Regime Transition and Foreign Policy: The Case of Russia’s Approach to Central Asia (1991-2008)

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Abstract

In 1991, Russian embarked on an ambitious regime transition to transform the country from communism to democracy. This would be a massive transformation, demanding economic, political, institutional, and social change. It was also expected that the transition would result in significant foreign policy adaptation, as Russia’s identity, direction and fundamental basis for policy-making was transformed. However, it was an unknown quantity how transition in the domestic environment would interact with foreign policy and what the nature of these changes would be. This thesis examines the relationship between regime transition and Russia’s foreign policy. It begins with an examination of literature on regime transition and the types of changes that potentially impact policy-making in a democratising state. It then moves to examining the policy environment and its impact on the contours of policy in each of the Yeltsin and Putin periods, drawing links between domestic changes and their expression in foreign policy. How these changes were expressed specifically is demonstrated through a case study of Russia’s approach to Central Asia through the Yeltsin and Putin periods.

The thesis finds clearly that a domestic transitional politics was a determining factor in the nature, substance and style of Russia’s foreign relations. Under Yeltsin, sustained economic decline, contested visions of what Russia’s future should be and where its interests lay, as well as huge institutional flux, competition, an unstructured expansion of interests, conflict, and the inability to function effectively led to an environment of policy politicisation, inconsistency, and turmoil. Tracing relations with Central Asia through this period demonstrates the challenges of transitional foreign policy. Although an apparent ‘consensus’ on a focus on ‘near abroad’ partners emerged in the wake of rising nationalism and political conflict in 1993, it was never consistently implemented. Continued uncertainty, division, and unrestrained political competition, meant Moscow never substantiated opportunities to maintain or increase its influence in the region.
This situation changed drastically under Vladimir Putin. Economic recovery, greater agreement on identity and national interests, transformation of the institutional environment and the installation of a more managed, delegative form of democracy stabilised the policy-making context. The political system became more personalised and tightly controlled, while political liberalism and pluralism declined. A smaller range of actors influenced foreign policy and their involvement was more predictable and constructive, though less autonomous. Policy shifted from the previously reactive nature where it catered more to immediate political interests, to demonstrating greater coherence, consistency and long-term, strategic focus. The subsequent change in Russia’s policy towards Central Asia was significant. Putin saw Russia’s relations with Central Asia as part of an integrated approach to the world. He refocused relations to target economic and security considerations; areas of primary Russian interest and in which he knew Russia had something to offer. The greater coordination of a range of foreign policy actors and the growth of resources at the state’s disposal allowed for more comprehensive strategies. Importantly, it also laid the basis for a more significant future Russian presence, even in spite of the challenges presented by the more vigorous external activity in the region following September 11. Ultimately, Putin’s domestic changes meant that regime transition came to matter less in the formulation and implementation of foreign policy and allowed Russia to pursue a more successful foreign policy in Central Asia.
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Introduction

With the collapse of communism in the late 1980s and early 1990s came some of the most profound political changes of the twentieth century. For those states involved in the transition from communism, there were no roadmaps or prescriptions. While they could draw on the prior experiences of other states transiting from authoritarianism, no one really knew how applicable these experiences would be to regimes transiting from perhaps the most comprehensive forms of authoritarianism in the modern age. While there was much hope and expectation, postcommunist states—and the rest of the world too—were effectively stepping into the unknown.

If there was one state whose transition was watched with more anticipation than any other, it was that of newly independent Russia. So long at odds with the West, there was hope that change would open new opportunities for more cooperative and constructive relations with Russia. Of particular focus then, was the impact of transition on foreign policy change. What would the abandonment of communism mean for the way Russia interacted with the world and what would be the impact on global security environment more generally? How would transition affect its relationships with the Former Soviet Union (FSU)—countries previously ‘imperial vassals’ but now theoretically ‘equal partners’? And while many had optimistic hopes for what Russia’s potential democratisation might ultimately mean for its interaction with the rest of the world, what might happen in the meantime during the transition itself—given this could potentially be a long, involved process—was much less clear. Exactly how the process of transition might affect the foreign policy outputs of the state while Russia was transforming was something that was much less understood. As it happens, Russia’s transition has been far more tumultuous than many expected and the meandering of its foreign policy often hard to predict, with many unexpected twists and turns.

This thesis aims to make sense of Russia’s postcommunist, post-Soviet foreign policy in relation to the domestic transformations that have been occurring. The specific research question investigates what changes took place during the evolving
transitional processes, and then how and why they were expressed in foreign policy. It seeks to identify the broad range of impacts—both positive and negative—of regime transition on foreign policy, and then considers how these dynamics impacted Russia’s relations with the outside world.

Understanding how regime transition has impacted Russia’s foreign policy is important, not only because of the size of the country and its regional and global influence, but also because of the potential to better explain and even predict the course of Russia’s future foreign policy. Throughout the Yeltsin and Putin periods, traditional approaches to understanding foreign policy have often failed to explain Russia’s foreign policy choices and actions, leaving the outside world baffled by exactly where Moscow was headed. While analysts often refer to a nebulous set of influences broadly termed ‘domestic politics’ in explaining the many twists and turns in Russia’s post-Soviet foreign policy, less attention is paid to understanding precisely which aspects of the domestic environment have been influential and why. Instead, many instead revert to the old adage that Russia was inherently incomprehensible, perpetuating the belief that “Russia is a riddle, wrapped in a mystery, inside an enigma” so famously coined by Winston Churchill, and, by inference, the supporting the existence of some type of Russian ‘exceptionalism’. It is the position of this research, however, that Moscow’s contemporary foreign policy choices and actions are not some kind of mystery unfathomable to those outside of Russia. Ultimately, Russian foreign policy has been the product of its transitional domestic environment, and the domestic upheaval and change has actually been one of the strongest, if not the pre-eminent influence on foreign policy. Closely examining the domestic context and impacts of regime transition on political functioning, the economic and social context in which policy has been formed and actions undertaken, and the way in which external factors (or more precisely perceptions and interpretations of these events and dynamics) entered the transitional foreign policy arena, makes understanding why Russia acted the way it has much clearer. While Moscow’s actions may still be less than consistent, they are at least more understandable.

In terms of understanding Russia’s transitional foreign policy, this thesis investigates the impacts of democratisation specifically, given Russia’s initial
liberalising tendencies and stated goal of democratisation. However, it also considers
the impacts of the stalling, perversion, and even reversal of liberalising trends, given
Russia’s failure to successfully consolidate a representative democracy during the
period in question. Particularly from the mid- to late-1990s, analysis increasingly
focused on whether Russia could still be seen to be democratising, or whether it
instead was embarking on a process of ‘re-authoritarisation’. Clearly, as will be shown
throughout this thesis, Russia’s transition did move in an increasingly illiberal or
authoritarian direction. While this clearly accelerated during the Putin period the shift
did begin much earlier, under Yeltsin.1 What is important for this study, however, is
the question of whether this constituted one continuous transitional process, or whether
it was two distinct, separate processes. It is the position of this author that Russia’s
transition under Yeltsin and Putin did constitute one continuous process. As the
following chapter details further in the examination of key concepts of transition, the
process of transition can be seen to be over by a range of measures, but predominantly
when ‘normality’ returns to politics and there is broad acceptance of the ‘rules of the
game’ by all political players.2 Although Russia made vast strides in the early years of
its transition towards procedural democracy, with the formal institutions and many of
the mechanics of democracy, at no time did democracy consolidate as the ‘only game
in town’. Democracy remained highly contested and only weakly integrated into
society and political culture. For this reason, it is perhaps unsurprising that what started
as a transition towards democracy headed in an increasingly illiberal direction as a
weakly rooted democracy came under pressure from a range of factors and political
quarters. Given there was never a substantive consolidation of democracy and the fact
that transition is seldom a linear, unidirectional or inevitable process, it is best to
characterise the Russian experience as one transitional process; one that ebbed and
flowed between liberal and illiberal elements, but shifted from an early democratising
momentum towards an increasingly illiberal character. Only towards the end of the

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1 Freedom House, for example, publishes an annual assessment of political freedom. Countries with a

Putin period could any sense of consolidation look to be appearing to signal an end to transition. However, even at this time there was sufficient instability and uncertainty around the ‘rules of the game’ to see consolidation as tenuous and embryonic. Exactly what this regime was (democratic, authoritarian or something in between) remained contested—though clearly it was not a liberal democracy—and whether this was a permanent state of affairs or just another ‘bump in the road’ to democracy, also remained uncertain. For pessimists, Putin’s emerging regime represented the increasing consolidation of authoritarianism and death of democracy. For optimists, there remained sufficient fluidity and uncertainty in the system that this was just another twist in the tortuous, long-term process of democratisation and that all was not yet lost.

In tracing the links between the two areas of domestic change and foreign relations, the thesis focuses on Russia’s attitudes and policy towards the Former Soviet Union (FSU) with reference to the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) and Central Asia (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan and Tajikistan), specifically. Central Asia has been chosen as a topical area of research due to the growing strategic importance of the region in international relations. Moreover, as newly independent states, formerly a part of the Russian and Soviet empires, these are republics towards whom Moscow had not had a foreign policy for a very long time. Transitional foreign policy with the region was a new policy. Relations with the region had most recently, and for a long period previously, been domestic policy. There was no pre-existing foreign policy to maintain through the transitional period. For this reason, it is to be expected that policy towards the region would more clearly reflect at any time exactly where Russia was at politically. Long-standing, institutionalised views that existed towards other geographical areas outside the former Soviet Union and outside the former Russian Empire, more particularly, were practically non-existent. The emerging policy was thus likely to be more susceptible to impacts from the domestic sphere and an easier area in which to examine the interactions between domestic and foreign policy.

In applying this research question to the case of Russia, the thesis tries to pull together two areas of political research—one on Russia’s regime transition and the
other concerning the evolution of Russian foreign policy. To undertake this synthesised investigation, the thesis has applied an approach based within analytical eclecticism. Analytical eclecticism is an intellectual stance that researchers can adopt ‘when pursuing research that engages, but does not fit neatly within, established research traditions in a given discipline or field’. The primary proponents of this approach, Rudra Sil and Peter J. Katzenstein identify three characteristics that differentiate this approach from other scholarly, research traditions.

“First, it proceeds at least implicitly on the basis of a pragmatist ethos, manifested concretely in the search for middle-range theoretical arguments that potentially speak to concrete issues of policy and practice. Second, it addresses problems of wide scope that, in contrast to more narrowly parsed research puzzles designed to test theories or fill in gaps within research traditions, incorporate more of the complexity and messiness of particular real-world situations. Third, in constructing substantive arguments related to these problems, analytic eclecticism generates complex causal stories that forgo parsimony in order to capture the interactions among different types of causal mechanisms normally analyzed in isolation from each other within separate research traditions.”

Due to the fact that this thesis seeks to integrate an understanding of Russia’s domestic politics and transition (typically approached from one of the comparative politics perspectives) and its impact Russia’s external relations (typically approached from one of the international relations perspectives), pragmatic eclecticism allows the combination of a number of varied approaches, combining also elements of area studies and historical perspectives, without the potential confines or over-

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4 Ibid.
simplification of any one traditional approach that might not so relevantly apply to the other area of investigation.

This type of integrated approach is particularly valuable in the case of Russia’s regime transition. Transitional politics are motivated by a complex range of factors, with individual and institutional actors motivated in ways and for reasons that might not normally influence their foreign policy participation. Factors typically outside the foreign policy equation are also brought into play by the ‘hyper-politicisation’ and comprehensive political, economic, and social fluidity of the transitional period. Rather than relying on any one, over-arching theory or explanation, the eclectic approach focuses on exploring the complex interconnections, relationships and linkages between different types of mechanisms that might normally be treated in isolation. Here, it draws on a range of perspectives to explain events in both a country and a theoretical area that has typically eschewed predictable, easily definable theories. In doing so, analytical eclecticism offers valuable opportunities for more integrated, comprehensive explanations of inherently complex relations, where other individual scholarly traditions might have been found wanting.

Similarly, the method of process tracing suits the complexity of analysis of the transitional environment. Process-tracing

“The attempts to uncover what stimuli the actors attend to; the decision process that makes use of these stimuli to arrive at decisions; the actual behavior that then occurs; the effect of various institutional arrangements on attention, processing, and behavior; and the effect of other variables of interest on attention, processing, and behavior.”

Importantly, too, the method applies not only to understanding the motivations of individuals per se, but also to agents more generally. As a specific approach to process-tracing, the ‘analytic narrative’ approach is of particular interest, with its

reference to ‘rational choice’ and ‘game theory’. The analytic narrative seeks to understand “actors’ preferences, their perceptions, their evaluation of alternatives, the information they possess, the expectations they form, the strategies they adopt, and the constraints that limit their actions.” Such a focus on the motivations for behaviour and the interactions between different political actors is particularly relevant in the transitional environment, where the fluidity of rules and norms underscores the unpredictability of political behaviour and gives these relationships and interaction a heightened significance.

In this combined approach, the thesis analyses key academic works on transition, foreign policy making, and Russian foreign policy, focusing on links between the thematic areas and attempting to uncover overlooked factors in existing mainstream literature on Russia’s post-Soviet transition. Primarily it relies on re-interpretation of English language sources and the burgeoning literature on both Russia’s transition and its foreign policy. Access to scholarly Russian sources has been more limited in the research. In order to avoid miscomprehension of complex analytical arguments, the use of Russian sources has mostly been limited to primary sources, particularly news media and interviews with Russian scholars during three research trips to Moscow.

The thesis begins with an examination of regime transition and democratisation, specifically, in chapter one, in order to understand the nature, processes, and areas of impact of these changes. It explores the many changes brought about by democratisation and the ways in which these can potentially interact with foreign policy. It takes a specific interest in the changes centred on enfranchising a wider electorate within foreign policy-making, given these changes both differentiate democratic foreign policy from its authoritarian counterparts and appear to potentially provide the greatest potential of upheaval. To set the scene of relations with Central Asia before moving to modern Russian foreign policy, chapter two focuses on an historical overview of Russia’s relations with the region, from the period of conquest through to the collapse of the Soviet Union when the shift from domestic to foreign relations occurred.

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The thesis then moves the focus to an examination of the periods of Russia’s post-independence policy under President Boris Yeltsin and then President Vladimir Putin. Chapters three and six examine the domestic environment and foreign policy process under Yeltsin and Putin, focusing in the areas discussed in chapter one, to establish an understanding of the context in which policy was made. They demonstrate the changing way in which domestic politics influenced the constraints, opportunities, and resources (financial and otherwise) available to the leaders and their governments. Chapters four and seven then trace the general foreign policy outputs of this environment, in both a general sense and specifically towards the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) and Central Asia. They link the domestic environment to its expression in foreign policy and Russia’s successes and failures in the external environment. Chapters five and eight take the focus to the micro-level, focusing on key areas of Russia’s relations with Central Asia to provide a greater level of detail on specific policies and approaches. They aim to demonstrate in greater detail the same themes outlined in the preceding chapters. As the focus becomes more specific, the study hopes to demonstrate just how interconnected the domestic and foreign spheres became during the democratising period, and how the changing nature of transition, from democratisation to a less liberal form of change, also changed the ways in which the domestic sphere influenced or impacted Russia’s interaction with the world.
Chapter one
Regime transition, democratisation and foreign policy

Decision-making rarely occurs in a vacuum. In stable democracies, foreign policy is the end result of a process in which historical memories, contemporary pressures, and domestic political life are reconciled and turned into policy.\(^1\) It is to be expected that in a transitional regime like Russia, undergoing comprehensive and often destabilising change, such processes are affected and foreign policy outcomes will in some way reflect these conditions. This chapter examines the impact of regime transition on foreign policy, with special reference to the postcommunist and post-Soviet experience. It begins by defining important terms and processes, before discussing the demands of democratisation specifically, and the various impacts on foreign policy from regime change.

Defining Regime Transition

In essence, regime transition is “the interval between one political regime and another”.\(^2\) To truly define regime transition, however, it is also important to define ‘regime’. Regimes are not simply the concrete institutions of a state, but the widely recognised ‘rules of the game’, written and unwritten, that give form to political activity.\(^3\) Regime transition is, thus, a comprehensive transformation. It is more than a change of government or institutional reform—it fundamentally redistributes power and rights, changing who has the power to define rules and who has the right to participate in politics. Therefore, it should not be confused with less comprehensive forms of political change, such as liberalisation. Although liberalisation does redefine


\(^3\) O’Donnell and Schmitter define regimes as the ensemble of patterns, explicit or not, that determine the forms and channels of access to principal governmental positions, the characteristics of actors who are admitted and excluded from such access, the resources or strategies that they can use to gain access, and the rules that are followed in the making of publicly binding decisions: O’Donnell and Schmitter (1986), p. 73, and Philippe C. Schmitter and Terry Lynn Karl (1991), ‘What Democracy is…and is Not’, *Journal of Democracy* 2 (3), p. 76.
and extend political rights, it does not entail the comprehensive redistribution of power characteristic of regime transition. Though it may indicate the initiation of deeper changes, it stops short of transition in reform, rather than revolution.

Given this comprehensive scope, it is unsurprising that considerable upheaval characterises regime transitions. During regime transition political actors operate in an environment where fundamental political rules are undefined. While those of the old regime are being discounted and deconstructed, new norms are either embryonic or entirely absent. At the same time, even when conscious attempts to break with the past are made, the path of transformation remains influenced by past decisions, institutions, and organisations of socioeconomic relations. And while not everything from the past exerts an influence on the present, not everything gets left behind. Moreover, rules are not only in constant flux, but are often arduously contested; actors struggle not just to satisfy their immediate interests and/or the interests of those whom they purport to represent, but also to define rules and procedures whose configuration will determine winners and losers in the future. Such high stakes mean regime transition is also a highly conflictual process or ‘game’ that takes place on multiple levels simultaneously. Consequently, transitions often appear chaotic and are seldom linear. Diversions, setbacks, stalling, and reversion remain commonplace until consensus on norms of political activity is re-established.

As a specific regime transition, democratisation involves comprehensive transformation of authoritarian or semi-democratic regimes. Procedurally, democracy is a form of government where the leaders are selected by the people, through fair, open, periodic elections, ‘and candidates are expected to compete for votes. Substantively, it is a form of government based on the consent of the people and serving the general interests of the governed’. Both aspects are important, and for the

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purposes of this study democratisation entails more than simply the introduction of elections. Thorough democratisation combines institutional change (the form of the state), representative change (who has influence over policies, and to whom the state is responsible), and functional transformation (what the state does or the range of state responsibilities).

Democratic transition typically comprises two phases. The first, often mislabelled ‘the transition to democracy’, involves the breakdown of the authoritarian regime and the instauration of an unstable set of democratic institutions. The previous order is brought to an end and the most obvious signs of democracy—the institutions—are established. The second phase is the more complex, incremental process of consolidating the democratic regime. Thorough consolidation involves not just a commitment to democracy in the abstract, but also a shared normative and behavioural commitment to the specific rules and practices of the constitutional system. Broadly speaking, transition ends when abnormality is no longer the central feature of political life; when actors have settled on and obey a set of more or less explicit rules defining the channels they may use to gain access to governing, the means they can legitimately use in their conflicts with each other, the procedures they should apply in taking decisions, and the criteria they may use to exclude each other from the game. Elite groups and factions must agree on the worth of political institutions. They must be unified structurally by extensive formal and informal networks, which enable them to influence decision-making and thereby defend and promote their factional interests peacefully. They must moderate their behaviours accordingly, perceiving politics as

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9 For an overview of the transformation in what exactly consolidation entails amongst scholars, see Andreas Schedler (1998), ‘What is Democratic Consolidation?’ Journal of Democracy 9 (2), pp. 91-107, where he outlines the growth in what consolidation means.
‘bargaining’ rather than ‘war’ and political outcomes as positive, not zero-sum.\textsuperscript{15} They must also ultimately accept democracy’s inherent uncertainty, as well as be responsive, responsible, and representative. At the mass level, consolidation requires extensive participation in democracy’s procedural elements, that no segments of the population are arbitrarily excluded or prevented from mobilising to express discontent, and minimal recourse to corrupt practices that distort mass participation.\textsuperscript{16} Barriers to broad, meaningful political participation, whether structural, cultural, or even psychological, must be removed. Those previously guaranteed preferential political access and those systematically blocked from it should ultimately be equally empowered. Participation should also deepen and perpetuate democratic behaviours and attitudes. In the final analysis, consolidation sees democratic institutions and practice become broadly and deeply legitimated at the elite and mass levels,\textsuperscript{17} ingrained in the political culture so that leaders, the vast majority of actors, and society come to see democratic practices as “part of the right and natural order of things”\textsuperscript{18} and “better for their society than any realistic alternative they can imagine”.\textsuperscript{19} More than just an institutional framework, democratic behaviours and thinking infuse the country’s culture, delivering broadly representative policy outcomes.

While there is broad agreement on transitional processes, defining which factors contribute to success or failure is more contentious. A number of scholars argue that democratisation outcomes may be strongly influenced by the way regime transition is initiated and the nature of the process. While more contested situations are not without risks, O’Donnell and Schmitter suggest that democracy is actually most likely to emerge from stalemated situations. Where no forces hold a clear advantage, negotiation and the pursuit of compromise and cooperation are necessitated. These behaviours ultimately encourage a self-serving acceptance of democratic change and facilitate more successful consolidation. In their view, democracy emerges from an interdependence of conflictual interests and the diversity of discordant ideals, where wary and weary actors are encouraged to interact strategically.\textsuperscript{20} Samuel J. Valenzuela

\textsuperscript{16} ibid, p. 4.
\textsuperscript{19} Diamond (1996), p. 33.
\textsuperscript{20} O’Donnell and Schmitter (1986), p. 72.
similarly recognises the significance of conflict to consolidation. He argues that while consolidation involves the elimination of the formal and informal institutions inimical to democracy, it takes the form of a struggle between actors who benefit—or think they could benefit—from those institutions, and those who do not. Consolidation, or its derailment, unfolds through precedent-setting political confrontations that alter or revalidate the institutional and procedural environment in its perverse or beneficial aspects.\(^1\) Samuel Huntington also appears to agree on the value of confrontation. In his discussion of models of transition—transformation (elite led), replacement (elite collapse or overthrow), and transplacement (negotiated)—he agrees that while pacts facilitate smoother transition, they can undermine truly meaningful transformation and hinder substantive democratic consolidation.\(^2\) Ultimately, the replacement model, while more conflictual, has the greatest potential for meaningful change. Though never free of authoritarian legacies, the hands of new elites are less bound by those they replace.

Transitional experiences also suggest that founding elections greatly influence democratic development. For transition to be viable in the long-term, founding elections must be freely conducted, honestly tabulated, and openly contested.\(^3\) While few initial post-authoritarian elections are faultless, further democratisation is unlikely to occur when founding processes are highly flawed, corrupt, or pursued cynically. Overt manipulation or inconsistencies can undermine early popular confidence in democracy. Paradoxically, some argue that founding elections should also not be too accurate or representative of the actual voter preference distribution, particularly where certain political forces would likely be decimated at the expense of stability and future balance.\(^4\) To achieve democratic health, the need to ensure the continued participation of a vast range of political forces may actually outweigh desires to exact electorally-accurate, but crushing, defeats on political opponents. The behaviour of electoral losers is also important, particularly when power is transferred away from previously dominant groups. If unsuccessful political forces are unwilling to respect electoral


\(^3\) Ibid, p. 62.

\(^4\) Ibid, p. 62.
outcomes, either ignoring results or opting out of constructive participation, then the potential for continued transition, let alone eventual consolidation, is seriously compromised. Ultimately, broad, consistent, responsible, enduring participation builds the social and political capital required to advance democratisation.

Research also suggests that the choice of political framework is an important component in the democratisation equation. Constitutional designs are difficult to change and are likely to last a very long time.\(^{25}\) This makes selecting one that facilitates democratisation, or at least does not predispose a regime to failure, crucial. A persuasive body of research suggests that choosing presidentialism hinders democratic consolidation and creates a greater predisposition to breakdown than parliamentary styles of governance. Explanations for this centre predominantly on presidentialism’s dual democratic legitimacy, where both president and parliament can claim popular legitimacy, and its tendency to create deadlock and conflict. Their direct plebiscitarian relationship with the electorate may cause presidents to overestimate their powers, conflating their supporters with ‘the people’ as a whole,\(^{26}\) despite often not being the first choice of most voters.\(^{27}\) Minimal concern for legislative dissatisfaction often follows and, in the worst cases, dictatorial pretensions may become tempting, something which is dangerous in systems with authoritarian legacies. For their part, legislative branches with no responsibility for governmental stability may feel less motivated to cooperate. The opposition in particular may feel it has nothing to gain.\(^{28}\) Instead they concentrate their efforts on criticising, opposing and fiscalising the executive and its policies,\(^{29}\) even seeking their complete downfall.\(^{30}\)


\(^{30}\) Arturo Valenzuela argues that in the case of minority presidents political calculations may see a perverse logic set in which opposition forces soon perceive that their own political futures can be best assured with the political failure of the incumbent, a factor that significantly undermines
Perceived presidential dominance also introduces a dangerous zero-sum element to elections. Whereas parliamentary government affords electoral losers some representation and a stake in the democratic system, presidential elections offer no such consolations. Losers must wait four to five years without any access to executive power and patronage. Consequently, capturing the presidency becomes all-consuming and elections exhibit a ‘winner-takes-all’ mentality. Moderation, responsibility, and cooperation are often abandoned, as political actors mobilise whatever resources they can in an effort to capture and hold the executive branch.

