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Author(s): Paul Kubicek

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Russian Foreign Policy and the West

PAUL KUBICEK

To many observers, both inside and outside Russia, Russian foreign policy is inchoate, difficult to define, even more so to predict, and harder still to respond to in a consistent and coherent fashion. Since 1991, its general pattern has swung from one of cooperation with the West to one of direct confrontation over issues such as Bosnia, NATO expansion, and Russia's assertion of a sphere of influence in other post-Soviet states. Why this shift has occurred and how the West should respond have become important policy questions.

Many locate the source of change and confusion in Russia's turbulent domestic politics. Alexei Arbatov flatly declared, "Present-day Russian domestic political conflicts and Russia's foreign policy uncertainties are closely intertwined," and this conclusion has been echoed by many others.¹ When considering an appropriate Western response, one might therefore suggest that if the source of Russian policy is at the domestic level, then the West must try to influence as best it can Russian domestic politics to strengthen the position of pro-Western, democratic reformers. This, many would claim, can best be done by pursuing a wide-ranging partnership with Russia.

Not all would agree with this analysis or prescription. Citing the apparent success of the cold war containment policy and still suspicious of Moscow's intentions, one might argue that the West should be cautious in pursuing partnership and instead act more confidently in asserting its own interests and power. According to this line of thought, Russia cannot challenge the West. Launching a preventive war is out of the question. Faced with a determined Western policy, Russia, regardless of the political configuration in Moscow, will be forced

¹ Alexei Arbatov, "Russia's Foreign Policy Alternatives," *International Security* 18 (Fall 1993): 5–43, at 5. See also Alexander Kozhemiakin, "Democratization and Foreign Policy Change," *Review of International Studies* 23 (Spring 1997): 49–74; and Vitalii Tretyakov, "Vneshnaia politika Rossii," *Nezavisimaia gazeta*, 2 February 1994.

PAUL KUBICEK is visiting assistant professor of political science at the University of Wyoming. He has written many articles on postcommunist politics and is author of *Unbroken Ties: The State, Interest Associations, and Corporatism in Post-Soviet Ukraine* (1999).

to be more conciliatory and retrench. Cast in theoretical terms, this side would argue that foreign policy is determined primarily by the international environment, not domestic politics, and that a more assertive policy will produce a more cooperative and moderate Russia.

Who is right? Is Russian foreign policy hostage to domestic events and forces or does it respond primarily to the international environment? How do these two levels interact? What are the results of Western constructive engagement and pressure on Russian policy? When Russian and Western interests clash, what should be the Western response? This article attempts to give answers to these questions by examining developments in Russian foreign policy in four important cases: Bosnia, NATO expansion, Ukraine, and the Transcaucasus and Caspian Sea Basin.

RUSSIA AND THE WEST: CONFLICTING PERSPECTIVES

While Russia has been embraced both in rhetoric and in certain international activities, as a partner of the West, there is debate about how far this partnership can go and how successful it will be. Considering the unpredictability of Russian politics itself, some have begun to question the level and nature of the West's engagement with Russia. This became most clear in 1993–1994 with concern over the prudence of Clinton's "Russia first" policy. It appeared again in debates over NATO expansion and American involvement in other former Soviet republics.

One school of thought, influential in both academic and policy circles, is that the United States must emphasize engagement and cooperation with Russia and do as little as possible to antagonize Moscow. The top priority—as stressed by President Bill Clinton, State Department officials Strobe Talbott and Stephen Sestanovich, and others—is cultivating democracy in Russia, as they expect a democratic Russia to be more Western-oriented and pacific.² Adherents of this line of thinking have faith in Russia's democratic potential, but recognize the fragility of Russia's democratic institutions. Consequently, they advise treating Russia with care, hoping that a benign international environment will provide more opportunity for democracy to take hold in Russia.

In addition, they tend to be agnostic about Russia's intentions and interests, arguing that these are not a priori givens but are determined by the relative power and preferences of coalitions, interest groups, and public opinion in Russia. As new actors gain influence over foreign policy, policies change to take into account their interests. Several studies have pointed to the intense domestic debate over Russian foreign policy and have identified various groups that

² This expectation is often linked to the democratic peace literature, although some have argued that democratization in Russia may not lead to a more peaceful state. See Kozhemiakin, "Democratization and Foreign Policy Change"; and Jack Snyder, "Democratization, War, and Nationalism in the Post-Communist States" in Celeste A. Wallander, ed., *The Sources of Russian Foreign Policy After the Cold War* (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1996).

have sought to influence foreign policy.³ The theme common to these works is that pragmatic nationalists have gradually become more influential in Russian foreign policy making, pushing aside liberal Westernizers such as former Foreign Minister Andrei Kozyrev. The more nationalist oriented figures, such as Boris Yeltsin advisers Sergei Stankevich, Andranik Migranyan, and former Prime Ministers Yevgeny Primakov and Sergei Stepashin, argue that Russia must begin to reassert itself as a great power, reorient its foreign policy toward other former Soviet republics in the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), and establish some distance between itself and the West. The influence of this group has become more marked since 1993 and grew as nationalists and communists did well in 1993 and 1995 parliamentary elections, compelling Yeltsin to adopt more assertive stances abroad in order to bolster his position. This shift in turn has worried many Western observers, who fear the consequences of a more confrontational Russia.

Finally, this school of thought often makes a connection between Western policy and developments in the Russian domestic political arena. The general proposition is that if reformers are in power, a hard-line Western policy will discredit the leadership and bolster opposition hard-liners and nationalists. Some saw this cause-effect relationship as early as 1993, and the NATO expansion debate centered on this concern.⁴ On the other hand, a policy of engagement with a reformist, Western-oriented leadership, based upon the principle of reciprocity, would vindicate the position of the leadership and help disarm its opponents. Finding the current Russian leadership generally pro-reform and pro-West, or, at any rate, more so than its leading rivals, many would argue for treating Russia softly in order to strengthen their domestic position.

The other school of thought, occasionally drawing on the lessons of containment, is less sanguine about prospects for democracy in Russia and cooperation between Russia and the West. While few see Russia as an immediate and direct security threat to the West itself, adherents to this line of thinking deride Clinton's efforts to establish partnership with Russia as a case of "idealistic opti-

³ The labels given to groups differ from work to work, and a particular individual's affiliation may be unclear or change over time. Nonetheless, the essential story is the same. See Arbatov, "Russia's Foreign Policy Alternatives"; Leszek Buszynski, *Russian Foreign Policy after the Cold War* (London: Praeger, 1996); Vladimir Lukin, "Our Security Predicament," *Foreign Policy* 88 (Fall 1992): 57-75; James Richter, "Russian Foreign Policy and the Politics of Identity" in Wallander, *The Sources of Russian Foreign Policy*; and Neil Malcolm, Alex Pravda, Roy Allison, and Margot Light, *Internal Factors in Russian Foreign Policy* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1996).

