and the whole region outside the disputed region was occupied, which meant the unification of Karabakh with Armenia. Russia's second response was its support of the coup the Elchibey government. Elchibey's collapse was helped by the coup led by renegade military commander Surat Huseynov, which, according to many sources, received direct military support from Russia.

Unlike his predecessor, Aliev considered establishing good relations with Russia, joining the CIS, satisfying Russia's interests to be the only realistic means of coping with the situation.

Shortly after coming to power, Aliev stopped all talks with foreign companies regarding the exploitation of Caspian oil (while assuring representatives of the companies that a contract would be signed soon and inviting Russian oil companies to take part in the consortium). As a result of the negotiations, Azerbaijan gave ten percent of its share in the consortium to the Russian oil company, LUKoil. The Parliament of Azerbaijan, with a vote of 30 against 13, ratified the country's membership in the CIS on 20 September, 1993.[36]

Russia's discontent over the nationalist government's (Popular Front) and Azerbaijan's close relations with Turkey and its anti-Russian discourse and policies encouraged Russia to support Armenia regarding the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. The best known case of Russian covert military aid to Armenia concerns the transfer of missile and anti-aircraft systems, multiple rocket launchers, and ammunition worth a total of about $1 billion between 1992 and 1997.[37] In addition, another reason behind Russia's continuing rejection was Azerbaijan's rejection of Russian military peacekeeping in Nagorno-Karabakh.

Russia's position toward the issue changed under the Putin. Early in 2000, Putin made several mediation attempts to move the issue forward (under the slogan "without victors or vanquished")[38] and promised that Russia would be the guarantor of a peace agreement, but in vain. Putin himself assured that Russia would not pressure either of the two conflicting parties.[39] In January 2003, Putin stressed the importance of maintaining balanced relations with Armenia and Azerbaijan and looked for a solution to the Karabakh conflict "based on compromise and justice that will suit both countries."[40]

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[36] See: N. Nassibli, *Azerbaijan: Oil and Politics in the Country's Future*, Praeger, Westport and London, 1999, p. 106.

[37] See: S.W. Itzkoff, "Russia as a Superpower," *The Journal of Social, Political and Economic Studies*, Summer 2004, p. 218.

[38] *News Line*, 10 January, 2001.

[39] See: Putin's press conference, 25 May, 2001.

[40] *News Line*, 21 January, 2003.

In conclusion, Putin's more neutral stand toward the conflicting parties (in comparison to the Yeltsin period) helped to defuse the conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan over Nagorno-Karabakh. This new Russian stand—as a real mediator rather than a party to the conflict—could have been the result of the U.S.'s and EU's growing interest in the Caucasus, as well as Russia's realization that it had nothing to gain from the continued conflict. After all, Putin's choice encompassed all of the Caucasus, not just parts of it.

Armenia

Since the fall of the U.S.S.R., Armenia and Russia have sealed a strategic pact within the framework of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), the military arm of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). This political, military, and economic alliance represents a strategic alliance in the Southern Caucasus. Russia counts on Armenia to maintain its influence in the region. Armenia sees Russia as an ally capable of ensuring its security in a hostile environment.

Relations between Armenia and Russia are rooted in a history of rivalry between the Russian and Ottoman empires. They are founded on a common vision of security issues aimed at thwarting the influence of Turkey in a key region of the Southern Caucasus. Christianity was something both Russia and Armenia had in common at that time, which opposed them to the Muslim Ottoman Empire.

Armenia has been Russia's main ally in the Caucasus since the breakup of the U.S.S.R. Throughout the 1990s, Russian-Armenian military relations were close. In 1997, Yeltsin signed a Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation and Security with "substantial military cooperative content."[41] In 2000, Armenia allowed Russian troops to stay in Armenia until 2025.