In reality, for presidential democracies to be effective and stable, presidents need both good constitutional powers (the constitutionally-mandated powers at their disposal that allow them to shape policy outputs regardless of whether they head a party or bloc of parties that controls a legislative majority) and partisan powers (those related to their standing vis-à-vis the party system, where strong, consistent legislative support translates into increased ability to shape the lawmaking process). Where presidents do not control a significant share of legislative seats it can become difficult to assemble a stable coalition to enable them to accomplish meaningful policy goals, a problem to which fragmented, polarised transitional systems are predisposed. The combination of presidentialism and multipartism, too, where minority presidents are more common, only aggravates institutional conflict and the potential for destabilising political stalemates. In such cases presidents are likely to find securing political stability. Arturo Valenzuela (2004), ‘Latin American Presidencies Interrupted,’ *Journal of Democracy* 15 (4), October, p. 13.

33 ibid, p. 13.
cooperative legislative support exceptionally difficult. Although the combination may not be impossible to sustain, democratic stability hinges largely on the desire of elites and citizens to compromise and create enduring institutions, a difficult expectation in transitional environments where institutions are often weak, society highly polarised, and cooperative cultures of compromise absent. Where the bodies do not cooperate, presidentialism’s temporal rigidity—each branch’s set electoral periods that break the political process into discontinuous, rigidly demarcated periods—can be politically crippling. Presidents may resort to democratically questionable actions, such as pork-barrel politics, to secure support. Alternatively, they may become lame ducks, be tempted to act extra-constitutionally, or to pass new constitutional amendments which legislators in an already marginal position are likely to resist. Consequently, a continually worsening spiral of executive-legislative conflict may emerge, where consistent, chronic inter-branch conflict generates constitutional crises that undermine the very survival of democracy. And although numerous scholars have identified the importance of confrontation and discord in building democracy, presidentialism may simply tempt behaviours and actions too destructive for democracy’s long-term sustainability, aggravating conflict without providing the strong incentives for cooperation inherent in parliamentary democracy. In creating an environment that continually perpetuates polarisation and zero-sum competition, presidentialism typically fails to move conflict into the more constructive interplay required for substantive democratisation. Instead, the process is mired in an unproductive, unstable phase, struggling to gain traction towards consolidation.

Similarly, it is argued that sequencing impacts success. The simultaneous pursuit of economic and political reform, in particular, is thought to incur high costs for either the structural reform programme or the nascent democracy. Politically, the difficulties of

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37 Linz (1990), p. 54-5.
39 ibid, p. 218.
41 See for example: Jon Elster (1993), ‘The Necessity and Impossibility of Simultaneous Economic and Political Reform’, in Constitutionalism and Democracy. Transitions in the Contemporary World,
simultaneity centre on economic reform’s impact on state capacity. Przeworski argues that, since consolidation depends on the ‘self-interested spontaneous compliance’ of political actors who come to identify democracy as serving their long-term economic needs, the viability of democratic consolidation is intricately linked to economic performance.\(^4^2\) Market reforms, however, typically do little to facilitate compliance, given that they are often accompanied by unemployment, rampant inflation, resource misallocation, volatility in income distribution, and a faltering social safety net.\(^4^3\) Deteriorating material conditions generally undermine the incentives required to encourage politically relevant groups to process their demands within the framework of representative institutions, and increase the potential for self-interested defection.\(^4^4\) Reform can lead to a loss of faith in the state by diminishing the quality of public goods and undermining the public sector.\(^4^5\) Ultimately, democratic legitimacy can suffer through its association with market reform. Representation may also be compromised where certain groups are strengthened at the expense of others—typically business over labour.\(^4^6\) Democratic erosion can also occur when those most affected by reform punish elected officials, replacing them with those more sympathetic to their plight—typically anti-reformers intent on halting reform. Successful consolidation may subsequently depend on reformers’ ability to remain popular while instituting controversial economic reforms—particularly difficult where reform appears initiated by external agencies and international lenders with minimal scope for popular domestic input.\(^4^8\) Yet how politicians respond to opposition is also important. As security in office becomes increasingly tenuous, incumbents may be

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45 Grugel, pp. 88-9.

46 ibid, pp. 88-9.

47 Slantchev, p. 279.

tempted to buy support, sacrificing both fiscal rigidity (and typically prolonging upheaval) and democratic ideals. Democratisation can be compromised when governments attempt to bypass opposition, pre-empting discussion or resorting to rule by decree in order to push through reform. Przeworski identifies neoliberal economic reform as particularly troublesome on this count; typically characterised by tendencies towards railroading and autocratic management, where consultation and moderation are compromised and the popular component of democracy is undermined. Society is taught that it can vote but not choose, legislatures that they have no role to play in policy-making, and nascent political parties, trade unions and other organisations that their voices do not count.

Consequently, many political analysts theorists promote sequential strategies. Pursuing economic reform first, for example, may help governments to implement difficult structural changes while insulated from a reactive, demanding electorate. Chile and China are frequently used as examples of this approach. The problem, however, is that subsequent political liberalisation is seldom guaranteed. Authoritarians may even use successful economic stewardship to deflect democratisation pressures and justify perpetuating illiberal rule. Though less common, the ‘politics before economics’ approach also has advantages. Divorcing the two changes allows democratic institutions and behaviours to be established in an environment uncomplicated by economic upheaval. Economic reform may also benefit. In Spain, for example, drafting of the constitution, formation of political parties and interest associations, and regular meeting of the legislative assembly lowered the political risks of subsequent structural adjustment. While neither process was without controversy, neither was derailed by endless struggles over the other. Spain’s approach also closely approximated the so-called ‘concertation’ strategy advocated by Przeworski, Luiz Carlos Bresser Pereira, and José María Maravall. This strategy uses where consultation with capital and labour and compensation and

49 Slantchev, p. 280.
50 Grugel, p. 89.
53 ibid, p. 619.
incentives for groups most affected by reform to help shore-up support and to avoid the worst political upheavals during economic change.  

Unfortunately, however, most democratic transitions coincide with economic crisis. And although examples like Portugal indicate simultaneous reforms can be successfully sustained, the impact of more specific factors like underlying historical and cultural values in generating a more diffuse legitimacy, detached from nostalgia for the past, to insulate the transforming regime during economic stress, should also not be ignored. Higher levels of public patience and support for governments facing formidable problems, too, can increase their scope to implement challenging policy initiatives. Moreover, where there is greater universality of belief in democratic legitimacy and commitment to democratic rules and behaviours, regime efficacy in formulating policy responses to problems can be improved, increasing stability and the potential for successful transition. Evidence suggesting a correlation between the shock value of reform and level of civil society revolt, too, again indicates the value of a more gradualist approach. Allowing society time to adjust to more incremental changes may avoid the overwhelming dislocation that inspires reaction. The aforementioned success of the Spanish ‘concertation’ approach also underscores the value of some form of pacting in creating a consensus or accord to guide transition, notwithstanding longer-term risks for consolidation. Unfortunately, however, for transiting regimes that neither enjoy such political capital, goodwill, positive cultural attributes, or have the ability to defer economic reform while they establish a stable democratic framework, experience indicates that simultaneous transition will likely be a difficult task, as negative synergies complicate both aspects of reform.

57 ibid p. 77.
Although many authors have applied generalisations about democratisation to postcommunist regimes—identifying correlations with Southern Europe, for example—arguments have also been made differentiating the peculiarities of postcommunist transition. For example, while balanced, stalemated transitions were most likely to facilitate democracy-enhancing pacts in Latin America and Southern Europe, scholars have argued that in the postcommunist world they instead lead to instability. Where authoritarian and democratic forces are relatively equal, the result has not been democratic compromise, but protracted confrontation—unconsolidated, unstable, partial democracies and autocracies. In successful postcommunist democratisations it has not been obligation, compromise, or even interest that has created democracy, but rather an imbalance of power in favour of principled figures with a normative commitment to democracy. Conversely, where asymmetric relations favoured those with authoritarian ideological tendencies, non-democratic outcomes have been most likely. While other factors influenced the particular power balances, it remains this core division that has been of most significance; the domination of one group—whether democratic or authoritarian—has contributed to more stable, decisive postcommunist transitions. Thus, revolutionary transitions—those thought by third-wave theorists least likely to facilitate democratic outcomes—actually produce the most stable and consolidated postcommunist democracies. Similarly, when comparing the Hungarian, Polish, and Slovenian pacted transitions with the Czech and Baltic experiences where there was greater rejection of the past, Valerie Bunce identifies no particular reason to privilege pacting over mass mobilisation in successful political and economic transitions. Ultimately, she also identifies the ‘breaking’ method as having greater relevance for postcommunist transitions. By inference, she

59 Though this point will be further developed later, such factors include their simultaneous nature, the depth of transition required given the intensive socialisation and transformation under communism, the necessity of extracting the party from the state, rebuilding civil society from an often almost non-existent baseline, and comprehensively redefining national identity amongst others.
61 ibid, p. 85-6.
62 ibid, p. 68.
also discounts the sequential approach, arguing that political and economic breakage not only go together, but actually appear mutually supportive—a pattern also at variance with the experiences of Latin America and Southern Europe.\footnote{ibid, pp. 223.}

A potential factor explaining these contradictory outcomes is the significantly different historical-political legacies of the respective regime types. The role of the military is of particular importance. Typically the primary barrier to successful Latin American and Southern European democratic transitions the military was one of the underlying factors motivating negotiated transitions. However, the military has generally been a lesser threat to postcommunist transitions. Here, a tradition of civilian control had generally existed throughout the communist period and often for much longer.\footnote{ibid, pp. 210-11.} Although it was never an undifferentiated, amorphous, fully integrated ‘executant’ of the Party as some may have perceived it, the military was certainly an ally and guarantor of the civilian regime, protector of Party hegemony, and ultimately subordinate to civilian rule.\footnote{Veena Kukreja (1991), \textit{Civil-Military Relations in South Asia: Pakistan, Bangladesh and India}, New Delhi: Sage Publications, pp. 21-22.} Hence, there is a lesser need to placate the military and protect its interests via negotiated pacts. The potential for involving communist hardliners in some type of pact, too, has been significantly lower, given their antipathy towards liberalism, greater politicisation and the extreme ideological gulf between themselves and the liberals. The communists have also lacked military rulers’ opportunity to redefine their political involvement when ‘relieved’ of power. They have typically have nowhere to retreat to, no continued responsibilities, and fewer opportunities to compensate for their loss. They have subsequently tended to demonstrate less willingness to compromise, identifying every issue as a battle for political survival. Attempts to bring communist forces into pacted transitions have, thus, tended to only aggravate instability and conflict. Other factors, like the length of authoritarian experience, depth of communist integration into the state, and strength of communist ideology, have also created more formidable barriers to change. Unsurprisingly, then, Bunce argues that those nations that have advanced furthest in political consolidation and economic reform are those where the opposition forces handed the ex-communists a decisive electoral defeat in the founding election.\footnote{Bunce (2004), p. 223.}
clean break involving the comprehensive defeat of authoritarian forces by committed democrats thus appears to contribute more to successful postcommunist democratisation than any other type of authoritarian demise.

Within transitions from communism, there also appears to be some differentiation between the experiences of European postcommunist regimes and their post-Soviet counterparts. Although the transitions do share many similarities, as a variant of postcommunist transition, post-Soviet regimes do exhibit a number of specific characteristics and areas in which a greater degree of change has been required as part of democratisation than in the East and Central European postcommunist regimes. Of particular importance is the degree to which post-Soviet regimes have also been involved in processes of state- and nation-building concurrent with the political, economic and social transitions inherent in democratisation. Post-Soviet states tended to be ‘new states’, often created by the Soviet Union, with little or no historical reference point, previous experience as an independent state or cohesive national identity. The withdrawal of the Party left these states with weak state structures, institutions incapable of fulfilling basic social needs, and poor state authority, capacity and policy implementation. The dearth of robust state structures effectively left many in a situation of practical anarchy, in place of either democracy or authoritarianism. The pervasiveness of the Communist ideology, the longer length of integration within the Soviet Union, the geographic and cultural distance from democratic Europe, limited previous experience with democracy or liberal modes of political organisation, under-developed autonomous social organisation, and differences in the way transition was initiated (top-down versus bottom-up), are also factors that distinguish the experiences of the post-Soviet states. Particularly for Russia, the metropole of the former Soviet empire, these factors created an even more challenging and extreme set of incentives, challenges, and opportunities than for many of the European postcommunist regimes. Russia’s post-Soviet experience will be discussed further in the coming chapters.

Given these multiple, complex and interrelated factors that influence (and potentially derail) this journey and the fact that transition is seldom a linear, consistent process, it is useful to also consider the other potential outcomes to any liberalisation
project. Not every regime democratisation results in a successful democracy. There are
a range of eventualities, from the successful consolidation of a liberal democracy, to
failed democracy and re-authoritarianisation. One of the outcomes of specific interest
for those who do not successfully consolidate a liberal democratic regime, given the
Russian example this thesis considers, is that of partial democratisation, where
democratic elements are combined with authoritarianism to create some type of hybrid
regime. The concept is known under a range of labels, including ‘delegative
democracy’, ‘illiberal democracy’, and ‘electoral authoritarianism’.

One of the earliest scholars to identify this regime type was Guillermo O’Donnell. O’Donnell describes delegative democracies as regimes in which rather than seeing a
robust system of horizontal checks and balances, there are instead overpowerful
executives, popularly elected presidents whose power is constrained only by the length
of their term in office. These presidents strive to prevent any challenges to their
powers by continuously undermining legislative, bureaucratic and political institutions
capable of doing so.68 While such regimes may remain democracies in the broadest
sense of the word (retaining elections, though these may no longer be entirely free or
fair), they cannot be characterised as representative democracies:

“Although delegative democracies have the formal
constitutional structures of democracy, they are
institutionally hollow and fragile. Voters are mobilised by
clientalistic ties and populist, personalistic (rather than
programmatic) appeals; and parties and independent interest
groups are weak and fragmented. Instead of producing an
effective means of ongoing representation of popular
interests, elections delegate sweeping and largely
unaccountable authority to whoever wins the presidential
election.”69

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April: 34-51.
University Press, pp. 34-35.
Fareed Zakaria’s ‘illiberal democracy’ and Andreas Schedler’s ‘electoral authoritarianism’ effectively describe the same type of system. In the case of electoral authoritarianism, though these regimes retain multiparty elections, they ‘violate the liberal-democratic principles of freedom and fairness so profoundly and systematically as to render elections instruments of authoritarian rule rather than “instruments of democracy”’. While these elections are broadly inclusive, minimally pluralistic, minimally open, and minimally competitive there is such a high degree of systematic, state manipulation aimed at containing and controlling the uncertainty of electoral outcomes that they cannot qualify as democratic:

“Rulers may devise discriminatory electoral rules, exclude opposition parties and candidates from entering the electoral arena, infringe upon their political rights and civil liberties, restrict their access to mass media and campaign finance, impose formal or informal suffrage restrictions on their supporters, coerce or corrupt them into deserting the opposition camp, or simply redistribute votes and seats through electoral fraud.”

While there might be a high degree of agreement between scholars on the form of this increasingly common regime type, its nature and what it actually represents is more contested. Schedler (2006) argues that in the field of comparative politics, scholars have approached this question from three main positions: that these regimes represent ‘defective democracies’; that these regimes are ‘hybrid regimes’; or, that these regimes represent ‘new authoritarianism’.

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72 ibid.
73 ibid.
Inherent within such classifications, is also the question of whether these regimes are themselves sustainable, a transitional stage on the way to further democratisation or on an inevitable path to further authoritarianism. On one hand, O’Donnell argues that delegative forms of democracy need not be inherently unstable or temporary. He sees that while delegative democracies may not be either consolidated or institutionalised democracies, they can be enduring: many appear to be in no imminent threat of authoritarian regression, or of making further advances toward institutionalised democracy.\(^{75}\)

How stable this form can ever be, however, is debated. In their current form, it is questionable whether these regimes can be seen to have consolidated a stable regime, something that appears to set them up for instability and the potential for change. In terms of democratisation, although they do establish competitive elections as the official route of access to state power, they do not establish electoral competition as ‘the only game in town’. Instead, they establish settings in which two games are operating simultaneously: one in which ruling parties seek to control the substantive outcomes of electoral competition, and one in which opposition parties seek to dismantle non-democratic restrictions that impact their competition. These are ‘fluid, adaptive, contested games whose basic rules players try to redefine as they play the game itself’.\(^{76}\) Formal institutions do not represent stable equilibria, but temporary truces.\(^{77}\) Such continually shifting dynamics inherently create the continual potential for change, either in a more democratic direction as opposition forces gain ascendancy in competition, or, as some would argue is the more likely outcome, towards a continually more repressive direction. Hence, other scholars argue that illiberal, delegative forms of democracy are unlikely to represent a stable, permanent form of governance and do eventually tend toward increasing authoritarianism. In this vein, Larry Diamond argues that delegative democracy is not only a structure but also a process, which over time tends ‘to accentuate the enervation of political institutions and the personalisation of political power’.\(^{78}\) In South American examples, in particular, he argues the fundamental ills of delegative democracy—personalism, the concentration of power, and weak, unresponsive political institutions—contributed to

\(^{75}\) O’Donnell (1994), p. 35.
\(^{77}\) ibid, pp. 12-13.
\(^{78}\) Diamond (1999), p. 35.
the turbulence and poor quality of democracy and to the political cynicism and apathy amongst Latin American publics.\textsuperscript{79} In this view, then, delegative democracy erodes democracy and democratisation, laying the path for authoritarian reversals.

**The Russian Transition**

In terms of the Russian case study discussed here, although the following chapters will discuss the precise contours of the transition and its impact on foreign policy making in greater depth, it is worth summarising at this stage which of the theoretical concepts explored above are most applicable to the Russian situation.

In terms of Russia’s overall transitional path, as discussed in the introductory chapter, although the Yeltsin and Putin periods constituted one continual transition, the nature of this process clearly changed over time. While Russia achieved the first stage of the transition to democracy—immediate institutional change and the introduction of elections—it failed to achieve consolidation of substantive democracy. Instead, the regime moved in an increasingly authoritarian direction. As with any transition, there are a range of influences that potentially explain this failure and none can be identified as the one, determining factor. However, from the above discussion a number of points do appear important. Russia’s style of transition—more akin to Valenzuela’s elite-led replacement—certainly lacked the same degree of mass support and participation as other more successful postcommunist transitions. Outside of the first efflorescence of civil society as controls were loosened, politics remained substantially an elite-dominated process. New barriers to political participation, such as the massive, brutal economic decline and disillusionment, emerged to further constrain mass participation. The practical failure of state-building, decentralisation and the anarchistic situation it bred, with Russia appearing to teeter on the edge of state collapse hardly provided an positive environment for democracy to thrive. Political culture and institutions were slow to change and support for democratisation waned. While at the elite level, transition remained stalemated for much of the Yeltsin period—a situation expected to have positive outcomes for consolidation—the reversion to past ‘zero sum’ political behaviours such as gamesmanship and overt efforts to crush the opposition, led to a

\textsuperscript{79} ibid, p. 39.
poisonous political situation and a series of damaging political impasses. The solutions to these impasses and other transitional challenges, such as the imposition of the superpresidential system or the war against ‘separatists’ in Chechnya, did little to contribute toward building trust and cooperation or confidence in democracy and restraint of the state. The heavy-handed military approach to trying to resolve the demands for Chechen independence, even though the war failed dismally, demonstrated just how underdeveloped political conflict resolution was in the state, how great the focus on the power of the state was compared to individual freedom and human rights, and how quickly members of the political elite would revert to past behaviours. While perhaps Russia did, perhaps, have Bunce’s ‘principled figure with a commitment to democracy’ within this stalemated situation in President Boris Yeltsin, Yeltsin’s own political code was too conflicted, his behaviour too inconsistent and as his health and political capital waned, the stalemate started to erode. Instead, the balance of power shifted towards those less committed to the initial vision of a Western, liberal democracy.

Under Putin, this imbalance only accelerated. The personalisation of power in Putin, though initially based on strong electoral support, coupled with an overly powerful executive and a wave of reforms that further disenfranchised the opposition and centralised power, eroded the earlier democratic gains. While greater stability was forged and a stronger, more capable state was established, it was at the expense of liberal democracy and individual rights. The aggressive, but popular campaign in Chechnya that marked his rise to power demonstrated clearly his focus on the primacy of state power and unquestioned rights of the state over any concepts of bounded authority, compromise or restraint. Russia’s democratisation subsequently stalled, before moving steadily into the realm of illiberal or delegative democracy and beyond. As either a stage in transition—a ‘halfway house’ on the way to either further democratisation or regression to some form of authoritarianism—or as a more permanent partial democracy in itself, the concept and processes of illiberal or delegative democracy are particularly important to consider in this thesis, particularly with regard to the Putin period. While during Putin’s first term the focus appeared to be on creating stability and building state capacity, with many scholars giving him the benefit of the doubt in terms of intentions, his second term clearly moved Russia in an
increasingly illiberal direction and, in the worst-case views, to authoritarianism itself. The rolling back of reforms and civil liberties under Putin certainly appears to add weight to the arguments of scholars like Larry Diamond about the risks presented by delegative forms of democracy. Although there was ultimately no substantive consolidation of either democracy or authoritarianism during the period in question—the ‘rules of the game’ were still not explicitly accepted by all political players—the trend looked to confirm that the slide into delegative or illiberal democracy would inevitably lead to authoritarianism and the abandonment of democratisation. This would clearly change the dynamics of the transition and its impacts on all types of politics, foreign policy included. In terms of the Russia’s long transition, then, how the process was initiated, its choice of political system, pursuit of simultaneous political and economic transitions, and the inability to throw out key beliefs and behaviours of the past, particularly the consistent focus on dominant, personalised leadership, were all key factors that combined to undermine the success of its democratisation. These concepts will feature frequently through the coming chapters.

Democratisation and Foreign Policy

The Background Debate

One of the formative debates regarding the impact of democratisation on foreign policy was the somewhat controversial argument put forward by Edward Mansfield and Jack Snyder in the 1990s regarding the greater war proclivity of democratising states. Though this argument has found less and favour over time, it is worth summarising the contours of the debate, prior to moving on to a more nuanced discussion of the range of factors impacted by democratisation.

Essentially, Mansfield and Snyder argued that although the common assumptions of democratic states are based around ‘democratic peace’ or ‘pacific democracies’—that is mature democracies do not fight one another and thus the spread of democracy contributes to a more peaceful global environment—there is no good summary of the development of the democratic peace thesis, and the contributing factors, see Spencer R. Weart

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states may be somewhat different. In fact, rather than contributing to a decline in the war proclivity of a state they argued that, at least in the short term, the transitional phase of democratisation sees countries become more aggressive and war prone and that they also fight wars with other democratic states.\textsuperscript{81} Their statistical evidence suggested that democratising states are two thirds more likely to fight wars than states that do not experience a regime change.\textsuperscript{82} Moreover, their findings also suggested the more dramatic the change, the greater the likelihood of conflict.\textsuperscript{83} Thus, rather than being a benign or positive influence, they argued that democratisation may result in more aggressive or belligerent foreign policies, with potentially serious ramifications for international security.

In explaining these results, Mansfield and Snyder focused on the inadequacy of typical democratic ‘pacifying tendencies’ in democratising states and the subsequent impact on elite struggle. There are a number of democratic characteristics that are considered by different authors to contribute as pacifying tendencies. Some, for example, focus on political structures—the existence of constitutional checks and balances, the complex structure of democratic civil society, the free marketplace of ideas, and even democratic nations’ association through international capitalist networks, that make decision-makers more cautious in the use of force.\textsuperscript{84} Others explain democratic peace culturally, or on the basis of specific norms of behaviour, values and beliefs. Such features include the self-interest of the average voter who bears the costs of war, the distaste of voters for attacking people like themselves, or the norms of bargaining and conflict resolution inherent in democracy.\textsuperscript{85} Those explaining the democratic peace see that in consolidated democracies institutional frameworks and political-cultural factors work to undermine the ease of going to war, whether by

\textsuperscript{82} ibid, p. 12.
\textsuperscript{83} ibid, p. 19.
\textsuperscript{85} See for example: Bruce Russet (1993), \textit{Grasping the Democratic Peace}, Princeton: Princeton University Press; Miles Kahler (1997); ‘Introduction’, in \textit{Liberalization and Foreign Policy} edited by Miles Kahler, New York: Columbia University Press; Mansfield and Snyder, p. 21; Sorensen, p. 99; and Weart, pp. 5-6,
demanding increased accountability of leaders, providing constraints to elite actions, or by creating a more informed, critical, and empowered population.

Yet for Mansfield and Snyder, the fact that these liberalising tendencies are retarded, operate only intermittently, or be all but absent in democratising regimes was problematic. “In newly democratising states without strong parties, independent courts, a free press, and untainted electoral procedures, there is no reason to expect that mass politics will produce the same impact on foreign policy as it does in mature democracies”\textsuperscript{86} For one, they noted that the institutions for channelling political participation and integrating diverse societal views into policy in democratising states are generally not well established and do not tend to work in a predictable, routine manner. Public pressures and preferences may not channel through to the elite; they may be distorted by entrenched interests, or intentionally subverted or ignored. Consequently, the interests of certain groups may remain disadvantaged and others over represented. Moreover, where independent media remain underdeveloped and only intermittently capable of informing the public responsibly, the median voter may be under-informed or misinformed. In this environment, the ruling elite is only intermittently accountable to the electorate and the electorate exerts only a limited influence over policy-making. Subsequently, in partial democracies or democratising states there is little reason to expect the median voter to exert a consistent constraint on the war making of the state or other elite groups benefiting from imperialism.\textsuperscript{87}

Those arguing against the democratic peace in democratising stages also identified failures in other democratic checks and balances to enforce pacifying tendencies. Often, for example, one or another branch of government remains dominated by elite groups with interests related to empire, protectionism, or arms racing from the authoritarian period.\textsuperscript{88} The distribution of powers among the branches is also likely to be highly politicised and unstable rather than legally and predictably institutionalised. In such circumstances, checks and balances are more likely to resemble naked interest

\textsuperscript{86} Mansfield and Snyder, p. 22.
\textsuperscript{88} ibid.
group politics than a constitutionally regulated decision-making process. Rather than moderation, competition and conflict may be the result. Finally, too, constructive cultural attributes like compromise and cooperation that help to moderate domestic and foreign political behaviour and activity may also be lacking. It may take considerable time until all these pacifying tendencies are developed to a degree that makes them capable of acting as moderating influences. This development may also face considerable opposition from entrenched vested interests within the state, who seek to subvert the democratisation project to protect their status. That “those groups with a strongest interest in retarding democratisation are often also those with a parochial interest in war, military preparation, empire, and protectionism,” only raises the stakes further.