⁴ For academic analyses applying these arguments, see Richter, "Russian Foreign Policy"; and Matthew Evangelista, "Internal and External Constraints on Grand Strategy: The Soviet Case" in Richard Rosecrance and Arthur Stein, eds., *The Domestic Bases of Grand Strategy* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993). For policy arguments regarding NATO, see Michael Mandelbaum, *The Dawn of Peace in Europe* (New York: Twentieth Century Fund, 1996). Other respected foreign policy analysts, including George Kennan and Sam Nunn, also made similar arguments that NATO expansion would strengthen Russian nationalism and lead to a backlash against the West.

mism,” to use Zbigniew Brzezinski’s phrase.⁵ The hard-liners are more skeptical about democratic progress in Russia, wary of Russian intentions, and argue that the West can and should become more assertive against Russia. In particular, they tend to believe that considerations of geopolitics matter more than possible domestic political change, and they are concerned that Russia will find its fellow post-Soviet neighbors as tempting targets and use economic, political, and military coercion as part of an imperial impulse. This, they claim, would clearly be against Western interests, and therefore the West should temper any Russian imperialist tendencies by denying Moscow spheres of influence in Eastern Europe or post-Soviet states. In Brzezinski’s terms, the United States must establish “geopolitical pluralism” in the post-Soviet area. When Russian and Western interests clash, as they inevitably must on questions such as NATO expansion or Russian claims of hegemony in the CIS, the West must not be afraid to assert its own interests. Russian policy will in turn respond to changes in relative power and acquiesce. Moreover, one might even take solace from Russian and Soviet history in making this case, arguing that international defeats or foreign policy failure have actually led to liberalization at home, not victory for more hard-line forces.

THE BOSNIAN CONFLICT

The conflict in Bosnia provided a crucial test for both the West and Russia, as it was the first major issue in which Russia tried to forge a common policy with the West, and it was also the first case to reveal the strains in a pro-Western orientation. While the Russian side tried to maintain a commitment to an international solution, it became clear that the Russian position—especially toward Serbia and the Bosnian Serbs—was not completely in line with the West’s. Moreover, Russian policy in Bosnia became a matter of debate in the domestic political arena. One Russian commentary noted in early 1993 that, “One does not have to be a prophet to predict . . . that the Serbian card will be actively played in our domestic political games.”⁶ The fall of the Western position in Russian foreign policy and the emergence of more nationalist leaders were largely played out with the Bosnian crisis as a primary backdrop.

⁵ See Zbigniew Brzezinski, “The Premature Partnership,” *Foreign Affairs* 73 (March–April 1994): 67–82; William Odom, “How to Create a True World Order,” *Orbis* 39 (Spring 1995): 155–172; Stephen Blank, “Russian Democracy and the West After Chechnya,” *Comparative Strategy* 15 (January–March 1996): 11–29; and Paul Goble, “Turning the Cold War on Its Head: The Costs for Russia, Its Neighbors, and the United States” in Uri Ra’anana and Kate Martin, eds., *Russia: A Return to Imperialism?* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1995). All of these people have been associated in the past with the U.S. government or military. Statements by current Western officials are, of course, more subdued; but the subtle shift in Western policy, particularly with respect to former Soviet republics, is a reflection of this school of thought.

⁶ *Moskovskiye novosti*, January 1993, quoted in John Scott Masker, “Signs of a Democratized Foreign Policy? Russian Politics, Public Opinion, and the Bosnia Crisis” (Paper presented at the 1997 Annual Conference of the American Political Science Association, Washington, DC, August 1997).

The pro-Western position emerged in 1992. The Russians, eager to forge close ties with the West, adopted an impartial position with respect to Bosnia; actively worked in the UN and the Contact Group of the United States, United Kingdom, Germany, and France; joined peacekeeping efforts; and supported the Vance-Owen plan, which would have in effect partitioned the country. Most importantly, perhaps, the Russians forswore their historic role as protectors of the Serbs, agreeing to UN sanctions against the rump Yugoslavia. One analyst suggested this step was the “most telling example of [pro-Western] Russian foreign policy in its initial period” and noted that it was made in the face of Western unity on this question.⁷

As the war continued, this policy, largely the creation of Foreign Minister Kozyrev, encountered criticism. Russian nationalists complained that Russia had kowtowed to the West and abandoned its brother Orthodox Serbs, traditionally Russian allies. Others pointed to similarities between the Serbs and the Russians, both the dominant nationality in a collapsed multinational state that are interested in protecting their coethnics outside their current borders. Thus there was a link between Bosnia and Russia’s own CIS policy. In addition, many complained that the West was not adequately respecting Russia’s position, and that Russia should adopt a more independent line consistent with its own interests and in line with Russian aspirations to be a major power.⁸ The center of criticism was the Supreme Soviet, which passed resolutions urging Yeltsin to end the sanctions on Serbia and to veto any military intervention in the Balkans.

During this time, there was an obvious link between domestic politics and Russian policy in Bosnia. One analyst suggested that the debates over Bosnia were a “surrogate battle over deeper internal conflicts in Russian political life,” which pitted Yeltsin and his team of reformers against a more conservative, hard-line parliament.⁹ In 1992–1993, Russian policy reflected more of a balance between the two positions, with Russia still supporting international efforts to end the conflict, while both Yeltsin and Kozyrev complained that “one nation should not dictate to another.” Despite a brief respite in October 1993 when parliament was “dismissed,” reinvigorated criticism emerged after Vladimir Zhirinovskiy’s Liberal Democratic “victory” in the December 1993 parliamentary elections. Zhirinovskiy was no longer, despite what Kozyrev said, a “medical” problem for psychiatrists. His entry onto the stage both gave heart to the Serbs and forced Yeltsin and company to reevaluate policy in the Balkans. Kozyrev conceded as much in an interview in 1994, declaring, “The opposition has succeeded in exaggerating this feeling toward the Serbs, toward Belgrade. Now, whatever the reason is, it is a fact of life that a considerable part of Russian

⁷ Kozhemiakin, “Democratization and Foreign Policy Change,” 64.

⁸ Stanislav Kondrashov, “Rossiia otstaivaet sebja cherez Bosnu,” *Izvestiia*, 28 May 1993.

⁹ Lenard J. Cohen, “Russia and the Balkans: Pan-Slavism, Partnership, and Power,” *International Journal* 49 (Autumn 1994): 814–845, at 832.

public opinion believes that Serbs are the closest people to Russia in the Balkans, and they have to be protected. We have to take that into account.”¹⁰

However, Russian policy shifted not only in response to domestic politics, but also to perceived opportunity. The Western alliance, seemingly hopelessly divided over Bosnia policy, was unable to assert itself and was losing regional and global credibility.¹¹ Not only did this embolden the Bosnian Serbs, but Russian leaders also saw Western caution as a chance to reassert their authority in the Balkans. One commentator in the liberal-oriented *Nezavisimaia gazeta* suggested that Russia could use Western inaction and the troubles in Eastern Europe to build a series of “special relations” in the region.¹² Beyond the immediate question of the Balkans, the Russian leadership also saw a chance to reestablish great power status and subordinate NATO to other organizations such as the Conference (later Organization) for Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE/OSCE) and the UN.¹³

Russian influence in Bosnia reached its zenith in February 1994. After a shell exploded in a Sarajevo marketplace, killing sixty-eight people, NATO issued an ultimatum to the Bosnian Serbs to remove their forces from around the city or face air attacks. The Russians expressed consternation at the fact that NATO had not consulted with them prior to making this ultimatum. Zhirinovsky threatened that bombing the Serbs would be a declaration of war against all Slavs, and opinion polls showed that two-thirds of the public agreed with his basic position and 77 percent disapproved of NATO’s threat.¹⁴ Presidential adviser, Sergei Stankevich, suggested that NATO air strikes would make it impossible for Russia to be a partner to the West. The Russians were spurred to act to prevent a clear humiliation. In a triumph for Russian diplomacy, Russian Envoy Vitaly Churkin convinced the Serbs to pull back and suggested that Russian forces be deployed to monitor the situation. Perhaps dizzy with success from this gambit, Churkin suggested that the West should now learn that Russia is an equal partner, and Kozyrev advised that Russia would no longer listen to the West’s lessons and lectures.