When Vladimir Putin came to power, Russian-Armenian partnership was transformed into a strategic alliance within the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO).[42] Since 2000, in response to increased U.S. influence, Moscow has regarded Armenia as Russia's outpost in the region.[43]

Armenia characterized Russia's presence in Armenia as a "strong stabilizing factor."[44] Since 1996, Russia has also had a military base in Armenia (free of charge), which was further strengthened when the joint military unit was set up; a new Russian military base was also considered (as compensation for the Russian bases to be closed in Georgia).

The main changes in relations under Putin occurred in the economic sphere. Armenia imports all of its gas and oil, mostly from Russia. Much of Armenia's electricity and nuclear infrastructure was acquired by Russia's RAO-UES to cover outstanding debts.

Consequently, some changes have occurred in Russia's relations with Armenia since Putin came to power, first in the "economization" of relations, as well as in increased military cooperation.

During the 1990s, Russia, due to its unstable economy, tried to use the separatism in Transnistria (Moldova), the Crimea (Ukraine), Abkhazia and South Ossetia (Georgia), and Nagorno-Karabakh (Armenia-Azerbaijan) to preserve its influence over its former neighborhood. But under Putin, due to

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[41] J.L. Black, *Vladimir Putin and the New World Order, Looking East, Looking West?* Rowman & Little?eld Publishers, Lanham, MD, 2004, pp. 228.

[42] The CSTO is made up of Russia, Belarus, Armenia, Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan.

[43] See: Press agency, 22 December, 2004, available at [panarmenia.net].

[44] S. Blagov, "Kocharian's Moscow Visit Underscores Strengthening Armenian-Russian Security Cooperation," *Eurasia Insight*, 21 January, 2003.

Russia's economic recovery, Russia tried to use the economy as a lever more than the other factors. The high price of oil and gas and the Soviet Union's legacy in energy sector (supply and transfer) in the region paved the way for Putin to do so.

Not that the traditionally close relations themselves have deteriorated, but they have definitely changed in the economic sphere. At the same time, Russia's closer relations with Azerbaijan did not seem to inflict damage on Russian-Armenian relations.

Russia under Putin tried to use energy (oil and gas) as a lever for putting pressure on the Near Abroad countries to make them accept its domination. In this respect, energy did not belong to the economic sector for Russia, rather it used energy resources in particular as a political tool. Putin implemented an energy policy based on his vision of exerting heavier state control on the energy sector and limiting the role of the oil oligarchs, who he saw as having amassed both economic and political leverage during Yeltsin's rule.

Putin saw the exploitation of energy resources as a guarantee of social and economic stability in the country and its global position, a notion that stands in contrast to the Soviet approach, which emphasized military supremacy. This vision supported Russia's view of itself as a great power.

Russia's Foreign Policy Toward Georgia

In the post-communist era, the relations between Russia and Georgia were very tense and sensitive due to many factors. Georgia's refusal to join the Russian-led Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) and its demand for Russia to withdraw its military forces from Georgian territory were burning issues in bilateral relations in the initial years right after the disintegration of the Soviet Union. Russia, however, adamantly resisted such a withdrawal of the Russian forces from Georgia.

Of course there are many factors that have made Russia and Georgia's relations problematic, including Russia's bases in the region and ethnic conflicts, but among them Georgia's trying to gain more independence from Russia and its positive view of the West, especially its striving to join NATO, is the main factor complicating these relations.

The recent crisis in relations between Moscow and Tbilisi originates in Georgia's Rose Revolution of late 2003, which brought President Saakashvili to power. His policy was aimed at bringing his country closer to the EU and NATO. He pledged to close Russian military bases in Georgia, and wants to make the most of Georgia's position on the route of new pipelines taking gas and oil from the Caspian Sea region to the West. This would give Western companies a route that bypassed Russia. For Saakashvili, the models to follow were the Baltic states.[45]

From a strategic perspective, Georgia's border with Turkey and its location on the Black Sea made the country very significant in Russia's eyes. Russia has been more worried about Turkish than Iranian influence in the Caucasus and perceived Turkey as a threat to its dominant position in the political, economic, and military fields. Therefore, the Russian military bases controlling the Georgian-Turkish border were of vital concern to Moscow.