Mansfield and Snyder argue that in such a situation of social change, institutional weakness and the mobilisation of threatened interests, political impasses are likely to emerge. Such impasses make it difficult for elites to form stable political coalitions with coherent policy platforms and sufficient support to stay in power. Ultimately they also contribute to the types of thinking and policy decisions that lead to war. Four specific factors contribute to impasses. Firstly, while mature democracies can successfully integrate a diverse range of often-incompatible interests, transitional democracies with weakly established institutional structures struggle to do so, impairing coalition building. Secondly, groups threatened by social change and democratisation, including still powerful elites, often take a very inflexible view of their own interests, especially when their assets cannot be readily adapted to changing political and economic conditions. Such groups may be unwilling to compromise their values, making impasse resolution even more difficult. Thirdly, threatened elites may attempt to undermine democratisation and manipulate the political situation for their own self-interest and survival. To do so, they will often mobilise allies amongst the general population using whatever resources they retain, in a process that ultimately becomes highly competitive and over which they can easily lose control. Often such appeals refer to emotive ideologies like nationalism and can cause a significant polarisation, making compromise and coalition building around a common

89 ibid, p. 25.
90 Mansfield and Snyder, p. 25.
91 ibid, p. 27.
92 ibid, pp. 27-8.
goal even more difficult. Finally, weakened central authority exacerbates impasses. Although autocratic power is declining, democratic institutions lack the strength to integrate the contending interests and views of newly empowered elite interest groups and mass groups. With integrating structures underdeveloped, public influence remains weak compared to that of certain elite groups, meaning elite interests can overwhelm a political leadership unable to defend itself from their pressure, sidelining mass opinion in the process.

It is the tactics utilised in overcoming political impasses that tend to breed recklessness in foreign relations and the resort to war. For one, in the case studies considered by Mansfield and Snyder, the strengthened power of elite groups vis-à-vis the autocratic centre combined with the continued weakness of mass groups created an incentive to make policy by log-rolling (the exchanging of political favors) among elite interest groups. War proclivity is enhanced given strength of the military within elite coalitions and the fact that the process tends to give each group what it wants the most. Secondly, they note the tendency towards ‘squaring the circle’, or integrating opposites. By creating ruling coalitions that are comprised of overly diverse and even contradictory bases of support, democratising states predispose their foreign policies to becoming overcommitted and even antagonistic, provoking too many enemies. The third set of tactics concerns prestige strategies. One of the simplest but riskiest strategies for a hard-pressed regime in a democratising country is to shore up its prestige or overcome domestic division by seeking victories abroad. Such activities often backfire spectacularly, however, and numerous examples exist of failed foreign adventures pursued for predominantly domestic ends.

Mansfield and Snyder’s work, then, demonstrated that domestic uncertainty and politicking can encourage the types of strategies that lead to more belligerent, aggressive or merely more fragmented foreign policy activities, ultimately resulting in a heightened chance of conflict and war. Of course, such controversial findings were

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93 Mansfield and Snyder, p. 30.
94 ibid, p. 31.
95 ibid, pp. 31-2.
96 ibid, p. 32.
97 ibid, p. 33.
hotly debated. Amongst these criticisms, Michael D. Ward and Kristian S. Glenditsch disagreed that all cases of democratisation are accompanied by increasing rates of war proneness. Rather, they argued through their analysis of democratising regimes that “during the democratic transition, at every point along the way as well as at the end points, there is an attendant reduction in the probability of a polity being at war”. Where they identified risk, however, was in the specific pattern of transition. While smooth, monotonic transitions are associated with the least risk and greatest benefit, regression, even in the short term, has the greatest risk: where authoritarian reversal occurs the risk of involvement in war increases. Andrew J. Enterline similarly agreed that autocratisation appears to have a more significant and positive effect on war-proneness than does democratisation. In tentatively explaining their findings Ward and Glenditsch also referred to institutions. They found that where democratisation brings with it constraints on the executive branch, there is a robust reduction in the likelihood of war. They posited that power sharing between the executive and legislature, the cautionary influence of the legislature in foreign policy making, and the influence of public opinion over these bodies are important factors in reducing the war proneness of both democratic and democratising states. Establishing robust democratic institutions based on a division of power is then important in reducing the likelihood of war in transiting states. Without such power-sharing arrangements, the democratic constraints associated with pacifism do little to influence the executive.

Despite these criticisms and qualifications of the linkages between democratisation and war, most scholars appeared to agree that transitions have potentially significant foreign policy repercussions, both positive and negative, depending to a great deal on the nature of the transition. While Mansfield and Snyder may have overstated or oversimplified the link between democratisation and war, their research certainly raised interesting questions about the way in which the domestic and external spheres interact during the transitional period and the degree to which regime transition in the

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99 Ward and Glenditsch, p. 69.
100 ibid, pp. 69-70.
101 Wolf, Weede, Enterline, Mansfield and Snyder, p. 191.
102 Ward and Glenditsch, p. 70.
domestic sphere could influence the foreign policy path of a state. The following section looks in greater depth and with a wider scope at the range of these impacts.

Economic Reform

The challenging, simultaneous transitions in the postcommunist world have had significant economic impacts on the states involved, particularly those in the former Soviet Union. Here, an unfortunate combination of unfavourable initial conditions, institutional degradation, and inefficient economic policies,\(^{103}\) resulted in considerable economic contraction, political instability, and social upheaval, at least in the short-term. Often these have impacted democratisation itself. The impacts of economic transformation have also been felt on foreign policy. Most obviously, by further contributing to instability, economic upheaval is central to the theme of dislocation that potentially permeates all aspects of transitional policy-making. When structural issues are so pressing and all-encompassing, few other issues can be dealt with independently, divorced of the unstable and often emotive influence of economic troubles. The reality is, however, that transitional states are required to “drive while democratising”;\(^{104}\) to continue implementing policy and maintaining essential services whilst reforming. Yet their ability to do so is impaired as transition restricts, removes, or redefines the resources available to governments. These pressures may demand measures to release resources for domestic reconstruction, such as retrenching overseas commitments, minimising security costs, and charting a course that discourages costly foreign conflicts or antagonisms.

Although some may use these pressures to refocus policy, the dislocation of the transitional period means constraints and trade-offs are seldom clear or consistently committed to by all political actors, particularly where inexperience is high.\(^{105}\) Aligning goals and intentions with real capacity and need, whether in terms of rationalisation or redirecting energies, may become sidetracked without a strong


consensus or committed guidance. Even best laid plans may come to nothing with insufficient resources to implement them. A significant discrepancy may ultimately emerge between stated policy aspirations and actual capacity, particularly when more emotive or competitive influences enter the fray. This may cause considerable damage to the state, even if only in terms of its international image. In worst-case scenarios, states may struggle to provide even the basic requirements for security—calling in to question state survival itself. Alternatively, economic troubles may contribute to the types of external aggression that Mansfield and Snyder describe in their highly contested thesis that transitional states are more likely to go to war.106

The growing economic interdependence that results from liberal economic reform is also likely to have consequential foreign policy impacts. For example, growing economic interdependence may influence changes in the way policy is made, encouraging increased activity by governmental and non-governmental interests affected by international economic exchange.107 While those benefiting from increased integration may become more active in order to further expand their gains and prevent any rollbacks of reform, opponents may seek to hinder change, or use the intervention of international actors (whether governments, foreign investors, or international institutions) as a weapon in nationalist campaigns against liberalisation,108 as the following section elaborates further. Broader foreign policy ramifications are also likely, particularly in the nature of policy. Specifically, economic liberalisation tends to encourage the adoption of more cooperative strategies and greater engagement with international institutions in order to manage growing external economic ties, transforming foreign policy in doing so, as China, Mexico, Spain, and the EU have demonstrated.109 In a positive spin-off for transition, this increased international engagement may also serve to bind succeeding governments to liberal economic programmes in the face of shifting political incentives or elite preferences, potentially making all aspects of reform more enduring.110 Over time, these growing state-to-state

linkages may also serve to constrain foreign policy more broadly, producing a more prudent, less volatile, and less belligerent external posture.\textsuperscript{111}

Of course, asymmetric relations of interdependence may also mobilise into politics as perceptions of international vulnerability, potentially producing less positive outcomes and more conflict, rather than less.\textsuperscript{112} Still, more peaceful external postures are also likely to be influenced by the elevation of national level goals like economic welfare and the concurrent devaluation of old values of military status and territorial acquisition, during liberalisation. Regardless of regime type, adoption of the market means the passionate, ideological policies of the past are likely to be replaced by more careful reckoning of economic costs and benefits.\textsuperscript{113} By transforming the resources available to the state, too, economic liberalisation can further transform external activity. Although states typically experience an initial decline and subsequent recovery in resources, permanently reducing the state’s role may cause a permanent downward shift in the ability of societies to extract resources for external purposes, reducing spending for more ambitious military or foreign policy causes. Through a variety of means, then, there is an expectation that economic liberalisation, and subsequent increased interdependence contributes to more moderate external state activity in the long-term, if the initial ramifications of economic transformation are somewhat more unpredictable and destabilising.

I ideological Change

Democratisation typically results in significant changes in foreign policy’s ideological underpinnings. Foreign policy is not simply the result of the interplay of institutional inputs. Ideas and beliefs guide the way actors perceive the state’s interests, goals, and responses to the constraints and opportunities it encounters. These provide policy-makers broad guidelines within which to operate, acting as stabilisers to give policy a more enduring form.\textsuperscript{114} These guidelines are generally discussed in terms of

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{111} ibid, p. 15-16.
\item \textsuperscript{112} ibid, p. 16.
\item \textsuperscript{113} ibid p. 16.
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the ‘national interest’, influenced on one side by factors arising from the very existence of the state for which policy-makers are responsible, like self-preservation, independence, security, and prosperity and on the other by the “interesting but problematical matter of domestic values”—those principles the government asserts as well as those which society as a whole (or the ‘nation’) appears to embody. Both involve taking foreign policy positions that seem most likely to promote the preferred way of life, both at home and abroad.\textsuperscript{115} Defining and establishing a consensus on these ideas is never easy. The interests upon which leaders base foreign policy are subject to differing interpretations and misinterpretations at the best of times—transition and upheaval only complicate this task.\textsuperscript{116} During comprehensive regime transitions, identity and the very notions of what constitutes the state, are in flux. Visions of the future—how society should reproduce itself—are often particularly disputed.\textsuperscript{117} Defining what the state is, let alone what its interests are, is often highly contested, particularly as new forces become politically enfranchised.

Although communist foreign policy is not antithetical to national interests, what constitutes such interests and their means of achievement is couched in strict ideological readings and, subsequently, distorted. The purging of these confines enables and, to some degree, demands comprehensive conceptual and policy shifts. Redefining national interests outside communism, however, involves more than removing a superficial overlay. Communism’s deep infiltration into the operational and conceptual aspects of the state means its collapse leaves an ideological vacuum. More than a system of governance is discounted and removed—an entire way of thinking and viewing the world disappears. Some states in Europe were quick to capitalise on the opportunity for radical change, turning debate into a constructive policy focused on ‘joining Europe’. In the immediate post-revolutionary period, for example, Czechoslovakia undertook a flurry of diplomatic activity as part of a larger effort to redefine its international political identity,\textsuperscript{118} and break decisively with the

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communist past. At the same time, breaking with the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (CMEA) and Warsaw Pact confirmed the democratic credentials of new governments at home, providing a relatively cheap means to boost political capital.\(^{119}\) Either way, national interests were quickly redefined, providing direction and focus for policies and activity.

However, not all states act as decisively and confidently. In her research into postcommunist foreign policy change, Allison Stranger found that the greater the independence of reformist elites from the entrenched forces of the old regime, the greater the scope for departure from previous policies. Conversely, the greater constraints on or threats to reformist power, the greater the tendency towards continuity or deferment of decisions on major external issues.\(^{120}\) Power asymmetries in favour of the reformists, then, clearly had positive impacts. The environment in which conceptual realignment occurs also matters. In worst scenarios tendencies towards praetorianism—a syndrome of immature modernity characterised by the pervasive politicisation of diverse social forces and institutions during social upheaval\(^ {121}\)—aggravates the volatility of transition, turning opportunities for conceptual change into threats to stability. Although conceptual debates occur in consolidated regimes, they are generally more insulated within strong institutions and have minimal destabilising external impacts. In praetorian societies, however, effective political institutions capable of mediating, refining, and moderating group political action are lacking. Nor are there accepted rules for resolving conflicts, resulting in each group pursuing its own direct political action.\(^ {122}\) In this environment, identity debates may be particularly contentious. As long as the institutions normally responsible for mediating between the domestic and external environments are weak, such debates can also significantly impact foreign policy.\(^ {123}\)


\(^{120}\) Stranger (1995), pp. 274-5.


While these themes will be elaborated throughout this chapter, suffice it to say that in praetorian transitional environments policy takes a backseat to politicking. Each issue becomes a struggle over the ability to define the nation’s interests and identity. Until broadly consensual national interests and stability are established, even those implementing policies may be unsure of precisely which interests to pursue. Leaders of the new states of the former Soviet Union initially faced such a situation. Struggling to define their nations’ interests, build new institutions out of a contested past in an environment where effective regional security structures were lacking, they were often forced to make foreign policy decisions before a clear consensus on national priorities was reached.\textsuperscript{124} Given the dependence on elite alignments rather than broadly consensual national interests, policy can appear unfocused and transitory in such circumstances. Where changes remain un-institutionalised too, continual policy revisions may occur, as policies fail to survive their sponsors’ departure from office.\textsuperscript{125} Considerable upheaval and uncertainty may result; the tangible results of non-consensual policy decisions, or merely perception, as debates over identity and strategy are aired very publicly.

Often, conceptual debates are accompanied and influenced by the emergence of nationalism. Certainly, a modicum of nationalism is indispensable for the creation and cohesion of a modern state and without it citizens will lack an incentive to participate actively in democratic politics.\textsuperscript{126} Yet the development of exclusionary nationalism can have negative, thoroughly unproductive consequences. Evidence suggests that particularly aggressive forms of nationalism are most likely to emerge where the greatest dislocation and upheaval exist, something to bear in mind for tumultuous simultaneous democratic transitions. When other forms of identity and organisation have disappeared or proved inadequate, the emergence of strong nationalist expressions may be ‘natural’ for groups feeling inadequately empowered or denied a political voice. Ethnic nationalism, for example, predominates when institutions collapse, when existing institutions fail to fulfil people’s basic needs, and when

\begin{footnotes}
\item[124] ibid p. 195.
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satisfactory alternative structures are not readily available.\textsuperscript{127} Difficult postcommunist market transitions, too, have created communities which regard nationalism as the only way to express opposition to what are increasingly seen as policies of impoverishing Westernisation.\textsuperscript{128} Expanding popular political participation may also exacerbate nationalism. As will be discussed later, the introduction of elections may tempt political elites to encourage or manipulate nascent expressions of nationalism for political gain. And though consolidated democracies have behavioural incentives and well-functioning institutions to encourage moderation and provide suitable disincentives to the opportunistic utilisation of nationalism, these may emerge only incrementally. In the former Soviet states, for example, early democratic competition occurred in a context of weak political parties, manipulative political machines, and unstable constitutional rules, making it doubtful that the moderating influence of the median voter would prevail.\textsuperscript{129} Instead, opportunistic and well-mobilised special interests, radical, minority and fringe groups often exerted a disproportionate, destabilising influence. Ultimately, then, the very weaknesses of transitional systems not only make it more likely that more extreme forms of nationalism will emerge, but are also likely to contribute to their persistence and expansion. As long as disorder continues, the potential for unpredictable nationalist interjections into politics remains high.

Heightened nationalism can have negative foreign policy repercussions, particularly in the conceptual and institutional flux characteristic of transition. Here, emotive nationalism may provide more ‘convincing’ explanations for upheaval and dislocation than other, more rational ideologies. Nationalists in recent transitions, for example, have often focused on the government’s willingness to do the bidding of foreign economic actors.\textsuperscript{130} Such simplistic and attractive explanations can hinder a government’s ability to pursue its international goals. More extreme nationalism can lead to the aggressive protection of ‘national’ culture and interests, scapegoating, and


\textsuperscript{128} Grugel, p. 206.

\textsuperscript{129} Snyder (1993), p. 91.

\textsuperscript{130} Linden, p. 177.
the perception of growing threats to the nation. It may ultimately create an environment in which foreign relations are conducted according to zero-sum thinking and contribute to the pursuit of more hostile policies. Given that in transiting nations the democratic norms for settling political disagreements and recognising political legitimacy that carry over into external relations are usually underdeveloped—behaviours like cooperation and compromise—they cannot be relied upon to “exercise peaceful restraints” and “negotiate rather than escalate disputes”, meaning they are potentially more predisposed to heightened aggression. Though conflict may be at the outer extreme, conceptual fluidity and comprehensive change are a potentially volatile mix, with unpredictable foreign policy outcomes.

**Domestic Institutional Reform**

Transforming the way in which politics functions is the most immediate task transitional regimes face. To do this, the very building blocks of their structure— institutions—and their interrelationships, must be transformed. Institutions shape actors’ preferences and create opportunities for, or constraints on, political action. They create incentives and disincentives for political actors, shape actors’ identities, establish the context in which policy-making occurs, and can help or hinder in constructing democratic regimes. Institutions organise political interests, channel participation, and shape the policy outputs of a state, but it is more than their structural form that matters. Institutions possess a history, culture, and memory of their own, sometimes embodying founding values and traditions but more often simply growing like ‘coral reefs’ through ‘slow accretion’. Change in this operating culture is as important as structural reform. Even at the level of interrelations between institutions—constitutional arrangements—structural change alone is insufficient to ensure complete political transformation. Political culture must also change if institutional and constitutional changes are to be meaningful. Broadly speaking, a country’s political culture reflects basic attitudes towards such matters as the

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trustworthiness of their fellow citizens, the legitimacy of other citizens’ rights and interests, how conflicting interests should be reconciled, the ability of citizens to influence government policies, and the legitimacy of existing political institutions.\footnote{Parrott (1997), p. 21.}

At any time, political culture guides the activity of political elites, defining legitimate or illegitimate behaviours. It acts like a lubricant, ensuring the smooth operation of the institutional mechanics of governance. Empirical evidence suggests that political culture is neither permanently fixed, nor easily malleable.\footnote{ibid, p. 22.} While certain attitudes and behaviour will demonstrate a great deal of permanence, a degree of change will be evident, though it will be neither rapid nor absolute. Over time political institutions and major sociopolitical events exert a reciprocal influence on political culture.\footnote{ibid, p. 22.} In this dynamic relationship, political culture both influences, and is influenced by, political events and the institutional framework in which politics operates. The following section discusses the key demands for institutional change, with particular reference to those impacting foreign policy and the instability and dislocation that institutional change both occurs in, and contributes to.

Democracy institutionalises ‘normal’, limited, or bounded political uncertainty:\footnote{Schmitter and Karl (1991), pp. 82-3.} it is a system of governance in which the rules by which political decisions are taken are \textit{certain}, but adherence to these rules assures \textit{uncertainty} of policy outcomes.\footnote{Adam Przeworski (1991), \textit{Democracy and the Market: Political and Economic Reforms in Eastern Europe and Latin America}, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 12.} This ‘bounded uncertainty’ is facilitated by political pluralism, the decentralisation of power amongst political forces and competition amongst these forces according to generally accepted and upheld rules. Such processes also ensure opportunities for the representation of diverse views and guard against any interest’s domination of policy-making. Essentially, the greater number of institutions required to participate in a political outcome, the less likely that those occupying any one of them can predetermine that outcome.\footnote{Clark (2002), p. 68.}

“In a democracy no one group can be sure that its interests will ultimately prevail. Even the most powerful group, be
it local or foreign business, armed forces, bureaucracy, or other privileged elements, must be ready to face the possibility that it can lose out in conflicts with other groups, which means that its interests may not be looked after”.  

Certainly, foreign policy is one area of politics that generally exhibits a lesser degree of pluralism and decentralisation. Typically, a similar core group of institutions make up the ‘foreign policy executive’ irrespective of regime type—the head of government and the foreign minister in the first instance, but often widened to include defence, finance, economics, and trade ministers. Oversight, participation and interference from outside this ‘executive’, by bodies such as the legislature, judiciary, other state institutions, non-state agencies, and the general public, are generally more limited. Numerous reasons exist for this isolation. For one, foreign policy’s very nature discourages broad participation. It demands specialist knowledge few feel fully confident in possessing. Most politicians also primarily concern themselves with domestic matters and avoid wasting time on cultivating contacts from which little perceived competitive advantage can be gained. Centralisation is also demanded by the need for efficiency. In 1963, Joseph Frankel noted that, as a rule, governments alone deal with other governments, command the best sources of information, and have the monopoly of legitimate and near-monopoly of physical force. Though changes have occurred with the growth of international business, NGOs and the like, states remain the dominant international actors. Centralisation within the government, as the controller of the most important resources mobilised in external activity, and amongst its experts more specifically, is simply ‘common sense’. The issues foreign policy deals with also demand its greater isolation. Ultimately, it pertains to state security and survival. It is highly sensitive, demanding cohesive policies and responses from professionals, minimising the potentially deleterious consequences of unsuccessful

142 Hill (2003), p. 56.
143 ibid, p. 56.
negotiations and domestic discord, debate or division over goals. Executive isolation, then, also aims to insulate foreign policy from excessive competition or public interference, given these influences are perceived as compromising the ability to create and implement a consistent direction, integral to maintaining national security. Put simply, the fewer participants, the less likelihood of complications, inefficiency, or ineffectiveness in external activities. As large clumsy bodies, parliaments, in particular, are generally perceived as unable to effectively exercise initiative and their participation upsets diplomacy. As sites for representing societal interests, their involvement unnecessarily complicates foreign policy processes.

It is these vagaries of public opinion and popular pressures, in particular, that executive isolation seeks to minimise. It is a well-established notion that public participation in foreign policy-making is not a good idea. Such arguments identify domestic politics as a source of irrational decision-making. They see that instead of using prudence in international relations, democracies may succumb to whims of public opinion or moods of possible belligerence or appeasement, that may result in confused, unwise policies. Walter Lippman, for example, argues that public opinion has forced governments “to be too late with too little, or too long with too much, too pacifist in peace and too bellicose in war, too neutralist or appeasing in negotiation and too transient”. In democracies, policy can either be ‘disrupted from below’, where the public, presumed to be ignorant and fickle, have too great an influence on the course of diplomacy, or ‘derailed from above’ when democratic leaders allow decisions to be guided only by what they believe will enhance their popularity, allowing public opinion to take on determining proportions. Considering ‘disruption

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147 Frankel, p. 25.
from below’, Morgethau argues that government should not be a slave to public opinion, but lead it and resist compromise on foreign policy essentials, lest this impair its rationality. In terms of ‘disruption from above’, it has been argued that the more removed policy-makers are from direct electoral pressures, the less likely such diversions become. George Keenan even goes so far as to argue for leaving foreign policy in the hands of professional diplomats whose bureaucratic tenure insulates them from the vicissitudes of public opinion.

Yet despite such vociferous arguments for executive isolation, democratic foreign policy-making does exhibit greater decentralisation and pluralism than in authoritarian systems. Democratic institutions, built on greater accountability and responsiveness, constrained by greater checks and balances, act to channel and integrate more diverse, pluralist influences into policy-making, both formally and informally. By contrast, in Soviet systems decision-makers were insulated and access to the foreign policy process was highly restricted. Foreign policy formulation was centralised in the ‘executive branch’, primarily the apparatus of the Communist Party Central Committee and Politburo. The Foreign Ministry had a virtual monopoly on external contacts, though the military also had significant external functions. The scope for actors outside this clique to have any transparent or predictable influence was limited. This was a top-down process, guided by entrenched, almost immovable ideas and interests. Democratisation introduces changes that ensure foreign policy institutions operate according to vastly different procedures and principles. Contemporary developments have also reinforced the difficulty and unproductiveness of executives over zealously guarding their foreign policy monopoly. The expansion and proliferation of links between governments and non-governmental actors in the globalising era has involved an ever-expanding range of actors in foreign activities, blurring the boundaries between foreign and domestic policy, and making separations increasingly difficult to justify. Foreign policy institutions in democratising nations are, subsequently, subject

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to two different, though mutually reinforcing pressures encouraging greater decentralisation and pluralism. While foreign policy remains centred in the executive, an increasingly diverse set of actors and influences interact with the institutions involved in its processes.