This was to be, however, a short-lived feeling of confidence. In April 1994, after the Serbs attacked the UN-declared safe haven of Gorazde, NATO launched air strikes. These were predictably condemned by Moscow, and Churkin again tried to use Russia’s “special influence” with the Bosnian Serbs to

¹⁰ Interview in *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty Research Report 3* (15 July 1994): 36.

¹¹ A litany of works explores this theme. See David Rieff, *Slaughterhouse: Bosnia and the Failure of the West* (New York: Touchstone, 1995); James Gow, *Triumph of the Lack of Will: International Diplomacy and the Yugoslav War* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996); and Sabrina Petra Ramet, “The Yugoslav Crisis and the West: Avoiding ‘Vietnam’ and Blundering into ‘Abyssinia,’” *East European Politics and Societies* 8 (Winter 1994): 189–219.

¹² Vitalli Portnikov, “Rosiiia vozvrashchaietsia na vostochnuiu Evropu,” *Nezavisimaia gazeta*, 1 December 1993.

¹³ James Sherr, “Doomed to Remain a Great Power,” *World Today* 52 (January 1996): 8–12, at 9.

¹⁴ “Bluff Called,” *The Economist*, 23 April 1994.

avoid conflict escalation. He failed and lashed out against the Serbs for being “sick with the madness of war.”¹⁵ The Bosnian Serbs could not be brought to heel, and Kozyrev conceded that if the Serbs did not come to their senses, NATO air strikes might be necessary. Despite strong opposition at home, Russia ceded both the military and diplomatic offensive to the West while backing away from pro-Serb pronouncements.

This continued into 1995, as the United States began to exercise more leadership on the Bosnian question and clearly threatened to take sides by arming the Bosnian government forces. The diplomatic debate shifted toward the U.S. proposal, endorsed by Russia, for a Muslim-Croat federation. On the ground, the Serbs’ position was weakened after Croatian forces defeated the Krajina Serbs, and Bosnian government forces launched a new offensive. Moreover, Western policy turned increasingly militant, especially after Serbian forces overran Srebrenica and Zepa in July 1995. NATO responded with air strikes without consulting Russia. The Russian government lashed out, calling the air strikes an act of genocide. Defense Minister Pavel Grachev told his American counterpart, William Perry, that “the policy of ignoring Russia’s opinion on possible ways of settling the crisis is inadmissible.”¹⁶ The Duma passed a resolution demanding Kozyrev’s resignation along with an end to sanctions on Serbia and an embargo on Croatia. Some deputies even suggested the Russian government arm the Bosnian Serbs. Along with concerns over NATO expansion, Russian–U.S. relations reached a post-cold war low.

Despite this, the United States and NATO pushed forward, ignoring Russian government concerns and the clamor from the Duma. While Yeltsin tried to stop NATO air attacks by vaguely referring to taking “appropriate actions,” he found he had no leverage—on the Serbs or on NATO. Russian policy was clearly at a loss. One Russian report conceded that Yeltsin’s threats were all “bluster” and “hot air,” since Russia lacked the power to do anything.¹⁷ Vindication for NATO’s hard-line strategy came in November 1995 with the signing of the Dayton Accords, which were reached with minimal Russian input and were an undisputed triumph of American power and diplomacy. Later, Russian troops were included in the multinational Implementation Force (IFOR), and special arrangements were engineered between NATO and Russian command; but as far as Bosnia was concerned, Russia was at most a junior partner in the post-Dayton arrangement.

Ultimately, what influenced Russian policy makers? Ardent pressure from many domestic quarters to pursue a more independent or assertive policy was a constant throughout 1991–1995. During most of this period, Western indecisiveness also opened up possibilities for Russia to play a larger role. However, once it became clear that Russia lacked the necessary power over the Bosnian

¹⁵ “Pax Russiana,” *The Economist*, 19 February 1994.

¹⁶ Cited in Masker, “Signs of a Democratized Foreign Policy.”

¹⁷ *Segodnya*, 8 September 1995, cited in Masker, “Signs of a Democratized Foreign Policy.”

Serbs and a strong consensus was reached on a more assertive NATO policy, Russia was forced to relent and take a backseat in the Bosnian operation. In short, assertive Western policy not only brought a solution to the conflict, but it also reduced Russia's role in the Balkans.

NATO EXPANSION

The question of NATO expansion has been the most troubling issue in Russia's relations with the West. Russian leaders across the political spectrum have spoken against NATO's move east. Public opinion polls also find that most Russians are against NATO expansion. This antiexpansion position has been a constant feature in the Russian foreign policy debate since late 1993.

The reasons for Russian resistance to this idea were varied, but they are not difficult to uncover. For some, NATO expansion was clearly directed against Russia, constituting both a security threat and a sign that the West did not seek a genuine partnership. Similarly, others mentioned prospects of a new division of Europe, with Russia clearly on the outside. Many made a link between NATO expansion and prospects for a democratic, Western-oriented Russia, arguing that NATO expansion would bolster the electoral prospects of Russian nationalists and therefore create, not prevent, a renewed Russian threat.¹⁸

Given these concerns, the Russians presented a series of proposals that would, they hoped, prevent or limit the consequences of NATO expansion. First, they suggested that the CSCE, which includes nearly all European countries, should be transformed into a more powerful vehicle to maintain peace and security on the continent. NATO, the European Union (EU), the West European Union (WEU), and other Western organs should be subordinated to this pan-European structure, which could provide collective defense for all states. Second, NATO itself, the Russians believed, needed to change from a military alliance into a more open, politically-oriented organization. In line with this, the Russians proposed the East Europeans should adopt the French model, meaning they would become merely political members and not allow NATO troops or weapons on their territory. Kozyrev also suggested that both the Russians and NATO give security guarantees to East European states. Finally, the Russians sought a special partnership with NATO, one that would allow them to influence and even veto key decisions such as expansion. Meanwhile, Yeltsin and his advisers began feeling the political heat for their pro-Western orientation, as nationalists accused them of betraying Russia. Given the nationalists' electoral success in 1993 and the fact that they could score easy points on foreign policy, the Russian leadership was forced to adopt a more assertive stance in order to weaken Zhirinovsky's constituency. By the end of

¹⁸ Alexei Arbatov, "Russian National Interests" in Robert Blackwill and Sergei Karaganov, eds., *Damage Limitation or Crisis? Russia and the Outside World* (Washington, DC: Center for Strategic and International Affairs, 1994); and Nikolai Kosolapov, "Novaia Rossiia i strategiiia zapada," *Mirovaia ekonomika i mezhdunarodnie otnosheniia*, no. 2, 1994, 14.

1994, Yeltsin was warning of a cold peace and suggested that NATO expansion would bury prospects for democracy in Russia.

While the United States and NATO agreed to some of Russia's suggestions—the CSCE was upgraded in 1995 to the OSCE and the idea of a NATO-Russia Charter was approved—plans for NATO expansion moved apace. In 1994, the Partnership for Peace (PFP) program was unveiled, which was envisioned as a way to bolster NATO-Eastern European defense cooperation and perhaps as a stepping stone to eventual NATO membership. The East European states and many CIS states eagerly joined, and in June 1994 Russia, after intense domestic debate, grudgingly agreed to participate. Momentum for expansion grew in 1994-1995, but NATO, fearing that assertiveness might play into the hands of the nationalists or communists, delayed more concrete steps until after the June 1996 Russian presidential elections.