As far as the Black Sea was concerned, Russia was in need of control over the Georgian coastline. When Georgian officials managed to clinch a deal whereby Russian troops would withdraw from

[45] See: M. Vashakmadze, "The EU and Russian Hegemony in Georgia," in: *An Enlarged Europe and its Neighbourhood Policy*, *The Eastern Dimension*, Latvian Institute of International Affairs, Riga, 2004, p. 17.

the Turkish border by 1994 and from Georgia totally by 1995, Russian Defense Minister General Pavel Grachev stated that this deal would lead to loss of Russian control over the Black Sea. Therefore every measure to ensure that Russian troops remain there should be taken.[46]

One area where Russia is able to interfere in Georgian affairs successfully is via the separatist regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. These conflicts are Russia's key chip for meddling in Georgian affairs. Support of these areas has taken many forms, including political. For example, when South Ossetia held a referendum for independence, the Russian government passed a resolution acknowledging the results. Russian officials also attended the inauguration of the de-facto president of the region after internationally unrecognized elections were held in South Ossetia. Russia also granted Russian citizenship to people in both separatist regions.[47]

Abkhazia and South Ossetia broke away from Georgia in the early 1990s when the Abkhazian and Ossetian ethnic groups revolted against central Georgian rule, resulting in the mass expulsion of ethnic Georgians. Russia warned that it would defend the separatist territories if the Georgian government launched an assault to win back control.[48]

Saakashvili has re-established Tbilisi's authority over one of the three problem regions—Ajaria, a Black Sea province bordering on Turkey. But South Ossetia and Abkhazia, located next to Russia, have proven more difficult. Unlike the Ajarians, the Ossetians and the Abkhazians are ethnically different from Georgians. Both were involved in wars with Tbilisi in the early 1990s when they established de facto autonomy.

Specific problems for Russia's security played an important role in Russia's involvement in Georgia's conflict with South Ossetia. In the case of South Ossetia, the patterns of Russian involvement were more evident due to the numerous Russian interests in the conflict. The possibility that the conflict in South Ossetia could have serious repercussions in the Russian Republic of North Ossetia has alarmed Russian policymakers. The North Ossetian people were not happy with the political developments in South Ossetia; they were in favor of unification with South Ossetia. To this end, they were not only enthusiastic about becoming involved in the conflict militarily, but also about lobbying for Russia's active involvement in the conflict in Moscow.[49]

Abkhazia, in particular, represents an area of strategic interest for Russia. Russia will continue to expand communications with Abkhazia; a more obvious and strategic reason for Abkhazia's importance to Russia is the country's location on the Black Sea coast. Russia only has one port with access to the Black Sea at Novorossiysk, and the future prospect of Ukraine joining NATO severely limit the options of the Russian Black Sea Fleet, because NATO members would surround the entire Black Sea. This would severely limit Russia's naval capabilities.[50]

Besides being a peacekeeper in the region, Russia also economically supports the separatist regions. During the Soviet period, Abkhazia was famous for tourism and agriculture. After its split with Georgia, the economy completely collapsed, leaving Abkhazia wholly dependent on the Russian ruble, Russian economic aid, and the Russian market.

In response to the increased U.S. political military engagement in the South Caucasian countries, Moscow, in line with the aforementioned pragmatist view, took some steps to prevent its posi-

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[46] See: S.E. Cornell, *Small Nations and Great Powers: A Study of Ethnopolitical Conflict in the Caucasus*, Curzon Press, Caucasus World, 2001, p. 345.

[47] See: K. Jibladze, "Russia's Opposition to Georgia's Quest for NATO Membership," *China and Eurasia Forum Quarterly*, Vol. 5, No. 1, 2007, p. 46.

[48] See: A. Chepurin, "Seven Subjects on Russian-Georgian Agenda," *International Affairs*, Vol. 50, Issue 3, 2004, p. 3.

[49] See: E.A. Pain, "Contagious Ethnic Conflicts and Border Disputes along Russia's Southern Flank," in: *Russia, The Caucasus, and Central Asia*, ed. by R. Menon, Yu.E. Fedorov, G. Nodia, EastWest Institute, New York, 1999, pp. 185-186.