Ultimately, the institutionalisation of multiple points of authority and expanding agenda-setting authority has important policy repercussions. Political enfranchisement and decentralisation can offer expanded opportunities for mobilised policy entrepreneurs. New ideas may rejuvenate or enliven debates, even encouraging comprehensive policy shifts. Where previous authoritarian elites may have myopically stuck to illegitimate policies fearing policy reform would demonstrate weakness or an admission of past error, the elevation of new actors or dissemination of a revised set of evaluations and strategies to the old elites, can bring about a reappraisal of the costs and benefits of change.\textsuperscript{156} By the same token, however, by encouraging pluralism democratisation makes any actor’s proposal just one of many competing ideas. Involvement is thus expanded at the expense of each policy entrepreneur’s capacity to effect change.\textsuperscript{157} Decentralisation also makes instituting such change considerably harder. The greater the number of veto points in the political system—the number of offices and branches whose acquiescence is required for policy or institutional change—the greater the likelihood that reforms or policy suggestions will be foiled.\textsuperscript{158} Thus, democratisation sees policy-making become more negotiated, increasing its representativeness, weeding out inappropriate proposals through checks and balances, but also frustrating the ability of many good ideas to attain pre-eminence. Hence, although decentralisation is certainly more modest than in other areas, it still entails some important changes in terms of process and, potentially, outputs.

\textit{Competition and conflict}

Importantly, the institutional transformations that occur under transition typically have significant re-distributional outcomes. Institutional arrangements impact the distribution of resources and power within a state. Institutions determine the roles and

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\textsuperscript{157} Checkel (1995), p. 46.

capacity of groups and individuals in policy-making, and thereby, influence actors’ abilities to achieve their policy preferences. Changes in an institution, therefore, can bring changes in state and societal actors’ roles and resources. Consequently, transformation is often highly contested, with a competitive environment emerging between ascendant and descendent groups. Recognising threats to their established position, institutional actors or important political interests may seek to subvert or retard democratic change. Where institutions themselves become preoccupied with efforts to influence the structures of political decision-making, they may become political actors in their own right, compromising their actual ascribed political functions. Underlying competitive tendencies may bubble to the surface, as issues of power and influence outweigh more mundane daily activities, with significant impacts on policy-making. In situations where the distribution of powers among branches of government is highly politicised and unstable, rather than legally and predictably institutionalised, checks and balances are more likely to resemble naked interest group politics than a constitutionally regulated decision-making process.

Transition may encourage institutions and particular interests to take advantage of institutional fluidity to advance their own agendas. In consolidated democracies institutions are usually entrenched and infrequently modified. Political actors have learnt to accommodate themselves to these institutions and design their strategies accordingly. During transitional periods actors have greater opportunity to design or redesign institutions. Institutions no longer clearly situated in constitutional frameworks, nor governed by vertical and horizontal constraints may identify uncertainty as an opportunity to broaden their mandate temporarily, permanently carve out new identities, increase their power over particular areas of state activity, or opportunistically enhance their own interests. Alternatively, with more responsible motivations, they may step into a perceived breach resulting from another institution’s failings, plugging the gap in the interim to ensure cohesive state functioning. Either way, the fluidity of institutional arrangements increases the scope for political infighting and unpredictability. In such chaotic conditions of inter-institutional flux

159 ibid, p. 4
and competition—whether at a macro level between branches of government, or micro level between bureaucratic bodies—predictable policy-making processes are compromised by politicisation and the aforementioned praetorian nature of politics, meaning policy may become a pawn in struggles for power. Negotiated transitions may offer greater protection to foreign policy by explicitly or implicitly excluding it from contests over future institutional design. However, pacts may also negatively impact foreign policy where, for example, the roles of particular institutions, such as the military or the existing national security bureaucracies are protected, or new roles are established to ensure their transitional commitment.162

Challenges of change and competition in postcommunist systems are exacerbated by the process of extricating the Communist Party. Communist parties were renowned for their comprehensive institutional penetration. The integration and intertwining of party and all levels of state institutions meant they appeared mutually indivisible. Unravelling the vast tentacles of the party is a massive, complicated project. It involves such changes as re-establishing institutional independence, reconstituting institutional interrelationships, adjusting practices, replacing personnel, and establishing new accountabilities. In postcommunist Europe, this meant moving from a situation where the Communist Party sanctioned no public foreign policy competition, to the elimination of its leading role and the establishment of legitimate, public roles for other actors.163 Real power was instilled into existing institutional shells and a diversification of foreign policy actors occurred, whereby new institutions gained foreign policy capabilities.164 However, key institutions and their inter-relations were often dogged by instability. Without the Party’s controlling hand, struggles for institutional influence, to formulate and specify arenas of responsibility, rights, and prerogatives occurred, some for their own sake and some in order to achieve desired policy results.165 Extrication of the Party, thus, contributed greatly to institutional instability, removing a stable ‘cement’ and opening a previously restricted area to more diverse influences. Complications also resulted from the Party’s internalisation of many functions typically undertaken by state institutions, including decision-making, information gathering and processing, and other such operations integral to the functioning of

163 Linden, p. 166-7.
164 ibid, p. 184.
165 ibid, p. 185.
foreign policy. Party International Departments tended to act as surrogate Foreign Ministries and important bases for a concentration of specialised advice.\textsuperscript{166} Purging the Party can leave transitional regimes with a dearth of suitably experienced state institutions, hindering cohesive policy-making until new institutions capable of replacing Party variants establish themselves and are drawn into predictable relationships with their counterparts and those in power.

\textit{Capacity and capability}

Concurrent to these relationship changes, challenges are likely to arise around state and institutional capacity. Particularly where state structures have been historically weak or state decay has accompanied the decomposition of the authoritarian regime, state building emerges as a central challenge for democratic consolidation.\textsuperscript{167} While authoritarian regimes do build institutions, they fill in the vacuum in the rule of law via authoritarian means. During democratisation, transitional regimes find themselves deprived of past authoritarian instruments to ensure law and order, but without the newly developed democratic mechanisms needed to guarantee things like property rights, contracts, and law and order.\textsuperscript{168} Chaos can result. This is exactly what most postcommunist regimes faced; the state constituted the greatest hurdle for democratisation, not the military, as in the Southern European or Latin American cases.\textsuperscript{169} Comprehensive rebuilding was required. For decades before communism’s final collapse, overall state capacity had declined significantly, with the threat of central force more than any legitimacy or value keeping the system together. The crumbling of the old order resulted in further weakening, if not the virtual collapse of most institutions and, in the worst cases, the growth in praetorian tendencies, instability and crime. Robbed of the necessary resources to undertake their mandated roles, either by diversion, redirection, economic dislocation, or the breakdown of inter-institutional ties, many institutions struggled with compromised capacity, hindering both their operation and that of the state overall.

\textsuperscript{166} Hill, p. 77.
\textsuperscript{168} Popov (2004), p. 118.
\textsuperscript{169} Bunce (2004), p. 211
In this type of scenario, where democratisation occurs without strong rule of law, the usual outcome is the collapse of output.\textsuperscript{170} This collapse typically concerns both concrete economic outputs, such as industrial production, as well as political outputs, where the useful, relevant work undertaken by institutions declines dramatically. This may see foreign policy institutions, for example, struggle to keep abreast of changes and advise or act accordingly. They may be unable to maintain diplomatic postings, meet international obligations, or even struggle to formulate policy. Weaker political institutions also makes politics matter more in foreign policy making as elites are less insulated from societal pressures and other parts of the state apparatus.\textsuperscript{171} Although this declining institutional isolation provides opportunities for integrating new ideas into policy, it can also increase instability. The greater the number of actors influencing the process, the greater potential for conflict and deadlock, particularly as a proliferation of views paralyses institutions too weak to effectively aggregate diverse demands or fend off challenges to their roles. Policy-making is likely to become politicised as weak institutions, struggling to build coalitions of support and operate in an uncertain environment are forced to represent the interests of new allies. In doing so, institutional weakening can contribute further to deadlock, confusion and policy instability, until institutions have the strength to resist illegitimate pressures and the resources to act effectively. Moreover, where transition has detrimentally impacted the central government’s capacity to overcome institutional recalcitrance or its ability to resist pressures from organised interests, this can further impact successful policy formulation, coordination and implementation. Only when central government re-establishes its monopoly on force and capacity to bring other institutions to heel, and formal vertical and horizontal accountabilities are re-established, can such challenges be addressed.

\textit{The military}

Although not as great a threat to postcommunist liberalisation as to other types of transition, the military—where it endures from the communist period—is one of the institutional actors with the greatest potential to capitalise on fluidity to expand its foreign policy role. It certainly has strong incentives to do so. The military’s external

\textsuperscript{170} Popov (2004), p. 118.
\textsuperscript{171} Checkel (1995), p. 46.
role is closely linked to the policy pursued by civilian politicians, though its activity is at the harder end of the spectrum. It is the protector of state security and is often more loyal to this goal than any one regime or government specifically. Its traditionally stronger nationalist tendencies mean that it often has its own concept of national interests and the methods that should be employed in achieving them. It may be motivated to act when it believes national interests are unsatisfactorily protected or diverge too greatly from its own concepts, or when the regime is weak or state survival is threatened. Such ‘responsible’ motivations notwithstanding, military figures may simply be tempted by power and prestige. The military also possesses certain advantages that facilitate role expansion, and perhaps make it more seductive. Military power is typically drawn from three resources: coercive and strategic, organisational, and political.\(^{172}\) During transition these resources may be disproportionately strengthened vis-à-vis other institutions. The military’s strong organisational structure, for example, is seldom as fragmented as other institutions, at least in the initial stages of transition. It also tends to retain its own significant technical, informational and, occasionally, even economic resources, upon which to draw. These advantages may increase its coercive power as well as its political weight, allowing it to penetrate or influence civilian decision making bodies more strongly than it would normally. Its permanence, stability and traditional values may also see it retain a high degree of societal respect in a disorienting, rapidly changing environment, lending legitimacy to efforts to expand its role. Any threats to these resources and advantages during reform may only add further impetus to competitive tendencies.

With both motivation and means, the military may seek to edge other institutions aside or completely dominate foreign policy making. Where the central government is unable to subordinate the military to civilian goals, it may act unilaterally and fracture a unitary policy line. In worst-case scenarios, this contentious relationship leads to a praetorian model of civil-military relations, where military elites innovate political structures and implement policies in order to dominate the regime and key civilian institutions remain insufficiently strong to assert control over the armed forces.\(^{173}\) Where civilian control cannot be established, the military may ultimately use its


\(^{173}\) ibid, p. 23.
advantages to the detriment of liberalisation more generally, with longer-term foreign policy ramifications. Even where it does not formulate its own strategy, however, it can become a destabilising influence, either by undertaking specific initiatives or acting as one of a number of institutional competitors, collectively complicating the implementation of a stable, predictable policy.

**Bureaucratic reform**

Reform within institutions, and to the supposedly non-political administrative apparatus—the bureaucracy—must also occur for change to be substantive. Bureaucracies are important actors in formulating and implementing policy. They influence agenda-setting and frame issues by controlling the flow of information to decision makers. They are often also charged with considerable discretionary powers in defining specifics when presented with broad policy goals. The ill-defined scope of powers and greater insulation from electoral pressures can make the bureaucracy very important, giving it more undefined but enduring policy interests. As with institutional reform more broadly, reform here is multifaceted. Reform must ensure a professionalised, meritocratic bureaucracy with relatively good pay, competitive standards of recruitment and, ideally, an *esprit de corps*, if it is to be truly effective. To do so, it typically requires changes to both the structures and behaviours bequeathed by the old regime. Macro level transformations in political culture must be echoed in changes to bureaucratic standard operating procedures and operating cultures.

Transforming the bureaucracy, however, is seldom easy. Problems can stem from the fact that transitional bureaucracies often remain inhabited by many public servants and political figures from the old regime. While their experience may contribute to stability and continued bureaucratic functioning, they may also complicate policy-making and even subvert transition itself. Importantly, bureaucrats and officials are seldom disinterested parties; they may work against change, particularly where they perceive threats to personal or institutional interests. Deliberate sabotage is not even

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174 Diamond (1999), p. 93-4,
necessary, passive resistance and a lack of enthusiasm often suffice.\textsuperscript{176} Subversion may even take place subconsciously. The inertia brought about by standard operating procedures is one of the administrative stabilisers, which, while bringing stability to policy,\textsuperscript{177} may need to be broken in order to facilitate change. Often, firmly ingrained attitudes cannot be easily overcome, irrespective of staff loyalty. These attitudes tend to colour the briefs submitted and the implementation of any instructions received.\textsuperscript{178} Policy may subsequently undergo mutation in the formulation and implementation phases, and institutional outputs may not fairly represent governmental goals or directives, as past modes of thinking and working are impressed on new policies. By the same token, however, the substantial personnel changes often pursued to effect substantive transformation have their own set of problems, particularly in the foreign policy sector. Reorganisation and de-ideologisation of the foreign policy apparatus can contribute to a lack of expertise or experience, resulting in amateurishness, as the skilled red nomenklatura are replaced with non-red, but also unskilled officials.\textsuperscript{179} When combined with the starving of resources, erosion of salaries, and subsequent retention problems, it is hardly surprising transitional Foreign Ministries often struggle to function effectively.

Given that the Foreign Ministry and those serving abroad represent a formidable foreign policy engine,\textsuperscript{180} the contradictory pressures they face during transition have significant policy impacts. On one hand, they gain independence and specific powers previously appropriated by the Party. They also gain freedom from previous ideological and behavioural constraints. Not all of these changes occur predictably, or in a timely manner. For example, Foreign Ministries, like other parts of the bureaucracy, face the continued legacy of communist political interference. Democracies require a separation between politicians and professional public servants. Politicians establish the general contours of public policy programmes, which public servants, as technical specialists, implement with minimal oversight. In the absence of

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\item\textsuperscript{176} Frankel, p. 30.
\item\textsuperscript{177} Skak, p. 23.
\item\textsuperscript{178} Frankel, p. 30.
\item\textsuperscript{179} Skak, pp. 28-9.
\item\textsuperscript{180} Hill (2003), p. 76-77 notes that their functions are typically threefold: routine information gathering; assisting policy-making, particularly in terms of sifting the vast quantities of incoming information; interpreting and predicting the actions of other states, and formulating policy options; and providing a site for memory.
\end{itemize}
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such a model, postcommunist politicians frequently operate as previously, interfering with the most minute of details,\textsuperscript{181} potentially subjecting bureaucratic processes to greater politicisation. At the same time, Foreign Ministries face erosion of their theoretical administrative monopoly from other quarters, and new behavioural constraints. The aforementioned decentralisation, greater inter-ministry cooperation, and aggregation of more diverse views and pressures, mean that democratic Foreign Ministries must be more consultative and prepared to undertake coordinative or facilitative, as opposed to solely directive, roles. Such demands are only further exacerbated by the growth of state and non-state actors operating internationally and hoping to influence policy, a process from which marginal international integration previously isolated postcommunist states. There is, thus, increasing horizontal decentralisation of state foreign relations, and the Foreign Ministry’s loss of control over many external issues to other parts of the state bureaucracy.\textsuperscript{182} With such an array of challenges, from politicisation and erratic interference to insufficient capacity to coordinate multiplying demands, it is hardly surprising that transitional Foreign Ministries struggle to deliver consistent administrative, advocacy, or policy outcomes.

The societal equation

Democratisation also increases opportunities for non-governmental actors to influence foreign policy. These changes are some of the most significant, given it is precisely increased societal input that differentiates democratic foreign policy from its authoritarian counterparts. Hence, they also constitute a measure of the true extent of liberalisation. Increased societal influence is facilitated by concrete changes such as greater decentralisation and pluralism, which increase the number of institutional sites for the direct interaction of mobilised interests with receptive policy-makers. In addition, behavioural and cognitive changes provide indirect, though no less important channels for influencing policy. Though constraints still exist, these two characteristics combine to ensure the democratic foreign policy elite is never entirely insulated from societal pressures. This changing policy environment may have significant policy ramifications. By increasing elites’ accountability and sensitivity to public opinion, liberalisation increases the significance of policy legitimacy. Where the insulation

\textsuperscript{181} Clark (2002), p. 51.
\textsuperscript{182} Hill (2003), p. 82.
from electoral pressures and ability to use force enables authoritarian political elites to follow foreign policy initiatives perceived as illegitimate, these incur greater costs for democratic political elites. Such policies are thus likely to change during transition and less likely to be pursued thereafter. The process of empowering these varied societal influences, however, is seldom smooth, as the follow section explores.

The legislature

The legislature is the primary site for societal policy-making influence. Democratic legislatures perform a number of functions including: integrating diverse views and interests into the political system by providing opportunities for instrumental or at least symbolic participation, infrastructural and material resources to political parties and indirectly to the socioeconomic groups they organise; resolving and regulating conflicts between diverse political actors; and building mass popular support. Democratic parliaments facilitate popular decision-making participation through the debate and interaction of directly elected functional representatives. It is precisely these representative, deliberative functions that non-democratic systems tend to constrain. Authoritarian legislatures often function as an appendage of the executive, if they exist at all. In European communist systems, for example, legislatures were essentially “rubber stamp” bodies, controlled by Party functionaries and directed by the Politburo and Central Committee on which decisions to take. They met infrequently and ratified rather than debated or decided. Postcommunist democratisation involves re-empowering the legislature, allowing it to deliberate, keep the executive in check, and assert popular influence over policy.

Democratic legislatures are commonly not assumed to have vastly more comprehensive foreign policy powers than their authoritarian counterparts. However, it is incorrect to equate a lack of formal constitutional foreign policy rights with disempowerment. Although their powers generally remain more limited than in other policy areas, even where explicit day-to-day oversight is not visible, elected legislatures do have a greater foreign policy role than is often recognised. ‘Smart’,

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184 Liebert (1990), p. 15.
185 See for example: Frankel, p. 16.
well-organised legislatures can manipulate indirect or obstructive levers such as delaying approval, debate, or funding to secure themselves a role.\textsuperscript{187} Veto powers can be used strategically and tend to encourage governments to consult in order to avoid policy rejection.\textsuperscript{188} The capacity to suggest amendments when vetoing can also ensure the legislative voice is heard. Specialist bodies such as Foreign Affairs Committees build expertise and empower informed legislatures to participate confidently in foreign policy matters and exert more sustained pressure on the executive.\textsuperscript{189} Cognitive and behavioural changes also facilitate greater legislative influence, through such means as policy-makers operating transparently and being willing to cooperate across the political system for mutually acceptable policy outcomes.\textsuperscript{190} Even where democratic policy-makers can act with limited regard to legislative opinion, few habitually do so. In certain circumstances, legislatures even delegate their foreign policy powers to the executive under particular rules and conditions, given limitations on their own organisation, information and resources. These procedural or substantive constraints deny the executive complete autonomy, and whilst a second-best option, delegation can ensure legislators still achieve the best outcomes for their constituents despite their own weaknesses.\textsuperscript{191}

Many factors, however, make legislative influence during transition more complex. For one, authoritarian-era structural and cognitive barriers must be removed before legislatures can bring societal influence to bear in a stable, productive manner. The previously monopolistic executive branch must be open to expanded legislative foreign policy influence. Cooperation is particularly difficult where inter-institutional conflict is high and power sharing and role delineation have not been resolved. It can be particularly problematic in presidential systems, where the majoritarianism and over-estimation of powers discussed in “defining regime transition” may encourage presidents to react even more negatively to legislative overtures to exert influence over

\textsuperscript{187} Frankel, p. 27-8.
\textsuperscript{188} ibid, pp. 26-7.
\textsuperscript{189} Hill (2003), p. 257.
\textsuperscript{190} Kahler (1997a), p. 290.
what they believe to be an executive prerogative. In an environment of mistrust and mutual antagonism, transitional parliaments may resort to blocking or complicating executive foreign policy initiatives, if, for no other reason than to attempt to stamp some authority on policy procedures when frustrated by their inability to effect change constructively. Transitional legislatures may even be predisposed to abandoning constitutional means in favour of diversionary tactics, given they are often populated by survivors of the old regime and more extreme political elements. Alternatively, they may be overly eager to invigorate their new roles, particularly early in the liberalisation process. Because liberalisation establishes property rights to policy-making, legislators are often reluctant to concede in the institutional power struggle by allowing the executive as much discretion as may be delegated in more consolidated democracies.\footnote{Martin (1997), pp. 68-9.}

Though growing trust and predictability makes delegation more likely as consolidation progresses, short-term conflict may be unavoidable. Executives, for their part, may be further tempted to subvert the legislature altogether, exacerbating inter-branch conflict and eroding institutionalised policy-making influence. Both sides may seek to create coalitions or appeal directly to the public in their struggles, contributing to further polarisation and foreign policy politicisation in the process.

Also problematic is the fact that few transitional legislatures exploit their limited opportunities as competently and constructively as their consolidated democratic counterparts. While legislative effectiveness and strategic activity depend greatly on organisation, efficiency and internal cohesion, these characteristics tend to be absent in transitional legislatures. Instead, they remain bogged down with structural problems, such as issues with parties and elections (discussed below), behavioural inertia and inexperience with pluralism, or those remnants of past rule broadly termed authoritarian legacies. Newly empowered legislatures with little experience with mutual second-best outcomes often struggle to debate and deliberate, but still reach solid, workable compromises. Instead, transitional legislatures often appear fraught with continual infighting as a zero-sum quality characterises all political battles, no matter how minor. Confrontation may only be exacerbated by continued, fervent conflict over transformation, where all other issues are held ransom to questions over reform. The more polarised the legislature the greater this problem, as irreconcilable
differences are brought into a forum only weakly oriented towards compromise and cooperation. Until redistributive struggles are resolved satisfactorily and normality returns to politics, identifying allies and common interests within the legislature may be practically impossible. Consequently, transitional legislatures may simply be too divided and weak to present any stable counterweight to the executive or convey the public voice into foreign policy. More troublingly, they may actually further complicate the formation of a stable, effective foreign policy.

Parties and elections

In consolidated democracies, elections offer a further formal avenue for ensuring accountability of the foreign policy making process to the mass populace. As with legislative influence, however, there are effective limits. Elections are only periodic, often occurring well after the important events electors seek to express their opinions on. Moreover, although there are exceptional circumstances where external issues dictate voters’ thinking, they seldom dominate elections; domestic issues generally remain decisive. Consequently, elections tend to indicate broad preferences and make assessments of leaders’ performances, rather than communicate specific ideas. Despite such limitations, elections constitute part of a broader pattern of foreign policy influence. They are a vehicle through which mobilised societal interests can attempt to influence policy by targeting or sponsoring candidates. They also allow the population to voice their opinions of current policy, punish candidates for their errors, or bring to power new governments with comprehensively different foreign policy strategies. Moreover, as most citizens’ predominant mode of interest articulation, elections may be an important component in democratic peace arguments. A healthy party system is essential, however, for elections and legislatures to operate effectively. Robust parties enhance legislative functioning, improve legislative capacity to counter encroachments onto its prerogatives from other institutional actors and generate the public support it needs to withstand challenges from bureaucratic elites. In consolidated democracies, parties constitute important two-way channels of

194 ibid, p. 261.
195 ibid p. 261.
communication between the mass of individuals and the institutions of government, aggregating and channelling popular influences upwards to decision-makers and transporting information and political power downward from elites to society.\textsuperscript{197} In specific foreign policy terms, although they may subordinate, oversimplify or generalise issues, parties nevertheless communicate public opinion, act as further forums of debate, and even outline alternative foreign policy options for the public to consider.

Of course, the role of elections and parties during transition is less predictable. For example, the transitional period typically witnesses the founding election, unlikely to function as a means of judging and sanctioning governmental policies unless former authoritarians participate, subjecting their prior decisions to public scrutiny. While subsequent elections may act as referenda on foreign policy they do so only incrementally as a stable electoral history is established. Secondly, few transitional elections are truly representative, meaning they are unlikely to accurately transmit societal opinions. The inconsistent electoral development in many postcommunist nations means effective representation may take time to emerge. Thirdly, like transitional legislatures, transitional elections are even less likely to be concerned with foreign policy than their consolidated counterparts. The magnitude of domestic transformations means that domestic issues generally override foreign policy at election time. Where external issues may enter the transitional electoral environment, however, is in a more unpredictable, dramatic fashion, often highly politicised, entwined with the emotive conceptual arguments discussed earlier, or on account of their domestic instrumentality. Political elites may fuel such mobilisation, manipulating issues of identity and national pride for personal electoral gain. This tendency is exacerbated by the introduction of elections into societies unaccustomed to electoral competition where the easiest way to win votes may be to appeal to tribal, ethnic, and religious constituencies.\textsuperscript{198} In worst-case scenarios, where the free marketplace of ideas remains underdeveloped, appeals to primordial identities and electorally driven radicalisation can promote communalism and ethnic conflict, as well


as foreign policy extremism and aggressive foreign adventures. Even where the outcomes are less extreme, when pursued with predominantly domestic considerations in mind, such as enhancing the electoral popularity and legitimacy of politicians, parties, and governments, foreign policy can degenerate into what biologists term ‘displacement activities’, with significant potential for inconsistency, volatility, and ill-planned policy decisions.199

The struggle many democratising regimes face in developing solid party systems further complicates this scenario. Democratising party systems often remain relatively fluid and uninstitutionalised with few opportunities for structured interaction between parties.200 Parties suffer low levels of legitimacy and are only weakly integrated into society.201 Postcommunist regimes, in particular, face significant challenges. Although communism provides many of the socioeconomic conditions that encourage party formation,202 it typically destroys all societal structures capable of undertaking functions typical of parties. There are no shadow parties, independent trade unions, or other societal organisations capable of being reactivated in order to fight new elections.203 The high level of mandatory participation in communist party activities also tends to imbue the public in transitional countries with a distrust of parties of any kind.204 Distrust of party politics is often endemic among people for whom “the party” meant exploitative apparatchiki and pseudoscientific prescriptions of Marxism-Leninism.205 The transitional environment typically does little to ameliorate such challenges. Socio-economic turbulence hinders voters’ efforts to assess their short- and long-term interests and pick a party that will represent those interests.206 Party development is also hindered by challenges in transforming institutions so parties can participate in a meaningful way. Lacking capacity to influence contemporary politics,

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199 Skak, p. 56.
205 Rose, p. 19.
parties can offer few rewards or incentives for people to join them.\textsuperscript{207} Moreover, postcommunist parties often do little to inspire confidence in their abilities or expand their limited base of support, exhibiting irresponsibility, volatility, a lack of ideological stability and commitment to core goals, low levels of internal unity, and an apparent disdain for the voters’ wishes. Successful parties tend to be broad movements, campaigning more on dissatisfaction or an emotive idea like nationalism, than concrete policies. Consequently, in postcommunist systems parties often struggle to consolidate reliable support, floating above the mass, rather than integrating strongly with it or representing it in any sense. Their inability to serve as a predictable, institutionalised mode of representing popular interests means they instead impact policy in more intermittent and unpredictable ways, or through negative, confrontational or diversionary strategies.