By the end of 1996, matters had come to a head. Emboldened by NATO's success in Bosnia, more confident of his Russia policy after Yeltsin's reelection, and mindful of his own domestic audience, Clinton made NATO expansion a priority and began to rally NATO partners in earnest behind this idea. Russians again cried foul. Anatoly Chubais, named deputy prime minister in March 1997 and a leading reformer, suggested that NATO expansion was "one of the worst ideas to be advanced by the West in recent years."¹⁹ Fellow reformer Grigory Yavlinsky agreed, warning that NATO expansion would only undermine the position of pro-Western reformers by constituting a psychological "rejection" of Russia from the Western community.²⁰ Yeltsin similarly grumbled that NATO was intent on squeezing Russia out of Europe. Others took a harder line. Russian generals issued a letter calling for Russian missiles to be pointed at the capitals of NATO members in order to force their leaders to reconsider. Some saw intensified Russian-Belarusian integration as a preliminary Russian step west to counter NATO's move to the east. The Russian-American "partnership," always wobbly, threatened to topple.

In May 1997, new life was breathed into this moribund creation. Russian and NATO leaders signed a new Founding Act, which was designed to placate some Russian concerns while ensuring a timely expansion of the alliance. NATO stated that it had no intention to deploy nuclear weapons in the new member states, and a joint NATO-Russia Council was established to be a venue of consultation between the two sides. NATO also pledged to reopen the question of amending the Conventional Forces in Europe Treaty (CFE) to take into account both expansion and broader Russian concerns. While the Founding Act admittedly does give Russia a voice, it is obviously not the veto that Yeltsin had previously demanded. While Yeltsin tried to save face with this document, claiming that even though NATO expansion did run counter to the cause of peace in Europe, he had managed to make NATO take into ac-

¹⁹ "Russia's Surly Answer to NATO," *The Economist*, 1 February 1997.

²⁰ Comments in "The NATO Distraction," *Transitions* (Prague) 3 (21 March 1997): 32-34.

count Russia's legitimate interests. But he was subjected to scathing criticism. For example, Alexander Lebed, perhaps positioning himself as Yeltsin's successor, argued that this new charter signified a new Yalta, one in which Russia is a "defeated party signing its act of capitulation."²¹

Despite all the efforts made to stop NATO expansion or to give Russia a say over this decision, NATO went ahead with its plans, and the Russian side largely caved in. Was this change precipitated by any changes in Russian domestic politics? It is hard to find any evidence for this. Russian opposition was virtually universal, and even in the end Yeltsin maintained that he was still opposed to the idea. The Russian side was basically forced to back down. Moscow could not restore the influence it had lost in Central Europe. NATO's will was determined, and various Russian efforts to sabotage expansion or water down NATO were rejected. A military response clearly was out of the question, the mad ravings of Zhirinovskiy and company aside.

RUSSIAN POLICY IN THE NEAR ABROAD

Russia's relations with the former Soviet republics have a prominent and special place in its foreign policy, as well as perhaps providing a crucial set of cases for its broader relationship with the West. Their importance is assured by a number of factors: fears that the various conflicts in these states might have repercussions for Russia, the desire to preserve economic ties, the need for Russia to find reliable allies, and interest in protecting the approximately twenty-five million Russians living outside Russia's present borders. Their special status is exemplified by use of the term "near abroad" (*blizhnee zarubezh'e*) to describe the non-Russian post-Soviet space, which implies (ominously, to some) that these countries are not "as foreign" as others and therefore may be subject to different rules or treatment. Some have posited a Russian Monroe Doctrine for these states, meaning that they are under Russia's sphere of influence.²² Russian interest in the near abroad has coincided with the rise of nationalist forces in Russian politics, and there is a clear connection between more vocal rhetoric from the nationalist-communist flank and renewed Russian assertiveness in the region. These developments have clearly alarmed Western observers and supplied more ammunition for skeptics of Western-Russian partnership. Western policy gradually has become more active and assertive to counter Russian influence, with the result that Russian behavior has become more moderate.

Ukraine

Among Russia's relations with all the former Soviet republics, those with Ukraine are of paramount importance. This is not only because Ukraine is the

²¹ "Russia-NATO . . . Well, Almost Everybody," *Transitions* 4 (July 1997): 12–13, at 13.

²² Andranik Migranyan "Rossiya i blizhnee zarubezh'e," *Nezavisimaia gazeta*, 18 January 1994.

second largest ex-Soviet state and because of its strategic location vis-à-vis Europe, but also because Ukraine occupies a special place in Russian history, culture, psyche, and identity. Both states claim the one thousand year-old heritage of Kievan Rus', and their histories are intertwined with each other. The nature of centuries of Russian-Ukrainian interaction is the matter of some dispute: Was it imperialist or mutually beneficial? But there is no doubt that many Russians view Ukraine and Ukrainians as an essential part of themselves. For example, Nikolai Travkin opined that, "History requires that Russia's relations with Ukraine be qualitatively different from its relations with other foreign countries."²³ Other political figures, including Alexander Solzhenitsyn and Zhirinovskiy, have been more explicit in their statements, claiming that Ukraine naturally should become part of a greater Slavic state with Russia. Moreover, this sentiment finds wide support among Russians. For example, a 1993 survey found that 72 percent of those queried agreed that Ukraine must be reunited with Russia.²⁴

More ominously, as far as many Ukrainians are concerned, these beliefs manifest themselves in Russian policy that threatens Ukraine's status as a sovereign state. The most conspicuous examples, perhaps, were 1992 and 1993 declarations of the Russian Supreme Soviet that declared the 1954 transfer of Crimea to Ukraine invalid and maintained that Sevastopol, the headquarters of the Black Sea Fleet, was part of the Russian Federation. Both received wide support across the Russian political spectrum. While more aggressive nationalist and military figures have advocated more direct pressure on Ukraine to convince Kiev that independence was a mistake, in 1993 even erstwhile Westernizer Andrei Kozyrev proclaimed support for Ukrainian-Russian unification while on a visit to Sevastopol. Ukrainians were rightly wondering if they had any friends in Moscow.

The key point for our purposes is that until quite recently there have been relative consensus and consistency in Russian policy toward Ukraine. Russia has strived for closer economic, military, and political integration with Ukraine, both within and beyond the CIS framework. Concerted pressure has also been put on Ukraine in order to make it bow to Russian demands. This course has been pursued vigorously since the dissolution of the USSR and has focused on several, often interrelated, issues.

The first of these is Russian territorial claims on Ukraine. The main area of contention has been the Crimea, which is two-thirds ethnically Russian and was only transferred to Ukraine by communist authorities in 1954. Many Russians see this land as theirs. In the previously cited survey, only one percent of respondents agreed that Crimea should remain part of Ukraine. In addition, there are plenty of home-grown separatists on the peninsula, and many accuse

²³ Nikolai Travkin, "Russia, Ukraine, and Eastern Europe" in Stephen Sestanovich, ed., *Rethinking Russia's National Interests* (Washington, DC: Center for Strategic and International Studies, 1994), 36.

²⁴ Data cited in Adrian Karatnycky, "The 'Nearest Abroad': Russia's Relations with Ukraine and Belarus" in Ra'anan and Martin, eds., *Russia: A Return to Imperialism?* 73.