[50] See: K. Bendelingi, "Two Dynamics of Georgia in NATO," *Inter Press News*, 15 March, 2008.

tion from eroding in the region.[51] Russia's vast energy resources became an important tool for exerting Russia's influence in the region under Putin. The Southern Caucasus has emerged as the proving ground for a new Kremlin strategy that seeks to utilize Russia's abundant energy resources to increase its leverage over countries in the Southern Caucasus and Central Asia.[52]

Since Georgia is quite heavily dependent on bilateral economic relations with Russia, especially considering the negative trade balance and dependence on Russian natural gas exported by Russia's state monopoly Gazprom, the first action this enterprise took was to increase gas prices, announcing in the fall of 2005 that the new gas price for Georgia would be raised from 63 dollars to 110 dollars for the same quantity (1,000 cu m) from 2006.[53]

Russian-Georgian Relations in Terms of NATO Expansion

The heightened tension between the U.S. and U.S.S.R. in the late 1940s prompted the establishment of NATO as a collective security organization to counter what was perceived as an impeding Soviet military threat to Europe. To consolidate their commitment to collective security, the U.S., Canada, and ten Western European states (Belgium, Denmark, France, Iceland, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, and the United Kingdom) signed the North Atlantic Treaty in Washington DC on 4 April, 1949. In response to West Germany's accession to NATO in 1955, the Eastern European countries, at the behest of Moscow, joined the Soviet Union in signing the Treaty on Friendship, Cooperation and Mutual Assistance, commonly known as the Warsaw Pact Treaty Organization.

Throughout much of the Cold War, NATO and the Warsaw Pact remained entrenched on their respective sides of the so-called Iron Curtain, meticulously planning for a possible military confrontation. Fortunately, a militarized dispute never materialized. The end of the Cold War also saw the demise of the Warsaw Pact together with the U.S.S.R. NATO, however, managed to remain intact and began to construct a new role for itself in international relations.[54]

While NATO-Russian relations were formally launched in 1997, the need for cooperation between these two entities was discussed even before the final dissolution of the U.S.S.R. in December 1991. In one of his first major foreign policy statements, Russian President Boris Yeltsin pledged Russia's participation in the North Atlantic Cooperation Council. Yeltsin even suggested that Russia might someday become a NATO member.[55]

In Yeltsin's eyes, the fall of the Berlin wall spurred dramatic shifts in the European security architecture, and it was therefore important that Russia not be excluded from such developments. Yeltsin calculated that, no matter how difficult, Russia ultimately stood to gain a steady policy of cooperation

[51] See: F. Douglas, "Russia's Firm Hand on Heating Gas Worries Its Neighbors," *The New York Times*, 8 January, 2001.

[52] See: I. Torbakov, "Russia Seeks to Use Energy Abundance to Increase Political Leverage," *Eurasianet*, 19 November, 2003, available at [www.eurasianet.org].

[53] See: Ibidem.

[54] See: F. Kaplan, "NATO in a Changing Europe, Searching for a Reason to Stay," *The Boston Globe*, 7 July, 1990.

[55] See: M.A. Smith, G. Timmins, "Russia, NATO and the EU in Era of Enlargement: Vulnerability or Opportunity?" *Geopolitics*, Vol. 6, Issue 1, Summer 2001, p. 73.

and engagement with NATO. In 1993, when Yeltsin accepted the first round of NATO enlargement (the Czech Republic and Poland), he faced fierce criticism, especially from the Russian parliament and military officers.

We can trace early post-Cold War friction between NATO and Russia as far back as the reunification of Germany. In 1990, the immediate question for Soviet policymakers was whether newly unified Germany would stay in NATO or not. During intensive diplomatic bargaining, Moscow is said to have accepted Germany's membership in NATO in exchange for the promise of not deploying troops or nuclear weapons eastwards.[56] Therefore, when NATO began contemplating possible expansion into Central Europe, Russia viewed this policy as NATO's broken promise.[57] Faced with mounting opposition from nationalists and communists in the Russian Duma, Yeltsin and his pro-Western Foreign Minister Andrey Kozyrev were pressured to pursue a more confrontational policy toward NATO.