\textit{Civil society}

Political activity in consolidated democracies, however, is not limited to elections or a reliance on traditional representative bodies. Modern citizens have a wide range of intermediaries, interest associations, social movements, locality groupings, clientalistic arrangements and the like through which to influence policy between elections,\textsuperscript{208} so-called ‘civil society’.\textsuperscript{209} Well-organised, articulate civil society organisations provide potentially important vehicles for influencing policy, through either institutional means or direct contact with key decision-makers. Although it is collectively that societal groups generally exert the greatest impact on foreign policy,\textsuperscript{210} groups in sectors where the government either rates the issue low on its agenda, or is concerned not to engage in a public struggle, may dominate the way in which policy develops.\textsuperscript{211}

In postcommunist regimes, however, state-civil society relationships tend to be far less functional. Primarily, there remains a paucity of independent bodies capable of articulating interests. As Juan Linz and Alfred Stepan note, ‘in all post-totalitarian

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\textsuperscript{207} McFaul (1993), p. 83.  \\
\textsuperscript{208} Schmitter and Karl (1991), p. 78.  \\
\textsuperscript{209} Civil society is defined as comprising socio-political institutions, voluntary associations and a public sphere within which people can debate, act and engage with each other in order to deal with the state: V. Perez Diaz (1993), \textit{The Return of Civil Society: The Emergence of Democracy in Spain}, London: Harvard University Press, p. 55, cited by Grugel, p. 94.  \\
\textsuperscript{210} Hill (2003), p. 270.  \\
\textsuperscript{211} ibid, p. 270.
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polities the relative flatness of the landscape of civil society has created problems for politicians because it is hard to represent amorphous groups’.  

Even where growth was more sustained, by the late 1990s, civil society infrastructure had still not approached the density and durability of such networks in long-established democracies. Like party development, challenges in establishing civil society stem greatly from the legacies of authoritarianism. Through the trivialisation of citizenship and repression of political identities, authoritarian rule destroys self-organised and autonomously defined political spaces, substituting them with a state controlled public area in which any discussion of issues must be made in codes and terms established by the rulers. In terms of authoritarian impacts on civil society, little rivals communism’s totalitarian aspirations. Communist regimes systematically exclude all voluntary participation, including the freedom to form independent associations, and introduce novel forms of compulsory mass participation directed from above. They not only constrain, but seek to entirely eliminate independent civil society. Consequently, while civil society is often resurrected in capitalist democratisations, in postcommunist transitions it must be created from almost nothing.

The legacies of past political interaction can also remain hindrances, especially where experiences were corrupt or perverse. Transforming the way the mass and elites perceive politics is central to developing vibrant, inclusive, representative politics. Of great importance is the emergence and maintenance of civic culture. Citizens imbued with a civic culture believe in the government’s duty to serve the people, their own capacity to influence government decisions, and their obligation to participate in national political life. They also believe in the general trustworthiness of fellow citizens, the universal right to engage in political activity, and the impermissibility of violence as a form of political action. An important component of civic culture, and of democratic civil society, is trust. High levels of distrust (in either institutions or fellow citizens) and low civic responsibility discourage participation in bodies capable of...
of articulating societal interests, with deleterious consequences for representation. In postcommunist democracies, mistrust, scepticism, and apathy certainly relate to the prolonged experience of dictatorship, history of political turbulence and discontinuities, memories of manipulation, and a systematic transmission of depoliticisation.219 One of the essential characteristics of regime maintenance in Communist Europe was the persistent effort to stimulate distrust and fear among citizens.220 State intrusion into every corner of society meant institutions repressed, rather than expressed people’s real values. 221 Public opinion was transformed into private opinion and no institutional means to aggregate or express individual ideas were sanctioned.222 This legacy of forced participation and societal bodies providing coercive rather than representative functions, undermines trust in intermediary bodies. Citizens instead eschew involvement in new, voluntary organisations. And while some characteristics of traditional society (such as close-knit and family-like solidarity) that were frozen and carried over into the postcommunist period can be beneficial in the early phase of transformation, longer term, even if such attitudes are not dysfunctional as such, there is a clear need to transform these traditional forms of trust into those functional in post-industrial society.223

Transitional dislocation only further complicates these challenges. Immediate concerns create an environment in which few have the time or resources for ‘superfluous’ political involvement. Even organisations established early in transition often struggle as economic reforms bite,224 unwittingly increasing the state’s isolation from popular influences.225 Disillusionment can also undermine participation, particularly where voters have unrealistic expectations of reform or are unable to

221 Rose, pp. 18-19.
222 ibid, p. 22.
differentiate between the consequences of market reforms and those of political liberalisation. Perceptions that reform does not heighten popular political control, but instead shifts control from one set of impenetrable elites to another (such as the IMF) can further encourage a retreat from political participation.\textsuperscript{226} Moreover, given political culture is not static, economic liberalisation, privatisation, and changes in levels of legality and public order may profoundly alter widely held political and social beliefs in the longer-term, and not necessarily in a direction favourable to participatory democracy.\textsuperscript{227} Emergent norms emphasising individual activity and the prominence of the profit motive, for example, may weaken emerging independent social organisations and cooperative spheres of social autonomy.\textsuperscript{228}

Even where they can mobilise, civil society groups commonly encounter states unprepared to respond to their demands. Unreformed authoritarian or immature democratic institutions, weakened or paralysed by transition are generally ill-equipped to deal with pluralist political competition. Institutions may be overwhelmed or further destabilised by the multifarious, competing demands pressed on them, favouring certain interests disproportionately, or simply rejecting civil society altogether. For politicians and bureaucrats unskilled in pluralist practices, suspicious of autonomous interests, the latter option may be the easiest. Already facing new internal competitors, political actors may actively seek to preclude further expansion of decision-making processes. Such selfishness is not restricted to older authoritarian interests. Many transitions have witnessed newly elevated elites quickly consolidate their decision-making dominance and resist encroachment of mobilised public interests or mass opinion onto the political sphere.\textsuperscript{229} Clearly, this neither encourages, nor facilitates the active representation and aggregation of civil society interests. And although the isolation of foreign policy from potentially destabilising influences may not be entirely negative, it is problematic. Without a strong autonomous sector, policy-makers may be too independent, capable of acting with few constraints and only minimally representative of society. Moreover, foreign policy may become disproportionately captured by narrow interests where there is no competitive counterweight to moderate their claims. Troublingly, this is precisely the environment Mansfield and Snyder

\textsuperscript{226} See for example: Lewis (1997), p. 454.
\textsuperscript{227} Parrott (1997), p. 25.
\textsuperscript{228} Lewis (1997), p. 459.
\textsuperscript{229} Grugel, p. 115.
stress contributes to democratising states’ war-proclivity. Even where aggression does not result, the paucity of civil society influence contravenes the more accountable and inclusive nature of democratic foreign policy.

**Public opinion and notional constraint**

In addition to these ‘structured’ modes of influence, most policy-makers also identify public opinion as a constraint on their actions. Not all critics agree. Some argue that references to public opinion are little more than lip service. They also note that the opinion referred to is most often attentive opinion—that of individuals or groups well conversed on particular issues, who are likely to be the most vocal in communicating opinion—rather than mass opinion as such. However, as authors like Thomas Risse-Kappen argue, policy-makers in liberal democracies do not decide against an overwhelming public consensus. In fact, the people, as a mass, exercise an important negative influence through the climate of public opinion, which prescribes the limits within which foreign policy can be shaped. Elites may have the final say, but elite groups whose opinions are in line with public preferences are likely to prevail. Public opinion thus affects policy “by setting broad limits of constraint and identifying a range of policies within which decision-makers must choose if they are not to face retaliation in competitive elections”.

Extending these ideas, Christopher Hill argues that public opinion constitutes a ‘notional constraint’, which exists as least as much in the minds of decision-makers as it is embodied in substantive elements like law, institutions, and demonstrations. It is a ‘constructed’ reality: on any foreign policy issue decision-makers will have a preconception of the public’s view and degree of interest, though this image need not reflect reality precisely. This notional constraint sets specific boundaries in their minds on what they can do in accordance with their concept of public opinion. While notional constraint is a limiting factor in

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232 Frankel, p. 70.
236 ibid, p. 268.
any regime, it is likely to be strongest and most closely reflect real public opinion in democracies, where societal interests are more effectively communicated to accountable decision-makers.

The functioning of notional constraint in transitional regimes is likely to be more problematic. For one, the very notion of representative public opinion may be questionable. The transitional period usually witnesses the first tentative expressions of public opinion, still lacking in complete freedom, and not entirely representative. Moreover, until the processes by which opinions are informed mature, public opinion may lurch dramatically, and be more damaging than beneficial to foreign policy formulation. Policy-makers may struggle to establish exactly what constitutes public opinion on any particular topic in a volatile environment characterised by rapidly transforming expressions of opinion. Consequently, their notional constraint may be based on quite selective concepts of societal attitudes, and more in line with their own preferences or only those of the most articulate, mobilised groups. Again, many political figures may simply exhibit a blatant disregard for public input, until more responsive behaviours are internalised. In the meantime, public opinion may only sporadically influence policy. However, this does not mean public opinion has absolutely no influence on transitional policy-making. Rather, the aforementioned instability and institutional weakness may facilitate intermittent, unpredictable, significantly influential incursions of public opinion that further exacerbate other transitional foreign policy-making challenges.

External Influences: The Operational Environment

In the contemporary world the division between the external and internal spheres has become less clear. In transitional regimes this fluidity can become even more pronounced, with both positive and negative repercussions. Certainly, engaging external benefactors appears advantageous to democratising regimes. External assistance can buffer economic decline, provide a focus for political and economic reorientation, and build the intellectual capital required for managing new economies and political systems. Evidence from postcommunist Europe suggests that regimes that receive significant direct economic and political assistance, in addition to moral support, are advantaged over those that do not. In terms of foreign policy, assistance
can make nations more favourably disposed toward donors and encourage permanent policy reorientation, particularly where new, rewarding sources of trade or investment are identified. Where changes “lock” nations into relationships with like-minded states, regime stability and durability, as well as foreign policy focus, are likely to be enhanced. Change may also have more pragmatic political benefits, delivering cheap electoral dividends for governments, as in the aforementioned European cases.237

Many factors influence the potential for positive incentives. The postcommunist transitions of the late 1980s and early 1990s, for example, occurred in a political-ideological environment that was more conducive to change than the preceding Cold War period. Globalisation and regionalisation also increased incentives and opportunities for change.238 However, the favourable environment was not experienced equally. In Europe, the intensity of incentives depended on physical and cultural distance, as well as the influence of Russia.239 In the FSU, however, distance from the European liberal heartland (and proximity to the rival Russian core) combined with the fact that only the Baltic states had experienced more than an ephemeral participation in preceding waves of democratisation, meant a significantly different transitional trajectory occurred: democratic institutions remained contested, neo-authoritarian solutions often found favour, and foreign policy outcomes were less predictable.240 Overall, too, although the environment for transition improved, one of considerable ideological conformity emerged. Communism’s fall led many to believe that

democratisation was inevitable.\textsuperscript{241} Economically, transiting states emerged into an ideological and programmatic context that was more hostile to political solutions.\textsuperscript{242} Assistance and advice from multilateral organisations and bilateral quarters pushed neoliberalism, creating universalising tendencies that placed boundaries on experimentation and regime types. Economic plans and foreign policy strategies had to be tailored with these constraints in mind, lest states isolate themselves from important economic, developmental and political assistance.

The fact that the post-Cold War external environment did not become substantively more secure provided a further challenge. While the threat of massive nuclear war subsided, so too did the predictability of the bipolar global security regime. And while fluidity offered opportunities for foreign policy initiatives and changes in global structures, it was also comprehensively more complex—exacerbating policy formulation and execution challenges for states grappling with reform and issues of identity. Compounding this, as participants in change, transiting states themselves exacerbated the unstable security situation. Neighbours and the international community were forced to re-evaluate transiting states, sometimes more positively, often more cautiously, given the potentially unwelcome consequences of their transitions. Communism’s fall throughout Eastern Europe, for example, clearly demonstrated one such impact: potential contagion effects.\textsuperscript{243} However, more serious potential outcomes also existed. In extreme cases where democratisation mobilises conflicts over the shape of the political community in ethnically divided societies, the boundaries between intra- and interstate conflict can become blurred.\textsuperscript{244} More generally, change can inspire re-evaluations of the threat provided by the transiting state or the newly consolidated regime, the decline of old alliances or disputes, and even opportunistic invasion. The more severe and protracted the domestic upheavals and more influential the state involved, the potentially more problematic. In the case of postcommunist Europe, the collapse of the Warsaw Pact and Soviet security guarantees combined with the strong desire to protect hard won sovereignty encouraged

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\textsuperscript{242} Schmitter and Santiso, p. 75.

\textsuperscript{243} Laurence Whitehead discusses at length the reasons for contagion in Whitehead (1996), pp. 5-8, and the international demonstration effects, pp. 21-22.

\textsuperscript{244} Kahler (1997a), p. 297.
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transformations in military capacity that were perceived as potentially threatening. What made this even more destabilising was the large number of states transiting simultaneously and the unusually high degree of post-independence political mobilisation they displayed, given the implied heightened propensity towards war.245 Unsurprisingly, then, transitional states may find themselves isolated until some form of normality returns, either through conscious retrenchment or external actors’ inability to keep pace with rapidly transforming political developments. Such disengagement may only further complicate policy-making for transitional regimes, unsure of how to react to an external environment, itself in a state of flux.

At the same time, however, transition has potentially positive security implications. It may remove security impediments. Democratisation may facilitate integration into the democratic community, with all the benefits this entails. Considering that no two democracies have ever gone to war against one another and that their greater international legitimacy appears to discourage other states from attacking, the security benefits alone appear significant. This same legitimacy may facilitate greater foreign policy success, even if liberal expectations constrain the more aggressive pursuit of state interests. Balancing such constraints, however, democratisation also offers opportunities for calculating foreign policy actors. In reality, diplomatic strategies and tactics are constrained both by what other states will accept and by what domestic constituencies will ratify.246 In a ‘two level game model’ statesmen are typically trying to manipulate domestic and international politics simultaneously. Opportunities exist for skilled politicians to use domestic policies to affect international bargaining and international moves to achieve domestic goals.247 Democracies have particular advantages in employing such ‘double-edged’ strategies. While all statesmen can benefit from stressing the limited size of their domestic win-set (the domestically-defined boundaries of acceptable agreements) and the inflexibility of domestic interests to extract better outcomes from foreign counterparts,248 democratic leaders can refer to electoral legitimacy and institutionalised public accountability as stronger constraints. By the same token, reference to external factors may be used to influence the greater

245 Skak, pp. 30-4.
246 Moravcsik, p. 15.
247 ibid p. 17.
248 ibid, p. 28.
domestic constraints democratic politicians face in pursuing their chosen policy directions. Creative and entrepreneurial politicians then, may actually enjoy advantages from the extra constraints placed upon them by democratisation.

Conclusion

Regime transition thus has a vast range of foreign policy impacts. In the case of postcommunist democratisation specifically, significant changes still occur as the popular voice is empowered, even though foreign policy making is never subject to the same degree of decentralisation and popular influence as other policy areas. Policy-makers become increasingly constrained by pluralism, the accountability that comes along with structural transformation and the emergence of a democratic political culture. While successful democratic consolidation offers significant opportunities for facilitating better quality, more enduring, responsive, innovative and broadly supported policy, change is not immediate. Establishing and normalising new systems and behaviours to facilitate and sustain truly democratic policy takes time. In the meantime, transitional policy-makers operate in an exceptionally fluid environment characterised by multiple levels of uncertainty. Economic decline, dislocation and reprioritisation often limit foreign policy resources, while institutional changes undermine states’ abilities to use them effectively. Considerable discrepancies may emerge between stated intentions and what can actually be achieved, while prolonged decline may jeopardise security of the state itself. Instability can also stem from ideological transformation, as the very concepts of what the state is, its role in the world, and what its interests are, are in flux. Building the stable, consensual conceptual basis required for clear, enduring policy can be a long and difficult process, particularly where debates are complicated by an under-developed market place of ideas and political and economic upheaval. Where the external environment is also unstable, this only further complicates efforts to redefine state identity, interests and policy, as well as the very contours of transition itself, by providing either positive or negative stimulus to change.

By far the most dominant and immediate sources of foreign policy instability, however, are the changes in the way the state functions. Pursuing comprehensive
political change demands not only institutional and legal, but also significant cultural and behavioural change—particularly when authoritarianism is abandoned in favour of democracy. However, while transforming, the political system must continue to operate. Policy-making may be complicated by discrepancies between old and new processes, as well as resistance to change. Comprehensive change also tends to negatively impact institutional capacity and efficacy, as institutions struggle with their new mandates, functions, relationships, and resources. With prior vertical and horizontal ties in flux, authority weakened, and pressures for participation growing, virtual institutional paralysis may occur. Weak, inexperienced institutions and burgeoning foreign policy actors clamouring for influence may only add to the confusion and instability. Uncertainty and redistribution may also intensify destructive competition and feed instability, while elite infighting can further undermine institutional and governmental capacity, even resulting in the disproportionate empowerment of certain institutional interests at pluralism’s expense. In this highly competitive environment, foreign policy issues may be mobilised to serve other competitive purposes in the domestic arena and thus become politicised. Alternatively, where consensus, predictable processes and clearly established hierarchies are lacking, the potential for opportunistic actors to pursue their own agendas, fragmenting state foreign policy, is only heightened. The institutional equation can thus be a complex and challenging one for democratising regimes and their foreign policy processes.
Chapter two
Russia’s historical relationship with Central Asia

In understanding the impacts of regime change on Russian foreign policy making towards Central Asia, it is important to understand the historical background to Russia’s relations with the region. This chapter considers the formation of relations between Russia and what would later become Central Asia, paying special attention to the drivers of policy and the influence of domestic factors on evolving regional policies. It seeks to identify continuities and trends in Russia’s approach to Central Asia over time, providing a context for both Moscow’s contemporary relations and a basis for understanding what impacts transition has had on Russia’s long term approach to the region.

The Russian conquest and colonisation of Central Asia was a gradual process that fell into two distinct phases: the first into the Kazakh steppe, mainly throughout the eighteenth century; and the second during the nineteenth century into the area then known as Turkestan. Within these broad phases however, colonisation was neither systematic nor consistent; it was instead punctuated by short periods of activity and long periods of consolidation. It was also a process motivated by differing factors at different times; though certain motivations were more regularly at play in the expansion equation, no one factor dominated thinking over the long period of colonisation. Moreover, it also appears that there was no definite strategic goal or ultimate vision; it was more a matter of trial and error. Nevertheless, it was a process that progressively intensified. Ultimately, too, conquest was thorough and finally completed at a time when the Imperial Russian state had begun disintegrating. By the late nineteenth century, the entire territory of modern Central Asia was effectively under some form of Russian control, either direct—under the administration of the government, or indirect—as vassals to the Empire. Although this administration did unwind temporarily following the October revolution, once the Bolsheviks had

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established their dominance in Moscow, Central Asia was quickly reintegrated into their new multinational state. The Bolsheviks’ motivations for integration were clearer, guided by such factors as security and the desire for international proletarian solidarity. Subsequently, there was also an increased focus on development. Still, post-revolutionary relations also demonstrated significant continuity with the Tsarist period. Central Asia effectively remained a colonial possession. The Communists were similarly contemptuous towards national aspirations, condescending, and demonstrated continued Great Russian chauvinism and imperialist attitudes. It was only under Gorbachev, and later independence that substantive changes in relations occurred.

Expansion and its motivations

Under both Ivan IV in the sixteenth century and Peter the Great in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, efforts to expand relations with the peoples south of Russia were primarily motivated by two interrelated factors; commerce and security. Although expansion onto the Kazakh steppe offered little immediate material gain Russia was keen to protect and enhance the trade routes that traversed the territory. Since the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries Russian merchants had participated in a trading route that passed down the Volga, across the Caspian and the steppes of Kazakhstan to the ancient Central Asian kingdoms and beyond to Persia and India.2 The steppe, however, was a dangerous place. Caravans were frequently subject to nomadic raids and kidnapping for the slave trade, while instability disrupted the expansion of trade networks. At the same time, security concerns reached beyond solely commercial considerations. The geographical contiguity that made it seem so natural to expand and fill the power vacuum before someone else did so,3 also meant that Russian lands, particularly those of southwest Siberia, were also frequently subject to raids. By expanding its influence on the steppe, the imperial government hoped to position itself better to curb such Kazakh forays,4 as well as those from further afield.5

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5 Bergholz, pp. 369-70
For a nation whose lack of strongly defined geographical boundaries and history of invasion already strongly influenced the national psyche, the preoccupation with security was significant. Given their lands afforded so little protection, Russians felt constantly pressed to expand their borders to keep their enemies at bay.\(^6\) And as well as fearing attack from their culturally superior neighbours in Europe, the threat of these ‘uncivilised’ nomads of the Eurasian steppe on their southern and eastern frontiers was genuine;\(^7\) it was from this direction that the Mongol invasion had come.

Success to this end came under Empress Anna in 1730, when the leader of the Lesser Horde expressed his wish that the tsarina be his suzerain.\(^8\) Motivated by internal political competition and self-interest other Kazakh leaders quickly followed suit; the Middle Horde in 1731 and some of the leaders of the Great Horde in 1734.\(^9\) This recognition of the Hordes as vassals of the empire, rather than asserting full military and administrative control over Kazakh territory, was a relatively limited commitment that suited Russia, given its continued preoccupation with Siberian expansion. Efforts centred primarily on the erection of a series of fortified posts,\(^10\) which by 1750 extended some 2500km, from Gurev to the northern tip of the Caspian Sea, north to Orenburg, east as far as the Alatau Mountains and the town of Ust-Kamnogorsk, and as far south as Lake Balkash.\(^11\) Yet it soon became apparent that these initial, cautious moves were achieving little. The khans of the Greater Horde, in particular, suffered insufficient internal authority to implement any agreements and failed to meet their responsibilities as vassals.\(^12\) Expectations of increased trade and security were disappointed. Traders remained as susceptible as ever to nomad raids, and the slave trade continued. In response, Catherine the Great (1762-96) embarked on a more proactive strategy, expanding Russian strategic depth from its Orenburg base. Progressively, Russia consolidated a firmer hold on the northern, north-western and

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\(^7\) Bergholz, p. 11.


\(^9\) Bergholz, pp. 370 and 372, this author notes 1731.

\(^10\) Soucek, p. 196.


\(^12\) Bergholz, p. 372.
north-eastern fringes of Kazakh territory. It transformed its influence and pockets of control into a more comprehensive authority, assisted by the establishment of military posts continually deeper in Kazakh territory, in places such as Akmolinsk and Turgai.\textsuperscript{13}

This advance, however, saw Russia trapped in a vicious cycle—continually expanding to establish defensible borders and protect territorial gains. As the informal boundaries of empire advanced, so did security risks and obligations. With Russian settlers moving into Northern Kazakhstan, for example, government forces were compelled to follow, building forts and outposts to protect the colonists and bring the nomads under closer control.\textsuperscript{14} In doing so, they only encouraged the colonists to advance further, dragging the state with them. Yet while pushing its military outposts deeper into the steppe, Russia remained unable to comprehensively control the territory, nor was there a stable or well-defined frontier. In the early nineteenth century, it became increasingly obvious the strategy for dealing with the Hordes was failing, and tactics like bribery subsequently gave way to a combination of tough negotiation and military force.\textsuperscript{15} A second stage in the initial expansion thus emerged, between 1822 and 1848, when St. Petersburg resolved to eliminate the hordes,\textsuperscript{16} extinguishing Kazakh sovereignty. To achieve this, the expanding southern line of military outposts created a stranglehold on a broad swathe of Kazakh territory and tightened the noose, formed over a century before, linking up the extensive areas between. By the time Russia’s endeavours were stalled by the worsening European situation, the majority of the steppe was under Russian control. Relatively little effective resistance had slowed the pace. Success, however, meant Russia now had to face the problem presented by the much closer proximity of the Central Asian khanates,\textsuperscript{17} and was forced to cast its sights further afield.\textsuperscript{18} Although a permanent, secure border remained elusive, changing international and domestic dynamics also meant new motivations were coming into play.