Moscow of fanning the flames in order to gain power vis-à-vis Kiev.²⁵ Ukrainians also fear the spread of separatism in other regions bordering Russia, where there is a high population of ethnic Russians and Russian is the most common medium of communication.²⁶ In addition, there is the more general recognition of Russia's recognition of Ukraine's current borders. Until very recently, Russia was not willing to sign a basic treaty with Ukraine that would forever renounce all territorial claims. The Russian position, expressed by Yeltsin in January 1993, was that Russia would recognize Ukraine's borders within the CIS framework, implying that the border question could be reexamined should Ukraine withdraw from the CIS. As Russian-Ukrainian relations deteriorated in 1992–1993, some Russian diplomats even began suggesting that there was no need for Western countries to upgrade their facilities in Kiev, since the days of Ukrainian independence were numbered.

The second issue of contention has been division of the Black Sea Fleet. In April 1992, Ukrainian President Leonid Kravchuk nationalized the fleet, but in principle agreed to a future 50/50 division with Russia, subject to negotiations. Numerous meetings between Yeltsin and Kravchuk addressed this issue, with the Russian side not only insisting on control of the fleet but basing rights for its own personnel. In June 1993, the two sides agreed to begin division of the fleet and established leasing rights for the Russians in Crimea. In September 1993, however, the Russians upped the ante, and Yeltsin himself took a harder line, demanding the Ukrainians “sell” their share to Russians to pay for mounting energy debts. He hedged on earlier pledges to consider Sevastopol as part of Ukraine.²⁷ Under domestic pressure, Kravchuk renounced the “bargain” he had made with Yeltsin. Talks continued, with each side accusing the other of backing away from earlier pledges. Real movement toward a final solution was only made in 1996.

A third issue is the Russian-Ukrainian economic relationship. Russia envisions a close economic relationship between it and other CIS states, seeking to reestablish the common Soviet economic space. Ukrainian leaders have balked at this, fearing a diminution in sovereignty; and they have been willing to pay the economic consequences.²⁸ These have been most dire with respect to energy. As Ukraine's debts have grown to several billion dollars, Russia has reduced gas supplies, making Ukrainian winters even more difficult. Energy issues have also been linked to those of the Black Sea Fleet and nuclear missiles.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 76.

²⁶ Surveys conducted in 1994 found that a majority of respondents in the regions of Crimea, Donetsk, Lubansk, Mykolaiv, and Sumy (all bordering Russia) favor a union with Russia. See Roman Laba, “The Russian-Ukraine Conflict: State, Nation, and Identity,” *European Security* 4 (Autumn 1995): 457–487, at 475.

²⁷ Bohdan Nahaylo, “The Massandra Summit and Ukraine,” *RFE/RL Research Report* 2 (17 September 1993): 1–6.

²⁸ Paul D’Anieri, “Interdependence and Sovereignty in the Ukrainian-Russian Relationship,” *European Security* 4 (Winter 1995): 603–621.

Still, Ukrainian leaders resisted the pressure, denouncing economic diktat and agreeing in September 1993 to only associate membership in the CIS economic structure, which means that cooperation with the CIS is strictly voluntary.

A final set of issues involves the military and Ukrainian possession of Soviet nuclear weapons. After the collapse of the USSR, Ukraine immediately began constructing its own national army and showed no interest in military integration into the CIS. It resisted Russian entreaties for defense cooperation, but a special area of concern was the strategic nuclear forces that Kiev had inherited. Initially, the weapons were placed under joint CIS command, and Kiev was given veto power over their possible use. In 1992, however, the Russian side claimed sole ownership of these weapons, which required that Ukraine either give up the weapons or allow Russian personnel to be based in Ukraine to maintain and oversee them. Both these proposals were unacceptable to Ukrainian leaders across the political spectrum, especially in light of Russian declarations on Crimea and the Black Sea Fleet. The foreign minister declared, "Ukraine cannot agree to this [Russian control] since its sovereignty and its economic interests are at stake."²⁹ In October 1993, the Ukrainian parliament proclaimed Ukraine's intention to become a nuclear-free state while also declaring the existing weapons to be Ukraine's property. The West, it should be mentioned, took sides in this dispute, and punished what it considered to be Ukrainian intransigence by denying it aid and refusing to offer security guarantees until the weapons were removed. By 1994, this diplomatic isolation, combined with Russian pressure on other issues and a failing economy, led some to question the continued viability of the Ukrainian state.³⁰

In 1994, some in Russia thought that the policy of pressure on Ukraine finally paid off. Leonid Kuchma, promising to defend the interests of the largely pro-Russian industrial lobby and build "Fewer Walls, More Bridges" with Russia, was elected president. Many thought that Kuchma would pursue integration with Moscow and bow to many of its demands in Crimea.

Yet these expectations (or fears, for many Ukrainians) were not realized. Kuchma proved to be an adroit bargainer and continued to defend Ukrainian sovereignty against Russian assaults. While he did agree to dismantle the weapons and sign the Nonproliferation Treaty, these acts were clearly done more with Washington in mind. In return, he won a highly publicized trip to Washington and gained Western aid for his economic reform program. By 1997, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) had supplied Ukraine with some \$3.5 billion in aid, and Ukraine was the third highest recipient—after Israel and Egypt—of U.S. foreign aid. Just as importantly, Kuchma was given security guarantees and invited to join the Partnership for Peace, in which Ukraine was the first CIS country to enter. By 1996, Ukraine was receiving solid support

²⁹ *Ukrinform-TASS*, 3 June 1993, quoted in Olga Alexandrova, "Russia as a Factor in Ukrainian Security Concepts," *Aussenpolitik* 45 (no. 1 1994): 68–78, at 75.

³⁰ Boris Rumer, "Will Ukraine Return to Russia?" *Foreign Policy* 96 (Fall 1994): 129–144.

from the West; and in 1997 Kuchma even proposed an “11 + 1” arrangement for the CIS, dropping Ukraine’s status from associate to observer. Some even see Ukraine heading a new bloc (together with Georgia, Azerbaijan, and Moldova) to counter Russian influence in the CIS.³¹

Russia had no forceful response to this change in Ukrainian policy. When Kuchma reasserted Kiev’s control over Crimea in early 1995 by dismissing the region’s president and parliament, Moscow maintained that this was an internal Ukrainian affair. Linkage between Ukrainian debts and Crimea was dropped, and the debts were successfully rescheduled in 1995. By late summer 1996, preparations were made for both a treaty on borders and division of the Black Sea Fleet. In May 1997, after another delay, Yeltsin made his long awaited and oft-postponed trip to Kiev, signing agreements on both counts; he also agreed on provisions on Ukrainian debt and removed various trade barriers with Ukraine. While both sides do stand to benefit, one detailed report suggested that the agreements are highly favorable to Ukraine, in some ways better than those the Russians backed away from eight months earlier.³²

What explains this shift in Russian policy from pressure and confrontation to one of cooperation and compromise? How was it possible that Ukraine has been able to secure a rather favorable deal from Russia and assert its independence? It is hard to find an explanation rooted in Russia’s domestic politics. There has been no clear coalition shift on issues relating to policy in the CIS or more specifically with Ukraine. When the initial breakthroughs occurred in 1995, there was still strong pressure and interest in a more assertive Russian policy in the near abroad, as Russia geared up for another round of elections. One proffered explanation, that Russia was bogged down in Chechnya and therefore unwilling to assert itself versus Ukraine,³³ seems ad hoc and is not consistent with other simultaneous cases of Russia’s assertiveness, including continued intervention in the Nagorno-Karabakh dispute, pressure of Central Asian states to recognize rights of ethnic Russian minorities, and wooing of Belarus to join a new union with Russia. Moreover, even in October 1996, one still finds the Russian Duma “virtually unanimously” voting to maintain a united Black Sea Fleet and control over Sevastopol. This was backed by Foreign Minister Primakov as well as visible political figures such as Aleksandr Lebed and Moscow Mayor Yurii Luzhkov.³⁴

Rather, if we look at what really changed, the obvious answer is Ukraine’s relationship with the West. As Kuchma cultivated political ties and aid from the West, he gained a stronger hand vis-à-vis Moscow. He used this to his advantage in February 1995, connecting Ukrainian debt rescheduling with IMF

³¹ *ABN Press* (Tbilisi), 4 November 1997.