Instead of adapting to the new environment in Europe and the new definition of security and calculating their interests on the basis of material threats and capabilities, the Russian political elites defined Russia's European security interests in terms of their historical aspirations to reclaim Russia's global status as a great power. As a result, European security, for the Russian political elites, was reduced to the effect NATO had on Russia's standing as a great power. Russian security policy toward Europe (and globally) throughout the post-Soviet period was driven by this status.

Russia's identity and interests regarding Europe were formed in response to Russia's own history. As with the general debate over Russia's post-Soviet identity, two questions animated the political elite debate over Russia's interests in European security: Was Russia Western? What was Russia's international role? Russia's identity and interests regarding Europe were based on historical aspirations to maintain Russia's past international status as a global great power and acceptance, albeit sometimes reluctant, that this status could only be achieved through inclusion in the West. Russian aspirations produced a desire to compete for social recognition in the West of Russia's great power status; they also produced a nineteenth-century view in the Russian political elites of a global great power status regarding Russia's position in Europe.

The Russian elites interpreted Western behavior through this nineteenth-century lens, in which world politics was based on a great power concert. Russian policy on European security became reactive to perceive Western efforts to undermine Russia's aspirations regarding its global status. Historical aspirations disposed the Russian political elites toward favoring competition with the United States and NATO for recognition of Russia's proper status. "Moscow's view is that Russia's entry into Western institutions should not be made at the expense of losing its major power status." NATO should not therefore "attempt to put Russia (with its potential for considerable influence on world events) in the position of an 'equal among equals'."[58]

For Russians, NATO came to symbolize a threat to Russia's identity as a global great power rather than as a genuine military threat, as it represented a challenge to the Russian elites' perception of their special role in stabilizing European, and thereby global, security. This, in turn, implied that Russia no longer had the positive distinctiveness it had previously possessed, a huge blow to national self-esteem, as this was the single shared positive distinction the Russian elites took from their past. By increasing the role of the United States and reducing Russia's role, the expansion of NATO's membership and missions challenged the elites' historical aspirations for a great power status on a par with the United States.

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[56] See: D. Averre, "NATO Expansion and Russian National Interests," *European Security*, 7 March, 1998, pp. 10-54.

[57] See: D. Polikanov, "NATO-Russia Relations: Present and Future," *Contemporary Security Policy*, 25 December, 2004, pp. 479-497.

[58] S.V. Chasnikov, "Sifting through the Relics of Confrontation," *Comparative Strategy*, No. 14, 1995, pp. 91-93.

The Kosovo conflict had the basic role of formulating Russia's perception of NATO. As Dmitri Trenin wrote in 1998, "the Kosovo conflict is not primarily about the Serbs and Albanians, but about the U.S. role in the world.[59]

This nineteenth-century interpretation of Kosovo reinforced the view that the Russians and Europeans perceived European security crises, such as Kosovo, in radically different terms. As Max Jakobson, former Finnish ambassador to the United Nations, wrote in 1999, the Kosovo conflict revealed a fundamental gap between Western and Russian perceptions of the evolution of international relations. The concept of humanitarian intervention was alien to Russian thinking. It was dismissed by Russian politicians and generals as a disguise for America's geopolitical ambitions... The primacy of human rights in Western policy is a function of the profound integration that has taken place between open societies. Russia has not yet been transformed by that process.[60]

NATO and Western involvement in the former Soviet republics was the most serious crisis in Russian relations with the West that arose over Western assistance to the democratic forces in the former Soviet republics in 2003 and 2004 during the Color Revolutions. In Moscow, this assistance was viewed not as assistance to democratization, but as an effort to undercut Russia's position as the leading power in its own backyard and reduce Russia's global status still further.