\textsuperscript{13} Soucek, p. 196.  
\textsuperscript{16} Stage runs between 1822 and 1848, Soucek, p. 197.  
\textsuperscript{18} Morgan, p. 44.
Once the brief interregnum caused by Crimean engagement (1853-58) and the preoccupation with Alexander II’s domestic reforms had passed, attention returned to Central Asia. In this second stage of expansion, between 1864 and 1884, Russia acquired the remaining two Kazakh territories, Semireche and Syr Darya, and the rest of the region; present-day Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan.\textsuperscript{19} Expansion here was significantly more complex and risky than on the steppe, however, given the existence of three relatively well-organised polities—the Khanates of Khiva and Khoqand and the Emirate of Bukhara.\textsuperscript{20} Moves against these states also held the potential of conflict with other major powers such as Britain and China, which Russia was keen to avoid. It was also more geographically distant, in a more foreboding environment and, thus, demanded comprehensively different strategies than previously employed. Despite these challenges, Russia expanded relatively rapidly, particularly in the early part of this period. In 1865 it stormed Tashkent—“the key to Central Asia”—annexing it the following August.\textsuperscript{21} In doing so, it essentially committed itself to conquering the entire region. By 1868 Russia was at war with the Emir of Bukhara, finally annexing substantial parts of his territory and making the rest a protectorate.\textsuperscript{22} The Russian army then subdued Khiva in 1873, although the imposition of a settlement terminating the khanate’s independence came only after Russian intervention in internal uprisings in 1875.\textsuperscript{23} Like Bukhara, however, it survived as a Russian protectorate, in part because maintaining its semi-independence allowed St. Petersburg to placate British concerns over Russian aggression. The Khanate of Khoqand, however, was less fortunate. In 1876 it was liquidated altogether, its remaining territory and that of its Kyrghiz vassals annexed.\textsuperscript{24} By the 1880s expansion was winding down. Already, however, Russia controlled practically the entire region. Only limited pockets of resistance and territory remained. In 1881 the Russians reversed an 1879 defeat at Gok Tepe, crushing the Turkmen resistance in what was described as a massacre. In 1884 continued Turkmen incursions led to the annexation of Mari, and to

\textsuperscript{19} Soucek, p. 195.
\textsuperscript{20} March, p. 139.
\textsuperscript{22} Soucek, pp. 198-99.
\textsuperscript{23} d’Encausse (1994), p. 146.
\textsuperscript{24} Soucek, pp. 198-99.
escalating conflict with Britain over the Afghan border. 25 Finally, the conquest of Central Asia was completed with the voluntary submission of the Oasis of Merv in 1884. 26 These vast gains were legitimated when the Pamirs Boundary Commission of 1895 and the 1907 Anglo-Russian Convention confirmed these new territorial realities under international law.

When explaining motivations for expansion, it is important not to ascribe some great scheme or overriding consensus to policy, nor to ignore its evolution over time. For much of the period in question, even those branches of government charged with the formulation and implementation of policy towards Central Asia adopted openly antagonistic stances on expansion. Generally speaking, the Foreign Ministry was a conservative force. Its restraint was based, on one hand, on a dominant institutional attitude of the region’s relatively minor importance. Foreign Minister Count Nesselrode (1816-1856), for example, remained consistently more concerned with European than Central Asian matters. 27 His successor, Gorchakov, perpetuated this Eurocentrism. The Foreign Ministry was also motivated by a desire to avoid conflict with other major powers, especially after the Crimean defeat. Advances into Turkestan were opposed on the basis they could cause friction, or even war, with Britain, 28 which was also vying for regional influence. Although they may have acknowledged the inevitability of some form of expansion, they still hoped to inspire caution and, with their allies in the Ministry of Finance, constrain the more aggressive, expansionist lobby. For those involved in diplomacy, Central Asia was but one part of a larger picture, and conservatism was the order of the day.

Such views, however, did not find favour with the War Ministry who, along with military figures, the frontier governors, and some nationalistic diplomats, favoured a more active policy, justified in terms of security, national glory, and international competition. Security-wise, throughout the late nineteenth century, the desire to create a stable frontier in a region divided among weakly organised nomadic tribes and petty

26 March, p. 142.
27 Morgan, p. 40.
states that were threatened by each other and centrifugally, continued to shape policy.29 Yet, the interest of other external powers—particularly Britain—in the southern periphery was also identified as a growing security threat. Although both powers had already expanded significantly without notable competition, given Asia was perceived as sufficiently large to allow expansion without risk of collision,30 by the mid-nineteenth century such confidence was evaporating, particularly following Crimea. Thereafter, any British encroachments upped the ante for Russian hawks, not only because they constituted a further insult to the injuries sustained in defeat, but also because they potentially foreclosed future imperial expansion by removing Russia’s last remaining ‘open frontier’.31 Defensively, too, British expansion into the vacuum between the Caspian Sea and China advanced foreign troops toward both the colonial acquisitions and Russia itself. Pre-emptively expanding Russian control further south was seen to offer greater strategic depth. Closer control over the Uzbek khanates too, would undermine Britain’s ability to use them against Russia or to construct an anti-Russian confederacy in the region.32

In offensive terms, the advantage of holding positions to threaten the British in India was emphasised.33 Throughout the nineteenth century continued activism aimed to perpetuate the perception that Russia maintained designs on India. And although no serious plans to invade ever existed, such actions were diversionary tactics, “…to keep England quiet in Europe by keeping her employed in Asia”.34 Locating Russian forces where they could threaten Britain at its most vulnerable point in the event of war, creating an implicit threat or opening an alternative front, it was hoped, would make the British more cautious about going to war in another crisis of the 1853-4 kind,35 and more willing to accommodate Russia’s European goals. Outside Europe, too, continued Central Asian activism afforded greater freedom from British interference in other colonial endeavours. Schemes in 1886, during the Boer War (1899-1902), and

33 MacKenzie, p. 211.
34 G. N. Curzon (1889), Russia in Central Asia in 1889 and the Anglo-Russian Question, London: Longmans Green, pp. 313-23, cited by Hauner, p. 84.
35 Gillard, p. 145.
the Russo-Japanese War (1904-5), for example, must be seen as part of a massive media campaign to keep the British on their toes in Central Asia and give Russia a free hand in Manchuria.\textsuperscript{36} Hence, the ‘hawks’ motivations went well beyond reactionary thinking or defending simple threats to border security, to more ambitious, sophisticated efforts to defend broader imperial interests.

In pursuing a vigorous policy and creating the image of being a strong imperialist power, many also believed Russia could recoup its military and political fortunes, partially offset its embarrassing reversals in Europe and prove it remained a mighty world power to its international detractors.\textsuperscript{37} Expansion was thus also compensatory. Soon after the humiliating Crimean defeat, for example, the Tsarist government ordered its forces deep into Central Asia, aiming to both bolster national prestige and gain compensation for its losses.\textsuperscript{38} Here it was almost certainly guaranteed success over less organised ‘backward forces’—something that could not be assured elsewhere. In addition, despite competition with the British, the danger of conflict with another imperial power was judged as comparatively lower than elsewhere.\textsuperscript{39} Such efforts to regain prestige were also directed domestically, where failure and international weakness resonated amongst an increasingly frustrated population. Though hardly empowered, the general population was becoming increasingly politicised and its criticism of governmental policy was growing, fuelled by domestic change. Nationalist themes increasingly came to attract the attention of concerned social groups. As these themes spread, pressure grew for the compensatory satisfaction of international displays of power.\textsuperscript{40} While the tsar was generally apprehensive about stirring up any form of popular nationalism—fearing the consequences for a regime based on conservatism and hierarchy—he was not completely averse to its mobilisation, particularly to placate the politically aware and shore-up the autocratic regime. And as the glory and prestige of the old regime and the autocracy faded, the temptation to embrace Russian nationalism only grew.\textsuperscript{41} Consequently, by the mid 1860s, it became

\textsuperscript{36} Hauner, p. 83.
\textsuperscript{37} Gillard, p. 117 talks about the effort to rebuild its position as a global power.
\textsuperscript{39} MacKenzie, pp. 211-12.
\textsuperscript{41} ibid, p. 63.
apparent that Alexander II was increasingly tempted by the glory and prestige to be garnered in Turkestan at minimal cost. He subsequently came to favour the War Ministry’s course of moderate expansion, abandoning efforts to balance the opposing forces in his government.42

Having committed itself to countering British influence for symbolic purposes Russia could hardly ignore any British challenges, lest it appear weak. Both powers were subsequently sucked into a self-perpetuating competitive struggle, where misperception motivated expansion, based only loosely on evaluations of actual costs and benefits. Competition with Britain thus also acquired its own momentum, intensifying over time, dragging Russia continually deeper into the region. In 1839, for example, rumours of a forthcoming Russian expedition against Khiva encouraged the British to install a puppet leader to create a buffer state in Afghanistan, and send officers to Bukhara, Khiva, and Kokand to convince them to throw their lot in with India rather than Russia.43 In response to being out-witted, Russia acted pre-emptively, accelerating preparations for the ill-fated Khivan campaign of winter 1839-40.44 Later, Alexander III struggled to halt further expansion, despite wanting to avoid military conflict. The Indian viceroy’s protectorate over Afghanistan (1879-80) again set in motion the struggle for position, with Russia responding with Merv and Geok Tepe.45 It was only in the final decades of the nineteenth century when most territory was conquered and both powers turned their attention elsewhere, that these tendencies declined.

In addition to official pressure, however, the hawks also drove their own unofficial expansionist agenda. Increasingly frustrated with government vacillation, its lack of urgency and preoccupation with other foreign policy questions, some military actors deliberately circumvented the Foreign Ministry line. Those closest to the action were typically the most militant and impatient,46 identifying opportunities for improving Russia’s position and capitalising on them. With sufficient backing from certain high-

43 Morgan (1975), p. 495.
44 Mission was forced back by severe climate, losing two thirds of its original strength of 9500: Morgan (1975), p. 495.
45 Geyer, p. 113.
46 MacKenzie, p. 212.
level officials, these figures essentially took policy into their own hands, converting each additional reconnaissance patrol and campaign into the necessity for another. In doing so, they blocked out a functioning, piecemeal policy, appropriating control and forcefully filling policy vacuums, pre-empting official decisions to expand. Yet local military commanders also had less altruistic motivations than the glory of empire. Far from St. Petersburg, reliant largely upon their own resources, they were tempted into risky advances in the pursuit of personal glory, promotion and adventure. Each successful campaign only increased their confidence and lust for expansion. Once initiated, such was the impetus of local expansionism that the government was unable to stall its momentum. And although the accomplishments of the Russian armed forces often embarrassed the Tsar and diplomats, who repeatedly issued official instructions not to advance, the government simultaneously fuelled these tendencies by rewarding those who succeeded. For example, when Cherniaev followed his instincts in taking Tashkent, contradicting the Foreign Ministry, he received not condemnation but three medals and a promotion. In fact, such decentralised, quasi-official expansion had benefits. It was economically efficient; local generals often succeeded at negligible cost to the government. Moreover, the apparent lack of control over those at the edges of empire was a valuable diplomatic tool, used by high-ranking diplomats to dampen the international political ramifications of expansion, while the state still benefited. Consequently, it is unsurprising that localised expansion was not only tolerated, but also encouraged. Such inconsistency meant, however, that like the quest for security and defensible borders, expansion also took on a self-sustaining momentum, driven by opportunism, prestige and the tsar’s unwillingness or inability to bring important institutional actors to heel.

Such a fragmented policy-making environment also afforded the emergent capitalist class scope to advance their interests, compounding expansionist pressures. Traditionally, scholars have argued that the industrial and commercial class presented an increasingly vocal argument for total conquest, convinced that annexation offered

48 ibid, p. 58.
49 MacKenzie, p. 211. See also Morgan (1981), p. 45, who notes that local commanders in Orenburg had sought expansion to further their careers.
50 Geyer, p. 95.
51 Morgan (1981), pp. 119-120.
crucial economic benefits.\textsuperscript{52} For one, capturing the region’s resources could supply Russia’s growing industry. Merchants, too, demanded the government secure cotton supplies compromised by the American Civil War.\textsuperscript{53} Tycoons, bankers and the educated were also vocal in their demand that the government secure favourable trade conditions to allow Russian goods to penetrate markets as far south and east as possible.\textsuperscript{54} Central Asia was a potential consumer of the metropolis’s manufactured goods, particularly those that remained uncompetitive in Western Europe.\textsuperscript{55} While a continual factor in the broad expansionist equation, however, trade was never a dominant factor and was certainly less significant in motivations to annex Turkestan than the Kazakh steppe.\textsuperscript{56} This clearly differentiated Russian imperialism from its contemporary counterparts. Instead, aforementioned issues like competition, strategy and prestige remained pre- eminent. The region’s actual economic importance also remained low; in the mid-nineteenth century, the khanates constituted only 6\% of imports and 4.2\% of exports in Russia’s Asian trade, the Kazakhs only 13\% and 16.8\% respectively.\textsuperscript{57} Despite rising imports of raw cotton from Turkestan the region’s economic importance remained extremely low until the 1890s.\textsuperscript{58} Moreover, while some may have been vocal in their demands, there is as much evidence that private interests actually had to be prodded and subsidised before they reluctantly involved themselves in Central Asia.\textsuperscript{59} There is also little to suggest Russian merchants or industrialists had gained a decisive influence over the deliberations of the autocracy.\textsuperscript{60} Importantly, Russia’s ruling classes held economic privilege by virtue of political power, not wealth, as was the case in the industrial powers of the West.\textsuperscript{61} Their influence remained somewhat precarious and the government was generally more concerned with more mundane economic matters than advancing the interests of private capital. It is clear

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{52} d’Encausse (1994), p. 141.
\textsuperscript{53} Rashid, p. 17.
\textsuperscript{54} Khalfin, p. 76, Wheeler, pp. 279-80.
\textsuperscript{58} Geyer. p. 93.
\textsuperscript{59} MacKenzie, p. 211.
\textsuperscript{60} Geyer. p. 92.
\textsuperscript{61} Sarkisyanz, p. 55.
\end{footnotesize}
that while economic motivations were certainly present, the claim that the ‘economic interests of the Russian bourgeoisie’ were a central reason for colonial policies in Central Asia appears more an idea stressed by Soviet historians.\textsuperscript{62} While many merchants certainly welcomed expansion when it became a \textit{fait accompli}, and some may have advocated annexation for economic reasons, it is an exaggeration to say that the trading community initiated the invasion of Central Asia.\textsuperscript{63}

Within this swirl of motivations, more pragmatic influences also existed. Following state development and reforms under Ivan IV and Peter the Great, Russia had emerged as a modern power, overwhelmingly stronger than any of its Asian neighbours.\textsuperscript{64} Neither the tribal societies of the steppe nor the more organised Central Asian city-states were a match for Russia, a factor that both facilitated its success, and encouraged its ambitions. Compounding this advantage further was the fact that Russia’s penetration coincided with the Central Asian states’ entering a slow, steady decline.\textsuperscript{65} Weakened by their own domestic struggles, backward economies, public discontent, and worsening conditions, the Khanates became rather lame adversaries.\textsuperscript{66} As this disparity grew, some Russians came to argue like their European counterparts, that imperial expansion was inevitable; it was ‘natural’ for Russia to displace weaker powers, filling the political and strategic vacuum. It was believed the vicinity of nomads was bound to force civilised states to expand until they reached another civilised state, in this case Persia.\textsuperscript{67} In the age of manifest destiny, too, expansion at the expense of primitive, tribal states was not simply regarded as inevitable, but also beneficial to mankind.\textsuperscript{68} Like all imperialist nations, Russia at least flirted with the idea that it could bring the benefits of its ‘superior civilisation’ to these ‘underdeveloped’ peoples. In 1864, for example, Foreign Minister Gorchakov compared Russian expansion to that of America, France, and Britain and motivated “less by ambition than…by necessity”.\textsuperscript{69} As a developed nation, Russia was ‘obligated’ to expand and

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{62} Geyer. p. 90 and MacKenzie, p. 211.
  \item \textsuperscript{63} Wheeler, p. 279.
  \item \textsuperscript{64} Ivan IV (ruled 1547-1584) Peter the Great (ruled 1682-1725) Soucek, p. 196.
  \item \textsuperscript{65} Bergholz, p. 71.
  \item \textsuperscript{66} d’Encausse (1994), p. 149.
  \item \textsuperscript{67} Sarkisyanz, p. 49.
  \item \textsuperscript{68} MacKenzie, pp. 210-211.
  \item \textsuperscript{69} Sarkisyanz, p. 49.
\end{itemize}
spread the blessings of Europe’s civilisation. The reality was, however, that ideological, particularly religious, motivations remained less significant than for other imperialist nations. While earlier history of the Muscovite state had been coloured by religious issues, later expansion did not exhibit the same religious undertones. In fact, the offensive war with Tatar Kazan in 1552 was probably the last war where religious enthusiasm had a major influence. Thereafter, occasional references to religious and other ideological justifications functioned more as compensatory justifications than true motivations, employed to lend legitimacy to the advance and disguise more exploitative intentions—a cynicism Russia did share with other imperialist nations.

The Tsarist administration

As Russian expansion advanced the authorities had to devise a method of integrating and ruling this massive region. Once annexed, the Kazakh lands were divided into three. The westernmost Kazkah lands (previously the Lesser and Bukey hordes) became the Uralsk oblast, whose governor reported directly to the Ministry of Interior. The Middle Horde was divided into the Turgai and Akmolinsk oblasts, with Turgai governed by the governor of Orenburg, who also reported to the Interior Ministry, and Akmolinsk governed together with Semipalatinsk, as the Governor-Generalship of the Steppe, from Omsk, Siberia. While this oblast also included some of the Greater Horde’s territory, much of this was later subsumed within the Governor Generalship of Turkestan, formed in 1867 and administered from Tashkent. Consisting of five oblasts (Syrdarya, Samarkand, Semireche, Fergana, and Zakaspie) and two protectorates administered as vassal states (the Emirate of Bukhara and Khanate of Khiva), this governor-generalship confirmed the overwhelmingly military nature of Russian administration. In the absence of any commercial network like the East India Company or cadre of civil administrators, the invading forces simply became an army of occupation and established a system of military governance that essentially survived until the revolution. While this reflected the region’s strategic importance, over time the administrative structures did gradually acquire more

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70 ibid, p. 48.
71 Sarkisyantz, p. 51.
72 Soucek, p. 201.
73 ibid, p. 201.
74 Wheeler, p. 273.
ambitious aims, such as providing for the progressive integration of Turkestan into the empire.\textsuperscript{75} And, ultimately, like imperialist structures worldwide, the administrative systems that took shape were based more on expediency and serving the interests of the coloniser than those of the subjugated peoples.

Economically, the self-interest of the imperial centre was most evident. The administration was shaped to provide revenue, a market for industrial manufactures, and to absorb some population.\textsuperscript{76} After rounding off the conquest, interest also centred on supporting the growing Russian industry, developing and exploiting the region’s resources, essentially transforming Central Asia into some sort of raw material appendage of the metropolitan industrial regions.\textsuperscript{77} Where infrastructure was developed, if not security focused, it tended to be tied to this extractive role. The expansion of rail, for example, though originally intended for troops and war, bound the region’s economy to Russia, making possible its development as a supplier of primary products (mainly cotton) to the metropolis.\textsuperscript{78} Through its extractive economic policies Russia established a fairly typical imperial economic relationship, in which the centre benefited greatly, while the periphery suffered from exploitation, under- and selective- development.

Outside of ensuring stability and profit, however, Russia was not a particularly interventionist colonial master. In fact, for most of the imperial period, its rule was remarkably benign. The Russian administrative system essentially overlaid the existing system and mostly let traditional rule be. While the economic policies it pursued impacted society indirectly, the Russians were surprisingly inactive in terms of social engineering. On the cultural and spiritual level, for example, they were fairly tolerant; local ways of life and Islamic belief were left alone unless they directly conflicted with Russia’s interests.\textsuperscript{79} In reality, however, these relatively non-interventionist policies were guided less by progressive attitudes than by neglect and ignorance. A large

\textsuperscript{76} Materialy k Kharakteristike Noradnogo Khoziaistva v Turkestane: Revizii Gr. Palena (1911), St. Petersburg, cited by Vaidyanath, p. 33.
\textsuperscript{77} Ibid, pp. 41-2.
\textsuperscript{78} Becker. pp. 240-2.
\textsuperscript{79} Soucek, p. 204.
measure of chauvinism and elitism was also evident. In southern Central Asia, as on the Kazakh steppe, Russia did not seek to integrate conquered people, but simply keep them in hand, not as Russian subjects but simply as aliens.\(^{80}\) When considered at all, the native population was viewed with distrust and contempt and little thought was given to its needs.\(^{81}\) Few administrators could speak indigenous languages and most were ignorant and indifferent to local customs and culture. Imperial officials did not exhibit any great concern for safeguarding the interests of the indigenous population, and often set aside valuable recommendations made by the various imperial commissions in order to serve their own or entrenched institutional interests.\(^{82}\) Only limited efforts were made to bestow any of the benefits of Russian civilisation, such as education, science, or technology. Thus, the benign appearance was a double-edged sword; the reality was that Russia’s regional administration perpetuated more typical colonial trends.

Apparent neglect also had more pragmatic goals, however. By not turning Central Asians into Russian subjects, for example, sparing them from military service, the imperial government hoped to forestall the formation of a local army, prevent the indigenous population learning how to handle modern arms, and thus maintain the disparity with Russian forces.\(^{83}\) A lack of efforts to educate the population also stemmed from military opposition to putting “ideas into the heads of the natives”,\(^{84}\) while keeping administrative structures predominantly Russian perpetuated the indigenous population’s political disempowerment. The region’s division also ensured its backwardness and balkanised nature, making it difficult for the indigenous population to build any large, well-knit and cohesive political organisation capable of challenging Russian domination.\(^{85}\) Finally, the non-interventionist approach also aimed at administering and managing the region as cheaply as possible. Once authority had been established, St. Petersburg’s principal interest was to maintain it at the least possible cost, allowing Russia to enjoy the benefits of empire without the expense.\(^{86}\) By managing the population without interfering in its affairs the tsarist government

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\(^{80}\) d’Encausse (1994a), p. 159.
\(^{81}\) Becker, p. 254.
\(^{82}\) Vaidyanath, pp. 36-37.
\(^{83}\) d’Encausse (1994a), p. 162.
\(^{84}\) Wheeler, pp. 283-84.
\(^{85}\) Vaidyanath, p. 35.
\(^{86}\) Becker, p. 236.
could render the machinery of colonial domination progressively lighter and less costly—an important goal for a weak and overextended Russia. Consequently, “benign” rule was also largely motivated by expediency.

The less interventionist approach did change after 1881, however, with the ascension of Alexander III and subsequent moves to greater absolutism, conservatism, and illiberalism. Fear, insecurity, and suspicion increasingly characterised tsarist rule, as it was challenged by popular dissatisfaction and the growth of revolutionary activity. This more conservative turn manifested itself in the supplementation of the relatively benign forms of acculturation with an intermittent state policy of forced cultural homogenisation. Alexander III’s reign was thus a period of harsh and systematic Russification for other ethnicities, despite the fact that ethnic Russians now only constituted 45% of the empire. In Central Asia efforts to strengthen Russian rule, undermine alternative sources of indigenous power and Islamic authorities, and homogenise cultural and social life expanded. In the same period, the negative ramifications of colonialism also became more obvious. New economic and social realities emerged. Cotton monocropping expanded, the seizure of traditional lands accelerated, and increasing numbers of Europeans came to occupy the cities. Nomadism declined, traditional clan and tribal organisations were eroded, and a new occupation-based social stratification emerged. For the indigenous population, Russian rule was now significantly impacting daily life, both through growing official Russification and the accumulation of more incremental colonial changes.

By the early 1900s, forced acculturalisation and the growing penetration of indigenous life fermented an increasingly vocal opposition. Organised around nationalist rhetoric, resisting Russian rule, it constituted an increasing threat to regional stability. Yet, rather than attempting to alleviate the causes of popular discontent, St. Petersburg demonstrated more interest in repressing the small native reformist intelligentsia. Subsequent policy allied the imperial presence with the most

89 Alexander Chubarov (1999), The Fragile Empire: A History of Imperial Russia, New York: Continuum, p. 207.
90 Vaidyanath, p. 48.
91 Becker, p. 250.
conservative elements of the local power structures. This myopic, reactionary policy ultimately proved self-defeating. Supporting conservatism meant that the tsarist regime came to support, by the end of empire, through its own ignorance and fears, those least amenable to the continuation of Russian rule. Finally, in 1916 the tsarist regime’s bankruptcy was demonstrated in a region-wide uprising that shook Russian rule to the core. Ostensibly, the uprising was triggered by the ill-conceived decision to draft Central Asians for service behind the front lines. This action, however, only ignited a combustible situation, bringing local concerns to the fore. Although imperial control and order were re-established, the brutal repression of the uprising and the death of more than one million Central Asians contributed to a greater political divide between Russia and the region, and fuelled the desire for independence. It also provided further evidence of the failure of the late-imperial regime’s reactionary strategies, and their attempts to resolve socio-political problems with military responses. The imperial regime simply reinstituted an unsatisfactory status quo. It is little wonder then, the Central Asians welcomed the fall of the empire only a year later.