³² James Sherr, “Russia-Ukraine Rapprochement? The Black Sea Fleet Accords,” *Survival* 39 (Autumn 1997): 33–50.

³³ See quote from *Izvestia* in Laba, “The Russian-Ukraine Conflict,” 466.

³⁴ Sherr, “Russia-Ukraine,” 37; and Taras Kuzio, “A Way with Words: Keeping Kiev Secure,” *World Today*, 52 (December 1996): 317–319.

disbursement of funds for Russia and therefore receiving Russian concessions. In 1996, as Kuchma teetered toward the Western alliance, backing NATO expansion and upgrading relations with NATO to special partnership (perhaps flirting with the idea of making a Ukrainian bid to join NATO), Russia found itself outmaneuvered. With the West firmly backing Ukraine—the U.S. Senate even applauded Ukraine for preventing the emergence of an organization to promote the reintegration of post-Soviet states—Yeltsin was, in the words of one commentator, “jolted” into addressing long-standing issues with Ukraine.³⁵

In 1991–1994, Ukraine was weak and diplomatically isolated, an easy target for Russian pressure. It managed, however, not to back down; and after 1994, when it could feel more secure due to better relations with the West, it was able to assert itself with Russia. Concomitantly, while Russian interest in Ukraine remained high, Russian power over Ukraine fell as Ukraine developed a greater range of political and economic ties that made, in essence, Russian threats less threatening. Many Russian officials, of course, did not approve of Ukraine’s tilt to the West, but they were not in a position to do much about it. By 1997, Ukrainian independence, insecure a few years ago, was virtually unchallenged; and this state has become an important buffer against possible Russian resurgence.

The Transcaucasus and Caspian Basin

The Transcaucasus and the Caspian Basin have also been and remain priorities for Moscow, as well as an area of growing Western interest. Russian interests in the region are several. One is the fear that regional conflicts (in Nagorno-Karabakh, Abkhazia, South Ossetia) could spread into Russia itself. In particular, some have spoken of Russia’s southern borders as its “soft underbelly,” and therefore they want to ensure that Russia maintains a strong military presence in the region. Second, the region’s vast fossil fuel reserves have attracted both Russian and Western attention, as many speculate that early in the next century the region will be second to the Persian Gulf in total output. Both Russia and the West have a strong interest in securing their place and limiting the role of others in this renewed Great Game. In the Russian case, this specifically means assuring its role both in exploration and as a conduit for shipping oil and gas to world markets. Finally, many in Russia believe that Russia has a special interest in protecting the rights of ethnic Russians and Russian speakers in the region. This has been especially pronounced in relations with Kazakhstan, where over 35 percent of the population are Russians, and many of these people are concentrated along the long Russian-Kazakh border. Some Russian nationalists even claim that this area is in fact Russian, and naturally Akmola, Kazakhstan’s new capital, is concerned that Moscow could easily stir up secessionist movements in northern Kazakhstan.

³⁵ “Russia’s Old Imperial Map Is Still Shriveling,” *The Economist*, 24 May 1997.

After the collapse of the USSR, however, Russian foreign policy was not overly concerned with developments in this region. Many in the Westernizing camp found the CIS states, particularly those in Central Asia and the Caucasuses, an economic and political burden, backwaters infested with authoritarian governments. They argued that it would be counterproductive for Russia to attempt to dominate them or keep them in a close union with Russia. They were also eager to purge neoimperialist tendencies from Russian foreign policy, believing that an imperialist Russia could not at the same time be a democratic Russia.³⁶

This policy was attacked by more nationalist figures in and out of government, including Lukin, Stankevich, and Migranyan. They asserted that Russia had real and important interests in this region that simply could not be ignored. In particular, they argued that the main security threat to Russia was conflicts along its periphery, and they suggested that Russia must fill the post-Soviet power vacuum and assume the lead for regional peacekeeping. Many also pointed to the need for closer integration within the CIS and hoped to achieve something close to the European Union. The Russian gas and oil complex also flexed its growing political muscle by pressing for integration of these states' nascent energy complexes with Russia's. In February 1993, Yeltsin addressed an appeal to the UN to give Russia special peacekeeping powers in the CIS. By April, the CIS-focused views of the "pragmatic nationalists" were enshrined in the Russian Foreign Policy Concept, and a corresponding Military Doctrine was approved in November 1993 that foresaw an enhanced Russian role in the region. By the end of the year, a new, more assertive Yeltsin-Kozyrev strategy became the prevailing line, one that defended Russia's "special role" in the near abroad but that officially eschewed "dominance."³⁷ Some, of course, feared precisely the latter outcome, thinking that Russia would use both its power and a series of regional conflicts to its own advantage.

These fears were largely borne out. In 1993, as Russian officials became more concerned about Russia's declining influence in neighboring states, more assertive rhetoric began to be supplemented with more heavy-handed policies. In Azerbaijan, President Abulfaz Elchibey had rebuffed Russian proposals on Nagorno-Karabakh. Russia responded by increasing aid to Armenia, and Elchibey even pointed to direct Russian involvement in Armenian offensives on Azerbaijani territory.³⁸ Elchibey turned to Turkey for assistance, and in March 1993 even signed a deal to build a new oil pipeline from Baku to the Turkish port of Ceyhan. Moscow was outraged, and many saw its fingerprints on a 17 June 1993 coup that brought former Politburo member Heidar Aliiev to power.

³⁶ The best source for Russian policy in this area is Irina Zviagelskaia, *The Russian Policy Debate on Central Asia* (London: Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1995).

³⁷ See Malcolm et al., *Internal Factors*; and Duygu Bazoğlu Sezer, "Russia and the South: Central Asia and the Southern Caucasus," *European Security* 5 (Summer 1996): 303–323.

³⁸ Aidyn Makhtiyev, "Baku obviniaet rossiiskikh desantnikov," *Nezavisimaia gazeta*, 26 February 1993.

Aliev then relieved a source of Russian concern by joining the CIS and temporarily ended talks with Western companies on oil and pipeline development.

Meanwhile, Georgia, which had also refused to join the CIS, became the next target. Georgian President Eduard Shevardnadze found himself in an unenviable position, as the militarily-weak Georgian troops were embroiled in civil conflict in South Ossetia and Abkhazia and also confronted with forces loyal to former President Zviad Gamasakhurdia. In early 1993, fighting intensified in Abkhazia, and it was very clear that the Abkhazians had Russian ground, air, and technical support.³⁹ Shevardnadze issued an appeal to the UN, but no help was forthcoming. In July, the Abkhazians captured the regional capital Sukhumi, which Shevardnadze had pledged personally to defend. In the following month, Russia's hand could again be seen in the resurgence of Gamasakhurdia's forces in western Georgia, which captured the port of Poti. Weak at home and internationally isolated, Shevardnadze had no choice. In return for a Russian-brokered peace and assistance against Gamasakhurdia, he agreed to join the CIS and allow Russians to maintain bases on the Black Sea. Learning his lesson, he even advised other CIS leaders to stop playing games with independence and to admit that all attempts to free themselves from Moscow would be in vain.