The reactive nature of Russia's status-driven foreign policy prompted the Westernizers and moderate statists to denounce the appearance of such anti-Western rhetoric under Putin. The Westernizers sharply criticized the Putin administration, as well as conservatives and hardliners, in 2003 and 2004 for risking Russia's relations with the United States and the West over the Orange Revolution in Ukraine.[61]

Georgia's desire to join NATO is viewed with suspicion by Moscow, which sees NATO expansion into former Soviet territory, and onto Russia's borders, as antagonistic policies inherited from the Cold War which ultimately serve to threaten Russian security, especially Russia's great power status, and its regional and international role.

For Russia, it is difficult to simply disengage from territories which were historically part of Russia and then part of the Soviet Union, particularly when these territories are defecting to the West. Russia believes that NATO expansion is not about increasing security. Rather, Moscow views NATO expansion as a means to exclude Russia from the international and European arenas. NATO is seen as a means to limit Russia's influence in the region and to curb Russia's rise as a regional and international power. NATO expansion is also humiliating for Russia because it denies Russia space to act in the changing European security context. Another important aspect is that Russia views NATO expansion as reneging upon the promise NATO General Secretary Woerner made in 1990 when he stated that NATO would not expand beyond Germany.

When Georgia entered into the Intensified Dialog (ID) stage with NATO, Russia quickly reacted by imposing economic and diplomatic sanctions on Georgia. This included banning Georgian wine and mineral water, which constituted the major Georgian exports to Russia. Russia stopped issuing visas for Georgian migrant workers in an attempt to economically punish the country. Many ethnic Georgians were also deported from Russia.[62]

Georgia was also wary of Russia's role as peacekeeper in the separatist regions, which Russia will not allow to be internationalized. Under the CIS mandate, Russian peacekeepers are the only troops

[59] See: D. Trenin, *Russia's Security Relations with the West after Kosovo and Chechnya*, Paris, 2000.

[60] See: M. Jakobson, "Russia Heads Off Toward a Solution of Its Own," *International Herald Tribune*, 12 November, 1999, p. 10.

[61] See: G. Golan, "Russia and the Iraq War: Was Putin's Policy a Failure?" *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*, Vol. 37, Issue 4, 2004, pp. 429-459.

[62] See: K. Jibladze, op. cit., pp. 35-51.

who are actively involved in the mission in Abkhazia, while South Ossetia is monitored by Georgian, Ossetian, and Russian peacekeepers. Russia's military presence in the regions allows the separatists to refuse to negotiate a political settlement with Georgia.[63]

Besides this growing dependency, it has become clear that the energy instrument is an essential part of Russia's external security policy. This was further evident after it used this to force Ukraine to pay a higher gas price at the end of 2005.

The geopolitical importance of the Southern Caucasus is based on the presence of energy resources. Stability in the Caucasus is a vital requirement for the uninterrupted transport of Caspian oil and gas. The Caspian Sea region (the Southern Caucasus and Central Asia) has about 3-4 percent of the world's oil reserves and 4-6 percent of the world's gas reserves. In itself, the Caucasian share of global oil and gas reserves is not considerable. However, in light of the uncertainty over the reliability of Persian Gulf supplies, as well as the possibility that Russia may use energy delivery as a power tool, the transportation of Caspian and Central Asian (Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan) energy supplies to the West via the Caucasus has gained vital importance.[64]

The importance of the region has also grown as a result of the energy policies of consumer states in the West that want to decrease their dependence on resources from Russia and the Middle East. A number of states and organizations are making efforts to end Russia's near monopoly on the transportation of energy supplies in the Eurasian region by creating alternative pipeline routes to transport these supplies.[65] Thus, the Atasu-Alashankou (China and Kazakhstan) and Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) oil pipelines, and the Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum (BTE) (Georgia, Azerbaijan, Turkey, and Kazakhstan) and Nabucco gas pipelines (European Union, Turkey, Bulgaria, Rumania, Hungary, and Austria) are operating, under construction, or planned.