The establishment of Soviet rule

The tsarist period officially ended on February 17, 1917 when Nicholas II abdicated and the Provisional Government was formed. During the Provisional Government’s short tenure, no major changes in relations occurred, though Russia’s position generally deteriorated further. Its uncompromising stance on the nationality question and its failure to redress nationalist concerns did little for Russia’s image. The regime born of the October revolution, however, initially seemed more favourably disposed towards demands for autonomy. Bolshevik policy recognised the right of nationalities to choose their destiny, even if this choice meant separation from Russia. Still, there

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93 Becker, p. 252.
95 Rashid, p. 21.
96 The Bolsheviks had clearly stated that the self-determination of the formerly oppressed peoples of the Tsarist Empire was one of their goals, as stated in two proclamations, one general and one specifically addressed to the Muslim peoples, see: Soucek, pp. 210-11, and Helene Carrere d’Encausse (1994c), ‘Civil War and New Governments’, in Central Asia: 130 years of Russian
was little regional support for the Bolsheviks and their position only weakened further as they were simultaneously challenged by local revolts, broader counter-revolutionary drives and foreign intervention. The outbreak of civil war saw the Bolsheviks displaced from the Steppe and cut off from Turkestan, with which they would only have intermittent contacts for two years. Already, by the time revolution occurred the Cossacks had seized power, sealing the Kazakh steppe from the Bolsheviks.97 The Kazakh Nationalist government, the Alash Orda, uncertain of whom to back, initially backed the Whites. Further south too, although a Soviet of People’s and Worker’s Deputies was established and proclaimed sovereignty over the region,98 its rule was far from unchallenged. For one, it still had to deal with continued uprisings and administer a region in complete disarray, cut off from Russia. At the same time, it did itself no favours, rejecting offers from Muslim organisations to form a coalition government and eschewing indigenous attempts to become politically active. The soviet’s official explanation for explicitly excluding Muslims was that the ‘natives’ possessed “no proletarian class organisations”.99 Yet, the reality was that this body was nothing more than a continuation of imperialist rule; an elitist body, espousing Russian chauvinism. The Central Asians responded by establishing the Turkestan Autonomous Government in the Ferghana Valley in December 1917.100 The liquidation of this alternative indigenous authority in early 1918, however, failed to increase support for the local soviet, instead illustrating its distance from those over whom it aspired to rule. Uncontrolled, its actions also increasingly damaged the broader Bolshevik cause and fuelled the Basmachi rebellions, which emerged in winter 1919-20.101

Little could realistically be done in Central Asia, however, until more pressing challenges elsewhere were resolved. Once the tide turned in favour of the Reds in 1919, attention turned to peripheral areas of the former empire. By then, too, many Muslim nationalists had abandoned support for the Whites, particularly after Admiral Kolchak proclaimed himself Supreme Regent of Russia and repeated his vow to fully

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97 March, p. 191.
98 d’Encausse (1994c), pp. 224.-5
100 Vaidyanath, p. 81.
101 Hiro, p. 18.
restore the empire. Suddenly, the Bolshevik willingness to accept self-determination appeared more attractive. Throughout 1919 and 1920 with growing indigenous support, the Red Army regained the Kazakh-Kyrgyz region from its adversaries. Assuring the Kazakhs their right to self-determination and a defined territory, aligning with nationalist leaders, and even transferring territory to the newly formed Kirghiz Autonomous Republic, strengthened the Bolshevik hand, enabling them to restore stability on the Steppe and cast their attention toward Turkestan. Towards the end of 1919, the government of the Russian Soviet Federated Socialist Republic (RSFSR) had become fully aware of the great discrepancy between its own precepts on the national question and the practices of the Russian Bolsheviks of Central Asia. In Turkestan, Soviet and party organs had fallen under the control of figures with nothing in common with the new regime’s ideals, intent solely on defending and strengthening their own position, and using the name of class struggle to oppress and persecute the native population. Recognising the potential for these anomalous policies to undermine their overall goals, the Bolsheviks began to pay greater attention to the Tashkent Soviet. A Turkestan Commission (the Turkkomissiya) was sent in November 1919 to “strengthen the links between the toiling masses of the Russian and Turkestan peoples, to help to strengthen the Soviet power…and to fulfil the Leninist national policy”. It aimed to root out continued imperialist attitudes and combat manifestations of both ‘bourgeois nationalism’ and pan-Islamic tendencies. To encourage greater local support the Bolsheviks also integrated indigenous peoples into the hitherto solely slavic Soviet. While it faced resistance, the Commission managed to weed out the Soviet’s most extreme nationalist and imperialist aspects, ensuring its survival, and ultimately its subjugation to Moscow.

By 1920, Bolshevik confidence was increasing. With stability re-established through most of the region and the Tashkent Soviet brought to heal, attention turned to Khiva and Bukhara. As domestic opposition within these rather backward regimes escalated, Moscow recognised a convenient opportunity to assist Bolshevik-friendly

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102 ibid, p. 14.
103 ibid, p. 17.
104 Vaidyanath, p. 100.
105 ibid, p. 102.
107 Vaidyanath, p. 113.
indigenous forces. Responding to an “appeal” by the Young Khivan Party, Soviet troops marched into Khiva in January 1920. Following the abdication of the last Khan Said Abdulla in February 1920, a Provisional Revolutionary Government was formed—the Khwarazm (Khivan) People’s Republic. Later that year, Moscow assisted the Young Bukharans overthrow their leadership. By year’s end, through limited intervention and alliances with indigenous forces, the Bolsheviks had installed new, socialist-oriented regimes in these former imperial vassals. Four regions now existed—the Kyrgyz (Kazakh) Republic, the Bukharan and Khwarazm People’s Republics, and Turkestan—and while all were Soviet influenced, they retained an official, though tenuous, autonomy. Between 1921 and 1923, however, the Bolsheviks increasingly encroached on this autonomy, abandoning previous commitments to self-determination for non-Russians. Gradually nationalist politicians were purged, republics subjugated through new administrative arrangements and treaties, military and economic independence similarly curtailed, readying the entire region for final standardisation and integration. With civil war all but over and most challenges to Bolshevik domination liquidated, the need for expedient agreements or subjugating overall Soviet goals for the sake of gaining temporary advantages in the struggle for power reduced. The risk of counterrevolutionary foreign intervention in the Russian revolution through any weak points on the periphery also had to be reduced, primarily through control of those republics. And finally, integration was seen to increase Soviet prestige, illustrating the ‘spontaneous’ spread of communism, particularly once it became apparent communism would not take hold in Europe, forcing the Bolsheviks to look back to Asia.

Military campaigns and efforts to win hearts and minds also began to pay dividends against the Basmachi movement, which had continued to lead rebellions throughout the early 1920s. While the stick was crucial, Bolshevik pragmatism—the willingness to temporarily reverse controversial revolutionary policies and ease the pressure on religious, cultural, and economic reform—was also important. By 1923 the tide had turned, as successful policies, the population’s exhaustion from years of upheaval, and the death of key rebel leaders bled Basmachi support. Although limited uprisings

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108 Hiro, p. 17.
109 Vaidyanath, p. 120.
continued, they were unsustainable and the effective defeat of the rebellions signalled yet another step in reconquest.\textsuperscript{111} The year 1924 became a turning point, when organised resistance to Soviet rule was liquidated, real sovereignty extinguished, and authority established to such a degree that socialist reconstruction—the imposition of new Soviet-wide norms—could begin. In October of that year, in order to create the objective conditions for the establishment of a socialist order, territorial reorganisation commenced. Delimitation sought to create equality in development amongst the nationalities, share out regional wealth, remedy the complex national tangle, and increase levels of class-consciousness.\textsuperscript{112} Turkestan was allowed to secede from the RSFSR, before being dissolved along with Bukhara and Khwarazm, and the Uzbek and Turkmen Soviet Socialist Republics (SSRs) established in their place. The Tajik and Kazakh autonomous republics were also established. Lastly, two autonomous regions were formed—the Qara-Kirghiz and the Karakalpak. Later, further changes occurred; in 1929 Tajikistan became an SSR, Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan attained the same status in 1936, and the Karakalpak region was subsumed within the Uzbek SSR.\textsuperscript{113}

By 1936 delimitation was finalised, with the Kazakh, Kyrgyz, Uzbek, Turkmen and Tajik Soviet Socialist Republics formed as members of the USSR in accordance with the 1922 Treaty of Union. This granted them autonomous, but not sovereign status. Within each republic the same political administrative structures were established, mirroring those of the RSFSR itself, ensuring political uniformity and simplifying management from Moscow. Of course, as well as the ostensible goal of socialist reconstruction, national delimitation also harboured other desires. For one, it aimed to strengthen Moscow’s dominance. Integrated into the hierarchical Soviet structures, the ruling authorities in each of the new national republics were clearly subservient to Moscow in all senses. Moscow would then direct these new national republics for both its own benefit, and for that of the revolutionary movement. National delimitation also aimed to render impotent any potential sources of region-wide opposition. Concern remained that linguistic, cultural and religious unity could facilitate anti-Soviet

\textsuperscript{111} Hauner, p. 92, sees the mopping up operations to wipe out the last of the Basmachi guerillas as the third step in re-conquest.

\textsuperscript{112} Vaidyanath, pp. 155 and 165.

collaboration. In particular, delimitation sought to finally eliminate any manifestation of pan-Turkic nationalism by introducing geographic and cultural divisions that did not exist previously. Kyrgyzstan, for example, was founded in an attempt to artificially divide the Kazakh nation into two separate entities, despite the fact the languages, customs and traditions were very similar. Throughout the region, in fact, new boundaries and the transfer of traditional territories appeared to purposefully create ethnic enclaves and the potential for tension and conflict. This can be seen most clearly in the division of the Ferghana Valley between Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. Such manipulation would later be complemented by policies of social and cultural engineering intended to accentuate differences and establish new national cultures and histories.

Life under the Soviets

Thus, by the late 1920s Moscow moved from re-establishing control to cementing its dominance with far-reaching political, social, and cultural policies. Administratively, Moscow used strict treaties, selective readings of agreements and ideology, the integration of state and party, and a system of sticks and carrots controlled from the centre to perpetuate this hierarchy. This meant in addition to the ‘vertical’ self-interest of the new regional communist class, there also existed a ‘horizontal’ self-interest, a pronounced Moscow-centred and Russo-centric chauvinism that continued the forced submission of the local population, despite the ‘international’ equality claimed by the system. This chauvinism was perhaps best encapsulated in the notion of Russians as starshii brat (older brother). Such dominance was effectively officially sanctioned during the Stalinist period’s ‘Great Retreat’, when the more radical egalitarian and collectivist Soviet policies were abandoned in favour of hierarchy, cultural traditionalism, and social conservatism. A state-promoted Soviet patriotism emerged, with a heavy Russian cultural overlay, to bind the nation together. Although an entirely Russifying or forcible assimilationist policy was never enacted, there was little question of who dominated the Union; the role of

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114 Rashid, p. 137.
115 Soucek, p. 232.
116 The term the ‘Great Retreat’ was coined by Nicholas S. Timasheff (1946), The Great Retreat: The Growth and Decline of Communism in Russia, New York, 1946, cited by Suny, p. 258.
117 Suny, p. 290.
Russian language and culture, and of the Russian people in general, as models whose values should be adopted, was overwhelming and beyond question or criticism.\textsuperscript{118} The Russified identity became a key component in efforts to create a uniform citizenry.\textsuperscript{119} Although this reliance on Russian culture certainly stemmed from the preoccupation with control—diversity could mean difference, dissidence, or secession and had therefore to be rendered harmless by vaccinating it with the Russian component\textsuperscript{120}—its legitimisation of Russian nationalism, arrogance, and continued political and cultural superiority, only normalised the region’s subjugation and perpetuated colonial exploitation through the new Soviet system.

In real terms, this chauvinism was expressed in the continued preponderance of Russians in power structures. Russians consistently occupied most high-level positions in republican governments, the party, military, and security apparatuses. Initially, this stemmed from the lack of well-educated and ideologically dependable local cadres.\textsuperscript{121} The Stalinist preoccupation with centralisation and unquestioned republican loyalty only exacerbated this situation. Many of the articulate and educated indigenous leaders who joined the party were purged during the 1920s and 1930s for fear of their nationalist leanings. Russians, on the other hand, were seen as loyal and dependable.\textsuperscript{122} Over time, however, Moscow realised that imposing revolutionary social transformations on a highly traditional society—divided from the Russian centre by language, religion, and culture—required recruitment of large numbers of Central Asians into local communist parties. The need for this native communist elite would remain until Soviet economic, social and educational policies had created a socialist society without national or class divisions, where all the nationalities had been assimilated \textit{(slianie)}, and ‘Soviet man’ had emerged.\textsuperscript{123} Following World War II, a new generation of Soviet-educated, war-hardened party cadres, loyal to the regime, began

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{118} Soucek, p. 233.
\item \textsuperscript{120} Soucek, p. 250.
\item \textsuperscript{121} See for example: Rashid, p. 194 re: Turkmenistan, and Tajikistan p. 169, and Gleason, p. 67, re: Uzbekistan.
\item \textsuperscript{122} Hiro, p. 30.
\end{itemize}
scaling the hierarchical ladder in Central Asia. These local cadres remained vulnerable to paranoia of heightened nationalism, however, as purges in the early 1950s demonstrated. It was only under Brezhnev that republican rule became increasingly indigenised, as a greater emphasis was placed on promoting indigenous figures to high office. In some respects, this reflected the adjustment of traditional social systems of patronage and kinship to Communist state-party hierarchies, and the mutation of clan-type relations into the structures of national nomenklatura. Yet those who rose to power still did so primarily as reward for subservience to Moscow and those who could promise unquestioned support for the socialist order were rewarded with virtually unlimited tenure. Moreover, although local leaders gained considerable autonomy, Brezhnev’s deal kept them out of federal decision-making, where Russians continued to dominate. And even locally, the strong Russian component endured. In the Turkmen republic, for example, weak nativification policies stemmed from both its location on the politically sensitive southern frontier, and because Moscow viewed the ‘natives’ as inadequately prepared to hold responsible positions. Key positions, such as security services officials, leaders of border troop units, and commanders of the Turkestan Military District subsequently remained either Russian or Slavic.

Economic relations also continued many exploitative practices, if ideological justifications had changed. Moscow’s control over planning and administration of the entire Soviet economy saw most regional interests relegated to second place, behind those of the union. Republican governments basically became responsible for implementing central economic directives and the economic exploitation of their own economies. In Central Asia’s case, policy centred on development as a raw resource

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124 Hiro, pp. 34-5.
125 Talking about the Turkmen and Kazakh experience in Rashid, pp. 116 and 195.
127 Gleason, p. 54.
129 Gleason, p. 65.
appendage. The result was a kind of internal colonial arrangement in which raw materials moved from Central Asia to the Soviet centre for exploitation, and were later returned as finished goods. As with the classic colonial arrangement this system entrenched comparative underdevelopment and political subservience, locking the region into dependence on Moscow. Perhaps the clearest demonstration of exploitative relations was the cotton industry. Like their tsarist predecessors, the Soviets concentrated on expanding the crop, though they took development to the extreme. From the outset, they began reconverting agriculture back to the almost exclusive growing of cotton, and in doing so created a situation in which cotton-producing republics did so almost exclusively, in plantation-style, mono-crop economies utilising their lowly paid labour force. Diversification was shunned and the huge collective farms were even banned from growing food crops, making the region reliant on imported foodstuffs. Infrastructure development also focused on the cotton industry, with the construction of hydropower stations and water dams for irrigation, particularly in the decades following 1960. While production and cotton exports declined from the end of the 1970s, in 1985 the industry still constituted two-thirds of the region’s total output and employed as many as one million people. Consequently, declines had far-reaching economic, political, and social ramifications. Environmentally, too, the continual expansion of irrigation and chemical use resulted in not only the virtual disappearance of the Aral Sea, but also water pollution and soil degradation. Even Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan—republics affected less by cotton monoculture—suffered from agricultural exploitation through such initiatives as Khrushchev’s ‘virgin lands’ and the general attitude that the region’s resources could be used as Moscow saw fit.

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132 ibid, p. 4.
134 Rashid, pp. 91-2, notes that the labourers in Uzbekistan received less than the national average and less than those in Russia.
136 Rumer, Boris, Soviet Central Asia: “A Tragic Experiment”, Unwin Hyman, Boston, 1989, p. 62, cited by Karaev,
An unfortunate example of such thinking was Semipalatinsk on the Kazakh steppe, where Soviet nuclear development caused intense radioactive contamination.\footnote{Martha Brill Olcott (1994a), ‘The Myth of “Tsentral’naia Azia”, Orbis, Fall, p. 551.}

The extraction of other resources such as minerals and hydrocarbons also disproportionately benefited the exploiter. The Turkmen SSR’s natural gas, for example, was sold to other Soviet republics at five kopecks or three US cents per cubic metre—considerably under the international value.\footnote{Hiro, pp. 144-5.} Realising no profit from such exploitation, there was no improvement in Turkmen living standards, with 53\% of peasant families and 40\% of industrial worker households living below the official poverty line during the Soviet period.\footnote{ibid, pp. 144-5.} Throughout the region the story was the same. Despite its huge economic potential and resource endowment, it had the lowest living standards, economic performance and socio-economic indicators, all considerably lower than Union averages. While obliged to echo the official line in public, even the national elites realised their republics held second-class status.\footnote{The areas he mentions are production per capita, use of energy, life expectancy, provision of educational and health facilities: Keep, p. 317.} Yet Moscow not only benefited economically from the cheap fuels for its industry and development. The structure of exploitation ensured the complete dependence of the region on Moscow’s redistribution networks, further perpetuating the exploitative colonial structure.

In industrial development, too, although the Soviet period brought a significant expansion of the region’s capacity —particularly during the Second World War relocation of industry—this was from a relatively low baseline. In reality, it remained underdeveloped and minimally diversified compared to the rest of the Union. While housing 7\% of the Soviet population, it did not share an equivalent proportion of Soviet industrial output,\footnote{Matley, p. 347.} nor did this increase significantly over time. Although increasing slightly after 1975, it fell in the two decades after Stalin’s death and remained about half the region’s share of the Soviet population.\footnote{Robert N. North and Denis J.B. Shaw (1995), ‘Industrial Policy and Location’, in The Post-Soviet Republics: A Systematic Geography, edited by Denis J. B. Shaw, Harlow: Longman Scientific and Technical, p. 55.} Where industrialisation did occur, it was hardly without issues. In Kazakhstan, the most industrialised republic, Russian domination of manufacturing resulted in
concentrations of non-Kazakh populations as high as 85% in some regions contiguous to Russia, transforming the social fabric. Elsewhere, geography, skills and distance influenced the style of industrial underdevelopment, as did the relative lack of tsarist industrialisation upon which to build. However, it was also undoubtedly affected by Moscow’s desire to monopolise regional economies with cotton production and extractive endeavours, and its tendency to favour European parts of the Union when planning development. In 1980, for example, the RSFSR absorbed 62.4% of total capital investment, much the same as twenty years earlier and 10% more than its share of the total population (52.4%). Central Asia, by contrast, received only 12.5%, a gain of only 0.7% over the same period, when its population share was now 15.3% and growing. Ultimately, this meant these republics remained dependent to a large extent on Union subsidies. Between 1967 and 1979, for example, while the Central Asian republics retained 92% of what they paid, the Russian figure was only 45% and 53% for the whole Union. Thus, where development occurred, it only perpetuated and even intensified tsarism’s most exploitative practices, despite socialism’s high ideals.

There were areas, however, where Soviet rule differed significantly from earlier Tsarist neglect. Revolutionary Marxist-Leninism encouraged a far stronger interventionist streak in the social and cultural spheres, in particular, though the Bolsheviks remained less active in Central Asia than elsewhere in the Soviet Union. As the agent of change the Communist Party sought to destroy traditional ways of life—they wanted to erase what they found and create something completely different in its place. This made the Bolsheviks far more ambitious, intrusive and brutal than the tsarist regime, aspiring to comprehensively reshape rather than simply control the societies they had conquered. For example, while perpetuating colonial economic models, the Communists transformed the socio-economic framework in which ‘development’ occurred. One of the most important transformations was collectivisation. Collectivisation aimed to destroy traditional social organisation—identified as a hindrance to ‘progress’ and control. Opposition was strong, particularly

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144 Keep, p. 313.
145 Ibid. 313.
amongst the nomadic peoples. Between 1930 and 1931 tens of thousands of Kazakh nomads fled to China, while many who resisted were crushed by Red Army units.\textsuperscript{147} The Kyrgyz, too, fled their homes and killed their own flocks rather than see them collectivised.\textsuperscript{148} Ultimately, however, force, mass deportations, propaganda, nationalist purges, and an influx of Russian cadres overcame local resistance, irrespective of the human consequences. By spring 1932, famine was raging across Kazakhstan, exacerbated by the destruction of livestock and crops by those resisting collectivisation. Moscow provided minimal assistance, in the minds of many because it helped further undermine local resistance.\textsuperscript{149} Kazakhstan ultimately lost an estimated 1.5 million people during the 1930s—a third of its indigenous population—through migration, death, murder, imprisonment, starvation, and other causes.\textsuperscript{150} Other Central Asian peoples fared little better. While many traditional ways were synthesised into collectivised agriculture, the process was still a massive and bloody upheaval. It also demonstrated the extreme lengths to which Moscow was prepared to go in imposing its vision—a foreign ideology—upon the region. Though Bolshevik interventionism certainly broke with the neglectful past, it still amounted to imperialism. Again, though the methods of rule had changed, the condescending and hierarchical attitudes motivating it remained.

The Bolsheviks were similarly more active toward religion. They saw Islam, as they did all religions, as a backward phenomenon linked closely to bourgeois nationalism. In its destruction they sought to eliminate any creed capable of challenging Marxism-Leninism.\textsuperscript{151} During the 1920s and 1930s, they were most active in their efforts. In addition to the ability to worship, they also attacked Islam’s economic, educational, and legal structures, realising that although they could not exterminate Islam immediately they could incrementally undermine its ability to sustain itself. Although their endeavours met resistance, determination prevailed and by the outbreak of World War II Islam was formally almost non-existent and its rites not openly practiced.\textsuperscript{152}

\textsuperscript{147} Rashid, pp. 114-5.
\textsuperscript{148} ibid, p. 143.
\textsuperscript{151} Hiro, p. 26.
Following a wartime respite, anti-Islamic activities recommenced, though efforts shifted from complete elimination to management, through such actions as the institutionalisation of a Soviet-controlled official Islamic bureaucracy. Having uprooted the powerful Islamic tree, Stalin could now afford to allow a sapling to grow under strictly controlled conditions.\textsuperscript{153} Under Khrushchev, however, the fervour of previous anti-religious campaigns re-ignited. Khrushchev’s ‘drive to communism’ did not tolerate a compromise with religion.\textsuperscript{154} Consequently, propaganda increased, religious rites were replaced with secular ones, more prayer houses were closed, and legal attacks escalated. These anti-religious campaigns continued until Khrushchev’s downfall in 1964. Brezhnev effectively abandoned state efforts to eliminate Islam. While maintaining tight control on religious activities, the communists acknowledged the futility of their ideological efforts, given Islam’s deep roots and the fact its main strongholds (the family and home) were areas that did not lend themselves to legal regulation.\textsuperscript{155} Their reliance on republican and lower level local officials had also proved ineffective. While the high level apparatchiks had abandoned God and saw Islam as epitomising backwardness, lower level officials were not only apathetic to the struggle against religion, but actively encouraged Islam.\textsuperscript{156} Ultimately, then, Moscow acknowledged its inability to comprehensively control all aspects of its citizens’ lives, and realised its desire to maintain its rule outweighed its revolutionary desire to completely destroy religion. Still, by this time, its interventionist actions had radically transformed Islam in Central Asia.\textsuperscript{157} In altering traditional life to a degree their tsarist predecessors never achieved, they underscored their imperialist tendencies, imposing secularisation and cultural change on the region.

**The Gorbachev period**

Throughout the Brezhnev era, behind the façade of stability the system was subtly eroded. The party lost moral authority as corruption spread through its ranks, and the

\begin{footnotes}
\footnote{153}{Hiro, pp. 310-11.}
\footnote{154}{Ro‘i, p. 41.}
\footnote{155}{ibid, pp. 605-6.}
\footnote{156}{ibid, p. 613 and 637.}
\footnote{157}{Official Soviet survey in 1979 only 30% of ‘formerly Muslim peoples’ described themselves as ‘believers’, 20% hesitant, 50% unbelievers; H. Alleg (1983), Etoile Rouge et Croissant Vert, Paris, p. 231, cited by Hiro, p. 157.}
\end{footnotes}
official ideology became increasingly less relevant to people’s everyday concerns.\textsuperscript{158} While the leaders got enough out of the economy to satisfy their priorities—a high level of military security for the Soviet state, and power, deference and material comfort for themselves and the lower ranks in the nomenklatura on whose support they relied—the more enterprising among the led were being allowed to grab what they could through corruption and the operation of various “coloured” markets.\textsuperscript{159} It was in this atmosphere of cynicism, rising dissatisfaction and ideological bankruptcy that Yuri Andropov took office following Brezhnev’s death. Coming from a KGB background Andropov rallied against the orgy of corruption, reshuffled personnel, and relieved many officials of their posts.\textsuperscript{160} While Andropov sought to cut away 50 years of distortion to return to the harsh and purposeful purity of the original Bolsheviks,\textsuperscript{161} his quest was cut short by his untimely death in February 1984, after little more than a year in office. After the hardline, conservative Chernenkno suffered a similar fate, it was one of Andropov’s rising stars, Mikhail Gorbachev, who assumed power in 1985.

Gorbachev’s rise, like Khrushchev’s decades before, was accompanied by high expectations of reform.\textsuperscript{162} While signaling the intention to address the rot in the system, Gorbachev remained a committed communist. His intention was to strengthen communism and perpetuate the regime’s existence, rather than dismantle the command economy or the Union. Like previous leaders, his primary motivations for domestic reform were linked to strategic capacity and international competition. In fact, Gorbachev and his colleagues came to power largely on the strength of a programme to “get the Soviet Union moving again”, based on a wide recognition that economic stagnation and accumulated technological backwardness—as symbolised by the Chernobyl disaster—were increasing strategic vulnerability, particularly as the US renewed competition.\textsuperscript{163} Like Khrushchev, Gorbachev initially reduced what was also a social and political problem to the level of a mere technological challenge

\textsuperscript{155} Keep, p. 2.
\textsuperscript{157} Mark Galeotti (1997), Gorbachev and his Revolution, New York: St Martin’s Press, pp. 19-36.
\textsuperscript{158} Ibid, p. 33.
\textsuperscript{160} Robert F. Miller, p. 110.
Similarly, its resolution was to be achieved by intensifying tried and true methods, returning to the communist orthodoxy, rather than by experimenting with ‘counter-revolutionary’ or comprehensive reforms. This meant many of Gorbachev’s early reforms, like Khrushchev’s before him, actually meant greater intervention and interference in Central Asian life.