Kazakhstan, which enjoyed a more secure domestic political environment, escaped such direct intervention; but it remained subject to Russian pressure on questions related to mutual debts, use of the launching site at Baikonur, fuel resources, and its ethnic Russian population. In order to get its way, Russia would reduce Kazakhstan's energy export quotas on Russian-controlled pipelines and put restrictions on the export of other Kazakh goods.⁴⁰ The cost of such coercion was minimal for Russia, but it put severe strains on the Kazakh economy. Having little choice, Kazakhstan acquiesced to Russian pressure. Russia also claimed that the Caspian was a lake, not a sea, which, if internationally accepted, would give Russia effective veto power over Kazakh and Azeri offshore exploration. Moscow also lobbied for dual citizenship for Russians living in Kazakhstan, and in November 1993 Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbaev likened Russian pressure with that Hitler applied on the Sudeten German question. Nonetheless, in 1995 and 1996, a series of agreements were made to protect the rights of Russians and Russian speakers in Kazakhstan, and the two states also strengthened bilateral ties in a number of areas. In 1996, Kazakhstan even joined a customs union with Russia and Belarus, and along with Armenia it has been until very recently among the CIS states most strongly oriented toward Moscow.

³⁹ This was, of course, officially denied; but as one writer put it, the notion of Abkhazian tanks and Abkhazian air force is as absurd as the idea of a Mongolian navy. See Sergei Grigoriev, "Neo-Imperialism: The Underlying Factors" in Ra'anan and Martin, *Russia: A Return to Imperialism?* 5.

⁴⁰ Daniel Drezner, "Allies, Adversaries, and Economic Coercion: Russian Foreign Economic Policy Since 1991," *Security Studies* 6 (Spring 1997): 65–111, esp. 88–94.

How does one explain Russia's more active interest and aggressive role in this region since 1993? One answer is entirely consistent with the general domestic politics explanation given earlier in this article. The liberal Westernizers lacked strong support for their program both in the Duma and in the presidential circle, and many grew disillusioned with the naive hopes they had placed on the West. New interest groups and political forces emerged advocating more assertive action to maintain a Russian sphere of influence, especially in former Soviet states. Public opinion also favored a stronger, more assertive Russian role in the near abroad. Foreign policy changed as a consequence of these changes at home.

However, is domestic politics the only explanation? What can one say about power and opportunities afforded by the international environment, specifically the role (or lack thereof) of the West? Andranik Migranyan suggested that Russian activity in these areas could become more intense during this time because Western involvement and interest was low.⁴¹ In other words, coercion carried little or no cost. Russia found a very permissive environment for assertive action. Paul Goble concurs with this line of reasoning, arguing that since American policy in the former USSR was so centered on developments in Russia and the success of Yeltsin's reform program, Washington became timid in its criticism of any of Yeltsin's actions in the near abroad for fear of undermining his position.⁴² This was particularly true in 1993, when Yeltsin was in constant conflict with hard-liners in the Supreme Soviet. Another observer suggested that U.S. policy toward ex-Soviet states was one of "diplomatic triage," one that had decided that some (the Baltic States, Ukraine) were worth saving, and others, including those bordering the Caspian, were more or less a lost cause.⁴³ During this time, Russia had essentially a free hand to use against its weaker neighbors, as America "indulged" Russian "sensibilities."⁴⁴

In 1994, America's Russia-first policy began to become more even-handed. Recognizing that inaction might leave the energy-rich Caspian Sea under the Russian or Iranian sphere of influence, the United States and its Western partners began to pay more attention to the region. In September of that year, when Yeltsin visited Washington and again demanded that the West recognize Russia's special peacekeeping role in the CIS, Clinton refused, saying instead that Russia should work with the UN and other international bodies. In December, the OSCE voted to send a peacekeeping force to Nagorno-Karabakh, in effect denying Russia the unilateral right to intervene. During the same time, despite Russian objections and not-so-veiled threats, Azerbaijan signed a multibillion dollar contract with a British consortium to develop oil and gas fields in the

⁴¹ Migranyan, "Rossiya i blizhnee zarubezh'e."

⁴² Goble, "Turning the Cold War on Its Head."

⁴³ Paul Quinn-Judge, "Clinton's Russia Policy: Between Desire and Reality" in Ra'an and Martin, *Russia: A Return to Imperialism?* at 182.

⁴⁴ S. Frederick Starr, "Power Failure: American Policy in the Caspian," *The National Interest* (Spring 1997): 20–31, at 20.

Caspian Sea. President Aliyev survived a (Russian engineered?) coup attempt and, apparently undaunted, pressed ahead with more plans to involve U.S., Turkish, and other Western companies in plans for petroleum extraction and pipeline development. Despite continued Russian pressure, Western political and economic support for the once-isolated Georgian and Azerbaijani governments had begun to make a difference. Stephen Blank argued that “. . . [OSCE and US actions] show that local governments working with the West can moderate or even rebuff Russian neo-imperial pretensions.”⁴⁵

In 1995, the West became even more active in the region. Partnership for Peace was extended to all states, thereby giving them an enhanced connection with the Western security community. More intense discussions over new pipelines were conducted, with Western companies and governments throwing their weight behind routes from the Caspian to Georgia and Turkey, thereby bypassing Russia. Western investments increased, with pledged funds reaching \$30 billion in Azerbaijan alone by the end of 1997. Shevardnadze, Nazarbaev, and Aliyev all traveled to Washington, signing multibillion dollar agreements with American oil companies and also receiving promises of greater economic and security cooperation from the American government and international bodies. In 1996-1997, American delegations also made high-profile trips to the region, promising more foreign aid and investment, closer ties with NATO, and suggesting that “international” (meaning non-CIS) peacekeepers be deployed in the region. The United States also took a more active diplomatic position in both the Nagorno-Karabakh and Abkhazian disputes, subtly pushing the Russians off center stage and thereby decreasing the Caucasian states’ dependence on Moscow. U.S. paratroopers were even flown in nonstop from the United States to participate in Partnership for Peace exercises in Kazakhstan, a projection of U.S. power that most certainly tweaked Russia’s nose.

Now in a stronger political position, these states’ criticism of Russian policy has become more pronounced. At an October 1997 CIS summit in Kisniev, Aliyev flatly rejected creating a CIS committee on regional conflict and instead supported the creation of a special partnership between Azerbaijan and NATO. Shevardnadze has suggested a Bosnian model to resolve the Abkhazian question—implying a stronger role for NATO at the expense of Russia—and has made overtures to Ukraine in an attempt to counter Russian influence. Despite loud Russian protests, Azerbaijan and Georgia were expected to complete a new pipeline to the Georgian port of Supsa by late 1998—early 1999, which would loosen the Russian chokehold on Caspian oil. Even the once compliant Nazarbaev has adopted a tougher tone with Moscow, complaining about Russia’s heavy-handed role on Caspian issues, trade, and Russian minorities. He has also endorsed alternative pipeline proposals, including one that would run through China. One report suggested that the new turn in Kazakh-Russian

⁴⁵ Stephen Blank, “Russia and Europe in the Caucasus,” *European Security* 4 (Winter 1995): 622–645, at 625.

relations shows that Nazarbaev has dropped “kid-glove” handling of Russia while eagerly expanding ties with Western countries.⁴⁶