Conclusion

Russian foreign policy in the late 1990s was built on fake history and mythical poetic representations of traditional alliances. Foreign policy in this period was imbued not so much with an "essential ambiguity" as with a fatal dualism and appeared to operate at two levels: what Russia really wanted and what it was forced to do.

After Putin came to power, Russia's national identity discourse shifted to Eurasianism. According to the Eurasianists, Russia is, was, and always will be a Great Power. In order to secure this status at the international level, Russia is seeking to establish an informal empire and dominate over countries that were once part of both Imperial Russia and the Soviet Union, but are now deemed independent by the international community. The integration of Eurasia into the Euro-Atlantic community is unacceptable and Russia will ensure that this does not happen. Russia's location on the cusp of three distinct civilizations, Russia's own uncertainty about where exactly the country fits, and being surrounded by weak countries which could not prevent Russia's expansion for centuries have been important elements of Russia's self-definition as an unquestionable Great Power.

Russia's foreign policy under Putin is best encapsulated by Eurasianism, which is driven by geopolitical considerations. This concept encompasses key assumptions about Russia as a civilization

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[63] See: V. Socor, "The Frozen Conflicts: A Challenge to Euro-Atlantic Interests," *Jamestown Foundation*, 2004, available at [www.gamestown.org].

[64] See: A. Stulberg, "Moving Beyond the Great Game: The Geo-economics of Russian Influence in the Caspian Energy Bonanza," *Geopolitics*, No. 10, 2005.

[65] See: Ibid., p. 25.

that is unique because of its position between Europe and Asia. As such, Russia is a Eurasian power, the strategic goal of which is to stabilize the heartland and act as a buffer between the East and the West. Within this assumption is the belief that Russia has the rightful hegemony in the region, and the country is pursuing policies to this effect. Therefore, the idea of Russia's great power status is intrinsically tied to restoring Russia's influence in the Near Abroad.

Putin was a pragmatic Eurasianist who tried to reassert Russia's great power status, particularly through economic development. To do this Russia needed to have cooperation with the Western countries, particularly the U.S. The focus of Russia's foreign policy was post-imperial state-building. Like in all post-imperial states, however, relations with former partners and subordinates are uneasy.

Putin's new Foreign Policy Concept, replacing Yeltsin's document that some consider to be imbued with excessive idealism, stressed that Russia's policy should be rational and realistic and designed to serve Russian economic and political interests; and Russia should pay special attention to its Near Abroad. The emphasis in relations with the CIS shifted from multilateralism to bilateralism, a change that Putin adhered to throughout his leadership, while the need to protect Russian ethnic minorities in the former Soviet states was regarded as a tool for Russia to preserve its influence and its presence in the region.

The great strategic problem facing Russia was the challenge of foreign policy diversification by its former fraternal Soviet states. Some of them, like Georgia, are driven by an intense desire to sever the connection between themselves and Russia. Therefore, it became apparent that the CIS had failed to become the great counter-European institution that some in Moscow had anticipated, but it was far less clear what would take its place.

Fear of Russian domination from the very beginning prompted countries like Ukraine to impede the institutional and political development of the CIS, while all (with the exception of Belarus) actively diversified links away from Russia toward the West and regional powers. In security affairs, NATO membership became the open aspiration of countries such as Georgia, Ukraine, and Azerbaijan.

Russia's reaction to NATO expansion can be explained by the indirect security threat this poses to Russia. Russia's conquest of the Northern Caucasus (its sovereignty borders) depended on Russia controlling the Southern Caucasus. When the Soviet Union collapsed, a similar pattern emerged; before attempting to subdue the Chechen separatists, Russia first secured its position in Georgia.

During his presidency, Putin tried to convince the rest of the world that the Near Abroad is still Russia's sphere of influence and that they should recognize it. Pursuing this goal as a fundamental aim of its foreign policy, Russia has tried to use three-dimensional tools: economic (as an energy supplier), political (support the Soviet elites in the Central Asia and Caucasus countries), and military presence (as peacekeeper) to keep these countries under its influence. It seems that Putin was successful about Russia's foreign policy goals.