How is Russia responding to these changes in the Great Game? There has been obvious concern, and Yeltsin categorically stated that the West was trying to “nullify Russia’s presence” in the CIS.⁴⁷ Frederick Starr suggested that for many Russians, watching Western moves in the region is “like seeing Indians take back the prairie.”⁴⁸ Nonetheless, there is also a certain recognition among Russian policy makers that they, as much as they might want to, cannot issue a decree and squeeze the West out of the region. Focusing on the new strategic partnership between the United States and Azerbaijan, one Russian report conceded that “Russia will have to take that into account . . . and make concessions on many international issues.”⁴⁹ The region is no longer a colony, a “back-yard” belonging exclusively to Russia. These states are less vulnerable to Russian coercion, and direct military intervention is not a practical option, as events in Chechnya clearly showed. One report, written in late 1997 by two analysts who earlier endorsed a Monroe Doctrine for the CIS, concluded that Russian policy makers would now have to recognize “geopolitical pluralism on the territory of the former USSR.”⁵⁰ Vice Prime Minister Valerii Serov added that these new states were now in a “totally different position in comparison with their situation in 1992,” because now they had “freedom of choice with whom to build relations.”⁵¹ Gradually, Russia appears to be readjusting its policy and becoming more neighborly. As Moscow has agreed that multiple pipelines will be needed to ship Caspian oil, it has altered its position on the legal status of the Caspian Sea and is warmer to multilateral solutions to regional conflicts.

Ultimately, of course, Russia cannot be pushed out of the region. It is too close, and the United States is far away. But, as U.S. Senator Mitch McConnell (R-KY) told his Georgian hosts in August 1997, “The Americans are here to stay.”⁵² Put another way, Washington will not allow Moscow to dominate the region.

Russian foreign policy appears to be adjusting in a conciliatory manner to this expanded Western role and Moscow’s diminished power. Under permissive conditions, Russian policy was bullying, and weaker states caved in to Russian pressure. As these states improved ties with the West and thereby reduced their vulnerability, Russians were forced to either apply more pressure or seek

⁴⁶ Sergei Kozlov, “Bol’she ne budiet ustupok iz Nazarbaeva,” *Nezavisimaia gazeta*, 7 October 1997.

⁴⁷ *RFE/RL Daily Report*, (23 September 1997).

⁴⁸ Quoted in Dan Morgan and David Ottaway, “US Woos Oil-Rich Former Soviet Republics,” *Washington Post*, 22 September 1997.

⁴⁹ Asya Gadzhizade, “Moskve nado uladit’sia,” *Nezavisimaia gazeta*, 16 August 1997.

⁵⁰ Konstantin Zatulin and Andranik Migranian, “SNG posle Kishineva: nachalo kontsa istorii,” *Sodruzhestvo NG*, no. 1, December 1997, 1–2.

⁵¹ Quoted in Ekaterina Tesemnikova, “Moskva namerena pridot’ SNG vtoroe dykhanie,” *Nezavisimaia gazeta*, 18 December 1997.

⁵² “US and the Great Game in Pursuit of Caspian Riches,” *Turkistan Newsletter* 1 (24 October 1997).

compromises. After the events in Chechnya, it became clear to many that a hard-line policy or a preventive war would not be effective. Lacking the means and perhaps the will to be more assertive, Russian policy has become less aggressive in the face of expanding Western influence.

CONCLUSION

What can we say about Russian foreign policy, both in terms of how it is shaped and how it responds to the West? It is obviously true that there has been an intense debate about foreign policy in Russia's domestic political arena. In particular, pro-Western approaches have been attacked as being too naive, weak, and not consistent with Russia's interests. There was also a shift toward greater interest in the CIS, and foreign policy rhetoric became much more assertive. This coincided with the rise of more nationalist actors and forces at home, and this assertiveness is consistent with a domestic-politics explanation of Russian foreign policy, one of the bases upon which the pro-engagement camp builds its case.

However, the evidence above indicates that concerns about relative power and international constraints and opportunities do better to explain actual changes in Russian policy, and the distinction between rhetoric and policy deserves emphasis. In short, one finds that Russia acts more assertively against weak target states when Western policy is either disinterested or in disarray. In contrast, when target states become more powerful (often due to Western involvement, as is clear in the cases of Ukraine and Azerbaijan) or when the West adopts a unified policy that will brook no Russian opposition (as in Bosnia and in NATO expansion), Russia backs down from rhetorical threats and tries to save face by getting the best deal it can at a negotiating table. Notably, when Russian foreign policy undergoes this shift, there is no discernible change in domestic coalitions or even in public opinion. Nor does Western pressure automatically lead to a strengthening of anti-Western positions within Russia, as many academics and policy makers have argued. For example, in 1996–1997, as the West pushed ahead with NATO expansion and expanded links with some of Russia's neighbors, there was no noticeable increase in the political fortunes of Russian hard-liners. On the contrary, in 1997 the Russian government became more reform-oriented at home and backed away from confrontations with the West on foreign policy.

To put the matter clearly in realist terms, Russian interests, as reflected in actual policy, are defined more by power than by the position on the "winning side" in the domestic foreign policy debate. Russia has adopted a less assertive position in the CIS, for example, not because new interests and actors have advocated change, but because Russian power is insufficient to counter a growing international presence in the area. Russia acquiesced to NATO expansion because it would have been difficult and counterproductive to carry out its pre-

viously-made threats. In short, policy changes as a result of opportunities and constraints in the international environment.

The policy implications are obvious, if not perhaps a bit ominous. Russia is largely a paper tiger. It may be able to talk like a great power, but its capabilities are limited. When faced with a determined Western policy, it will back down. Conversely, Western inaction appears to give only encouragement to those advocating a more assertive and confrontational policy from Moscow. The West, therefore, should and can limit Russian power and influence by asserting itself in areas such as the near abroad and perhaps even get away with pushing NATO up to Russia's frontier. In short, containment worked, is working, will work. Or, to quote Lenin, "If you meet steel, stop. If you meet mush, push on."

This conclusion, however strikes me as a bit too extreme. First, Western policy should be tempered. The West has not simply shoved its policy down Russia's throat. With respect to both NATO and the Bosnian conflict, a sugar-coating of sorts was placed on the bitter pill, as some Russian concerns were taken into account. In the CIS, the West has wisely backed away from establishing a formal alliance or military bases, and is realistically trying to assert its own interests without pushing Russia entirely out. Second, one should not overstate the Russian threat. The mainstream Russian foreign policy of the pragmatic nationalists envisions a realistic partnership with the West and is not overly anti-Western.⁵³ The West, therefore, need not and should not try to isolate Russia. Finally, any Western foreign policy must recognize a host of mutual interests with Russia, above all preserving peace on the Eurasian continent. Where possible, the West must be willing to work with other states, including Russia, to realize these common objectives. Cooperation has produced results in Bosnia and Kosovo and must remain a priority. However, the West can and should continue to pursue a more balanced policy, such as pushing engagement with other post-Soviet states, even if this displeases Moscow.

This article has argued that while the West should not indiscriminately throw its weight around, Western assertiveness can be effective. We can do business with a pragmatic, nationalist Russian foreign policy elite. Carrot and stick schemes such as behavioral regimes to influence Russian policy and protect Western interests would appear to have a good chance of success.⁵⁴ The United States need not cede to Russia a special sphere of influence or give it a veto over NATO policy. Prudence is required, but the West can be confident of its ability to define and defend its own interests while pursuing partnership with Russia.

⁵³ This point is emphasized by Malcolm et al., *Internal Factors*, 87–88.

⁵⁴ Ted Hopf, "Managing Soviet Disintegration: A Demand for Behavioral Regimes," *International Security* 17 (Summer 1992): 44–75.