In cultural terms, for example, Gorbachev’s efforts to rejuvenate socialism increased focus on Islam, abandoning the unofficial Brezhnevian compromise that had afforded Central Asia greater cultural freedom in return for continued subjugation to Soviet rule. In these early Gorbachev years, Islam was defined as synonymous with backwardness. ‘Islamic’ practices were the root of communism’s problems; not just a religion whose worship habits could be conveniently ignored, but a cultural framework that undermined the entire Soviet experiment in Central Asia. It was said to breed a form of mental parochialism, leading those under its ‘influence’ to not learn Russian, serve poorly in the military, and have a greater predisposition for disloyalty to the Soviet state. Statistics ‘backed’ this view. By 1990, it was thought that at most 24% of Uzbeks were fluent in Russian, down from the 49% claimed in 1979. Given the much higher birthrates, too, the troubles in Central Asia had further reaching implications for the entire regime. Without change the Soviet army, for example, would either have to deal with potentially unreliable, unhealthy, non-Russian speaking conscripts, or switch to an all-professional force, which would direct the economy’s labour pool away from industry. Gorbachev identified the lack of ideological vigilance as having allowed subversive elements to creep in and permeate all levels of society, including the ranks of the region’s Communist leadership. This made it a target: an unofficial war was declared on Islam, generally, and corrupt Central Asian party officials specifically. This drive found expression in the political purges and

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168 Ibid
controversies of the ‘Uzbek affair’. Officially, the scandal stemmed from long-running cotton quota falsification. Indications were that between 1976 and 1985 Uzbek officials had overestimated production by nearly 6 million tonnes, and that Uzbekistan’s political leaders had embezzled excess crop payments.\textsuperscript{170} Such blatant corruption had certainly exacerbated the region’s economic, political and social problems. Investigations led the central authorities to realise that native elites had found ways of subverting the nomenklatura system of appointments in the oblasts and raions,\textsuperscript{171} and begun to rebuild more traditional patronage networks. Brezhnev’s offer to republican elites of greater autonomy over personnel and less ideological rigidity had only helped this process. Despite the fact that such corruption and networks had become commonplace throughout the Union, Gorbachev targeted Central Asia, as both an example to other republican elites, and because he saw this corruption as representative of the intrusion of traditional elements of Central Asian culture into Soviet life.

Gorbachev’s response also did little to demonstrate any great change in Russian condescension towards Central Asia, or any increased tactfulness in heavy-handed attempts to effect change. In 1986 he dispatched a large number of prosecutors and investigators to Uzbekistan. Thousands of local, regional and republican party leaders were subsequently purged and the entire republican political elite changed. Hundreds of directors of kolkhozes and sovkhozes were also fired, replaced or purged.\textsuperscript{172} The ultimate results of the infusion of new personnel, however, were muted, and it was soon apparent reform had not extended as far as the bureaucratic culture in which the elite worked.\textsuperscript{173} Gorbachev’s actions also did little to endear him to locals who, despite their dissatisfaction with current political rule, were impressed even less by Moscow’s standover tactics and interference in local affairs. The attempt to re-impose control by dispatching large numbers of Russian cadres met with only partial success, and the policy was eventually reversed following Russian indecision, Central Asian resentment and the muted threat of a nationalist backlash.\textsuperscript{174} A similar arrogance was demonstrated

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\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{170} Karaev.
\item \textsuperscript{171} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{173} J. H. Miller, p. 84.
\item \textsuperscript{174} Stringer, p. 159-60.
\end{itemize}
in Gorbachev’s December 1986 sacking of long-serving Kazakh Communist Party (KCP) leader Dinmukahmed Kunayev for allowing corruption to flourish. His replacement by Russian Gennady Kolbin appeared to break the unwritten convention that republican leaders be indigenous. Fearing a return to more overt domination, thousands took to the streets in Almaty and anti-Russian sentiments surged, undoubtedly fanned by a Kazakh political elite united against an appointment perceived as mandated to clean up the rest of the corrupt republic.\textsuperscript{175} The Soviet authorities’ violent response did little to quell interethnic strife, though Moscow stood firm until 1989 when Kazakh Nursultan Nazarbayev was appointed leader. However justified the initial goals, the anti-corruption drive’s implementation thus only demonstrated the continued perceived cultural superiority of Russian-influenced communism and the imposition of Soviet solutions on a disempowered indigenous population.

Broadly speaking, Gorbachev’s early economic reforms—\textit{uskorenie} (acceleration)—also proved a disastrous failure; accelerating the Soviet Union towards not a glorious future, but a precipice.\textsuperscript{176} Policies were poorly thought out, superficial responses to economic troubles. To encourage growth, for example, Gorbachev simply raised targets for 1986-1990, doing nothing to address the root of stagnation or provide any new stimulants outside coercion and propaganda. Pushing industry at capacity also meant there was insufficient time to undertake the necessary modernisation, while combating inefficiency by creating new super-ministerial bodies only compounded bureaucratisation. Moreover, the campaign to increase the quality of production by introducing controls and rejecting substandard outputs without substantively addressing the underlying reasons for shoddy goods meant increased wastage, an inability of over-worked factories to meet shortfalls, and thus even tighter supplies of consumer goods. Labour unrest and dissatisfaction also increased, particularly once workers were penalised through lost bonuses, only further feeding the cycle of poor quality production.\textsuperscript{177} Campaigns against the embezzlers and bribe takers bleeding the official economy also ended up hurting those who legitimately wanted to make a go of

\textsuperscript{175} Galeotti, p. 128
\textsuperscript{176} ibid, p. 52.
\textsuperscript{177} ibid, p. 56.
private business while true criminals continued to benefit. Ultimately, as well as directly undermining the economy, overly simplistic reforms raised expectations to unrealistic levels, fuelling disappointment and undermining social receptivity to later reforms. Although later economic dislocation would make the consequences of these reforms appear relatively inconsequential, there were few parts of the Union where the declining economic situation was felt more than in Central Asia. Already the poorest area of the USSR, comparatively deprived in terms of consumer goods and living standards, the region could hardly afford further declines.

By 1987 it was increasingly obvious Gorbachev’s modest reforms were failing. Faced with the true depth of the crisis, Gorbachev embarked on a more radical path, substantiating the rhetoric of “radical reforms” outlined at the 27th Party Congress of February-March 1986. These policies would come to be known as glasnost (openness) and perestroika (reconstruction). However groundbreaking, these reforms still aimed to prolong rather than extinguish, the life of the socialist state. While in hindsight it is easy to dismiss Gorbachev as somewhat naïve, overly idealistic, and his policies hopelessly flawed, his efforts to bring greater openness and liberalism to the Soviet Union signalled massive changes for the way in which Moscow dealt with Central Asia and for the region itself. While change was desired, as reform bred unintended consequences and control of reform slipped away from central authorities, relations were recast to a degree never expected by either Moscow or the Central Asian republics themselves.

On a social level, for example, glasnost entailed greater cultural and religious freedom. Breaking sharply with decades of antireligious policies, Moscow began to back away from its anti-Islamic policy in 1988 and 1989, abandoning the carefully cultivated illusion of Moslems happily marching in lock-step with atheistic Communism. Gorbachev instead set a course of rapprochement, symbolised by such actions as the return to religious custody of a seventh-century Koran, taken from the

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178 ibid, p. 57.
179 ibid, p. 62.
region by Tsarist troops. Official changes in attitude further stimulated the religious revival already in motion and provided new legal channels to stimulate its development. Over time, as the central authorities’ power eroded further and their ability to police the boundaries of acceptable activity continually declined, Central Asians tested the new political climate, placing continually greater pressures on a regime increasingly unable to respond. In this way, the cultural and religious awakening in Central Asia strengthened, and given similar dynamics occurring throughout the Union, nationality and cultural issues became politicised. It became increasingly obvious that the supposed brotherhood amongst nationalities was a farce. Along with inter-ethnic strife, growing disillusionment with communism was reflected in increasing antagonism towards Russians. Finally given the freedom to critique their subjugation to Moscow and the Soviet experiment with forced atheistic cultural change, deep-seated resentment became increasingly evident. Taken aback by the depth of anger, the authorities never resolved how to adapt the nationality policy, aside of devolving more policy-making power, letting the republican leadership deal with the situation as best they could, and using special Interior Ministry (MVD) troops where this strategy failed. Declining stability and security were an unfortunate price paid for greater freedom. In June 1989 such instability was clearly demonstrated by clashes between Meshketian Turks and ethnic Uzbeks, which ultimately demanded the dispatch of some 9000 MVD Troops and saw more than 100 deaths. A year later, a bloodier clash between Uzbeks and Kyrgyz erupted in Osh following a dispute over housing resulting in as many as 1000 deaths. The ruthless Soviet military response to further conflict in Dushanbe in February 1990, contrasted with the measured treatment of the Baltic states. While it initially succeeded in intimidating local forces, it also deepened nationalist feelings and further undermined attitudes towards Russians.

Economically, too, breaking down central controls and introducing rudimentary aspects of the market only contributed further to growing dislocation, declining outputs, and contractions in consumption and production. Again, Central Asia suffered
disproportionately, given its weaker economy and Moscow’s increasing focus on Russia as the Soviet economy began to hemorrhage more seriously. Perhaps most importantly, the grants and subsidies upon which Central Asia had become dependent now began to evaporate.\textsuperscript{188} Without the incentives to remain subjugated to Moscow, relations became increasingly strained. At the same time, Gorbachev’s reforms were only exacerbating other economic troubles. Growing Central Asian birthrates, in particular, were eroding previous advances, widening the gaps between Union-wide and Central Asian indicators in wage rates, healthcare, housing, employment and education. While regional funding had increased, it was insufficient to compensate for this huge population growth.\textsuperscript{189} The fact that Russians or other migrants had also tended to take the managerial, technical and industrial roles, while locals were mainly employed in agriculture and handicrafts,\textsuperscript{190} also became increasingly problematic as non-natives began to depart the region from the 1980s, leaving major gaps in commerce, industry, and politics.\textsuperscript{191} Previous Soviet development strategies were also catching up with the cotton growing republics. The excessive demands placed on a fragile environment and the inefficient command system of production resulted in widespread environmental degradation and declining production.\textsuperscript{192} Importantly, too, greater freedom of information and speech meant such controversial issues could finally be raised publicly. This did little for centre-periphery relations.

Political reforms were also transforming relations in unexpected ways. Throughout the Union, 	extit{glasnost} brought greater political pressure from below as the population voiced its dissatisfaction and continually pushed previous boundaries. While some republican leaderships also became increasingly radicalised, the opposite occurred in Central Asia. Here, the leadership remained largely conservative, bureaucratic, and corrupt. They had benefited politically and economically from socialism, and were ambivalent, if not openly hostile towards reform. Self-interest motivated them to subvert or undermine reform wherever possible, particularly in the aftermath of the Uzbek affair. They were unreliable agents to effectively implement Gorbachev’s reforms. The region’s leaders blamed Gorbachev for rising political, economic, and

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\textsuperscript{185} Stringer, p. 162. \\
\textsuperscript{186} ibid, p. 154-5. \\
\textsuperscript{190} Keep, p. 316. \\
\textsuperscript{191} Olcott (1994a), p. 551. \\
\textsuperscript{192} Stringer, p. 162. \\
\end{flushleft}

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social tensions, and were incensed that they were the ones having to deal with his reforms’ repercussions. They also resented their portrayal in the Soviet press as temperamentally corrupt.\footnote{ibid, p. 147-8.} Obstructing reform not only denied the region any benefits of \textit{perestroika} and \textit{glasnost}, but also further fragmented the elite unity required for successful implementation. Elite disillusionment across the Union (at both ends of the political spectrum) isolated Gorbachev, rendering him increasingly powerless and unable to effect the changes he desired. For a leader who had never had a strong network of trusted officials upon whom to rely,\footnote{J. H. Miller, p. 82.} recalcitrance was particularly damaging. Responding to such resistance, Gorbachev initiated a third stage of reform in 1988\footnote{Robert V. Daniels (1983), \textit{The End of the Communist Revolution}, New York: Routledge, p. 19.}—\textit{demokratizatsiya}—political reforms that hoped to overcome inertia by bypassing vested interests and integrating more reformers into the political system. While this may have still further radicalised the elite elsewhere, so much so that it came to play a considerable role in the USSR’s final collapse, personnel changes in Central Asia were limited. Here, the elite were mostly able to manipulate levers to retain power, keep the population disempowered, and contain the growing mood for greater autonomy and freedom. Moreover, Gorbachev achieved little in sidelining those acting as a break on change.

Paradoxically, perhaps, as disintegrating tendencies grew after 1989, it was the Central Asian leaders that remained the most stalwart supporters of the Soviet Union’s perpetuation, and turned their populace out in droves to vote for the revitalised Union in March 1991.\footnote{Slovo Kyrgyzstana (1991) August 19, cited by Olcott (1994a), p. 552.} This same conservatism led them to support the abortive August 1991 coup against Gorbachev.\footnote{Only Akaev did not support the coup: Slovo Kyrgyzstana (1991) August 19, cited by Olcott (1994a), p. 552.} Tajikistan’s Kakhar Makhamov publicly supported the coup attempt, Uzbekistan’s Islam Karimov fell just short of doing so, and Kazakhstan’s Nursultan Nazarbaev only publicly condemned the putsch once its failure was imminent.\footnote{ibid, pp. 552-3.} While they backed down once following the coup’s failure, the damage caused by this political miscalculation was already done. By opposing liberalism to protect their own cronyism the leaders had ‘proven’ what many Slavs suspected; that ‘backward’ regions like Central Asia were a drain on resources and
holding their development back. Influential writer Alexander Solzhenitsyn summed up the mood in an essay called “How Should We Rebuild Russia?” which promoted the three Slavic republics cutting themselves loose from the other twelve as a prescription for Russian renewal. 199 Whatever the actual truth, such views were particularly pronounced amongst the emergent nationalist elite in Russia. And as real power drifted from Gorbachev and the Communist Party to influential national leaders like Boris Yeltsin, a corresponding Russo-centrism emerged in what only barely remained ‘Soviet’ politics. The long-term arrogance towards the region was only taken to a new level on December 8 1991, when the three Slavic republics unilaterally dissolved the Union, without even consulting the Central Asian republics. Moscow’s new leadership gave little thought to the region in pushing dissolution, or how relations between the former centre and periphery would now operate. The new form of these relations would actually take years to stabilise, and would be complicated by the reform processes in Moscow, as the following chapters will show.

Conclusion

Russia’s relations with Central Asia before 1991 were characterised by a number of continuities, from the earliest tsarist times to the reforming communist regime. Imperialism, arrogance, contempt, and a certain degree of instrumentalism were all consistent themes in Russia’s actions. Moreover, in spite of both its tsarist and Soviet colonial successes in the region, Central Asia was never a primary focus for Russia. However authorities might have liked to portray the situation, Central Asia was always of secondary importance to other goals, whether during the imperial period when the imperialism accented European strategies, or during the Soviet period when Moscow favoured European areas of the Union. The constant irony was that, despite this lackluster focus, Central Asia delivered both Russia’s greatest imperial gains and provided its most unswerving cadres as communism began to collapse. In essence, Moscow was never able to conceptualise relations outside a mindset of centre-periphery style relations, nor to clarify exactly what its interests were, beyond domination of the region. Its focus was consistently on how it could benefit from the region—something that may have been acceptable during the age of imperialism, but

something more difficult to explain once it was supposedly marching in brotherhood to communist utopia with the republics concerned. The other unfortunate continuity was inconsistency. Russia’s focus on the region was patchy to say the least. During the imperial period, Russia’s activism depended greatly on the tsar’s predisposition, the domestic situation and any need for diversionary tactics, as well as external competitive factors, rather than any overarching strategy. Once the colonial ruler, Russia was almost a reluctant master whose rule was similarly inconsistent and did little to advance the region. During the Soviet period, while significantly more interventionist, Moscow’s approach depended greatly on opportunities and developments elsewhere. Although the region certainly benefited in terms of nation-building, economic development, and modernisation—particularly when compared to neighbouring Afghanistan—Central Asia also disproportionately bore the brunt of the more negative aspects of communist rule. Treated as second-rate partners, there was hope democratisation and post-imperialism would transform Moscow’s approach to the region. It is to this period the following chapters turns.
Chapter three

Russian foreign policy making in the transitional environment - 1991-1999

Having examined the theoretical consequences of regime transition on foreign policy, attention now turns to the case of postcommunist Russia. This chapter examines the tumultuous transitional foreign policy context under Boris Yeltsin, from independence in 1991 until his resignation in December 1999. It focuses on understanding and analysing the environment in which foreign policy was made, specifically tracing the key areas of transitional impact on foreign policy discussed in chapter one: the domestic economic, ideological and institutional impacts, in addition to external impacts, or more precisely how perceptions and interpretations of these external events and dynamics entered the transitional foreign policy arena.

Economic influences

During the Yeltsin period, the Russian economy strongly influenced foreign policy. The most obvious impact stemmed from the collapse of the Russian economy, with output falling 45% between 1989 and 1998 (see table 1). This huge decline circumscribed the options and resources available to policy-makers. Remaining resources were redirected to domestic uses—something also influenced by more permanent reprioritisations and reallocations consistent with democratisation and ideological change. A major retrenchment of external spending and activity subsequently occurred. At the same time, economic decline further encouraged foreign policy economisation, where resources were shifted to areas and relationships with perceived economic benefits. As will be discussed in the following chapter, such thinking strongly guided Foreign Minister Andrei Kozyrev’s Westernising strategy, where economic recovery was prioritised over all other considerations. In fact, this economic focus remained one of the key determinants of Yeltsin’s foreign policy:

1 Popov, p. 96.
pursuing marketisation and improvement, greater efficiency, and integration in the world economic system.²

Table 1: Russian Gross Domestic Product, 1990-1999

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>GDP</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>-3.0</td>
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<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>-5.05</td>
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<td>1992</td>
<td>-14.53</td>
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<td>1993</td>
<td>-8.67</td>
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<td>1994</td>
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<td>1995</td>
<td>-4.14</td>
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<td>1996</td>
<td>-3.6</td>
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<tr>
<td>1997</td>
<td>1.4</td>
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<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>-5.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>6.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Source: www.worldbank.org

This is not to say, however, that this determinant was consistently applied throughout Yeltsin’s reign, or that policy closely reflected these new economic constraints. A strong consensus on the economisation of priorities was never achieved. Many political actors failed to adjust to the new realities and continued to overestimate Russia’s capacity in their foreign policy rhetoric, remaining ignorant of the economic costs of certain policy paths, or simply refusing to recognise the legitimacy of new resource allocations. Even the President periodically made statements far removed from Russia’s actual capacity, dependent on a greater resource commitment than was feasible. Subsequently, what Moscow claimed it would do and what it could actually achieve often differed greatly. This led to disappointment and frustration at home and abroad, as well as damage to key national interests and relationships. Particularly after 1996, Russia was increasingly perceived as a blundering, ineffective former superpower making bold, unfounded, and ultimately embarrassing commitments it could never substantiate.

Economic decline also affected foreign policy in a less direct manner. The massive economic contraction and apparent inability of the ‘radical’ market reformers to

reverse this decline or at least soften its social repercussions, deepened opposition to all aspects of their strategy, not solely their economic policies. Processes like mass privatisation with its rapid creation of pervasive political, social and economic inequality and a politically powerful mega-rich elite, contributed to popular disenfranchisement and polarisation, undermining the legitimacy of the reformists and their strategy. Opponents seized on decline and the perverse short-term social ramifications to illustrate the failure of the reformist model, claiming the bankruptcy carried over into other areas like foreign policy. A range of alternative foreign policy strategies and conceptualisations of identity were subsequently driven by economic dislocation and dissatisfaction, to which the government had to respond. When economic crisis was particularly severe, or opposition to the reformist agenda particularly strong, not only did foreign policy focus falter, but governmental cohesion and policy stability were also compromised. This was most obviously demonstrated through personnel changes designed to placate the opposition, such as liberal Prime Minister Yegor Gaidar’s substitution with the more conservative Viktor Chernomyrdin, or the replacement of the entire government after the 1998 financial crisis. Ultimately, the government also felt obliged to undertake populist external actions to divert attention from domestic crises, as occurred in the 1999 seizure of Pristina airport during the fallout of 1998’s black economic events. Such actions, originating in economic uncertainty and upheaval, only introduced a further unpredictable and highly politicised element into foreign policy-making.

I ideological Influences

As well as a comprehensive economic overhaul, the Soviet collapse resulted in an ideological revolution. The de-legitimisation of communism created an ideological vacuum. Policy makers suddenly had to formulate a new foreign policy in the absence of any consensus on what Russia was, what its key interests were, or how best to achieve them. And unlike many of their postcommunist counterparts, they could not simply hark back to a pre-communist identity. Effectively, there was no non-imperial Russian tradition and identity to build on. Neither the Soviet Union nor tsarist Russia had a pre-imperial history as an ethnically homogenous state. Russia

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3 Skak, p. 142.
did not acquire an empire: from at least the seventeenth century, it was an empire. The new Russia had never existed in the current geographical or cultural form, and deciding how it should conduct itself on the international stage attracted considerable debate. The diversity of these views and the emotion with which they were expressed reflected the fact that foreign policy choices were not simply based on perceptions of realist or pragmatic interests, but because they were based upon differing conceptions of Russia’s ‘raison d’être’. At the core of these debates were questions of identity and attempts to redefine the ‘Russian idea’. They were part of a search for a national perspective, or national self-image, to explain in the context of Russia’s history, where it was trying to go, and its role in the world—something that would provide a looser set of ideas to replace Marxism-Leninism and around which people could unite. This would subsequently inform some sort of operational plan for approaches to all aspects of policy and reform.

Yeltsin and his Foreign Minister, Andrei Kozyrev, were the first to put forward answers to these questions. They believed Russia was culturally a part of the West, and its foreign policy should not only reflect this, but also accelerate reintegration. Although many analysts have tended to characterise (or, in hindsight, even dismiss) Kozyrev as an idealist, in fact, he had as his operational code a conception of national politics that reflected traditional state interests. It was simply at this time, in Kozyrev’s view the key national interests were intricately linked to facilitating domestic transformation: “transforming Russia into a free, independent state, formalising democratic institutions, setting up an effective economy, guaranteeing the rights and freedoms of all Russians, making our people’s life rich both materially and spiritually”. Foreign policy had to facilitate a non-threatening external environment, facilitating the much-needed reallocation of resources from competitive

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5 Nicole J. Jackson (2003), Russian Foreign Policy and the CIS: Theories, Debates and Actions, London: Routledge, p. 28.
6 ibid, p. 30.
external strategies to domestic reform. The reformers also understood that Russia’s domestic transition was reliant on the West’s economic and political assistance.\(^9\) Convincing Western partners that Russia was worthy of their aid and investment was thus important. To achieve these goals, Kozyrev recommended avoiding an “aggressive policy of defending [traditional] national interests in relations with partners”.\(^10\) Instead, Russia’s best strategy was a combination of active cooperation and acquiescence, even deference to the West. Though this would be challenging in the short-term, it would be offset by the long-term value of integration into the West as a capitalist, democratic partner.

Between 1991 and Spring 1992, a confluence of factors ensured the dominance and stable implementation of ‘Westernisation’. For one, a sense of euphoria, optimism and desire for change permeated the political spectrum.\(^11\) The communist approach to policy-making, both domestic and foreign, appeared ideologically bankrupt. Emulating the West was an attractive alternative. It was widely assumed, perhaps somewhat naively, that such integration would be on equal terms and quickly rejuvenate Russia economically, politically, and socially—even enhance its international position. At this early stage, too, Yeltsin was politically strong. Defeating the Communists had engendered him with high levels of support.\(^12\) Combined with the aforementioned optimism, his prestige inspired trust and confidence in his policy judgements and choice of reformers. His strength also had a formal basis. In late 1991, the Supreme Soviet granted Yeltsin emergency powers in response to his argument that the declining economy demanded accelerated reform.\(^13\) He could effectively rule by decree with few constraints on his power and pursue his reformist line in a unilateral fashion. Importantly, too, the political forces predisposed to opposing his strategy were mostly fragmented and atomised. Few real parties or well-developed, independent social forces could organise effectively or articulate competing ideas, particularly following the Communist Party’s dissolution.

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\(^12\) ibid, p. 45.

It took time for opposition forces to regroup, adjust to the new realities and challenge the administration’s vision of modern Russia.

However, the westernising strategy failed to consolidate. Although opposition to such a revolutionary path was always going to be significant, a major impetus to question the Yeltsin-Kozyrev vision of Russia came from the strategy’s apparent comprehensive failure. Externally, critics noted Moscow’s substantial loss of international influence, the West’s subservient treatment of Russia, its worsening security situation and apparent failure to protect traditional national interests. The former superpower’s collapse into virtual powerlessness was hard for many to accept. It was domestic failures, however, that had the greatest impact in eroding support for the westernising strategy. The massive and sustained collapse of the economy, state institutions and capacity discussed throughout this chapter, caused many to question whether Russia could emulate the West—whether, indeed, it was culturally a part of the West—and to search for alternative identities. Opposition coalesced around two broad positions: pragmatic nationalism and fundamentalist nationalism.\(^\text{14}\) The pragmatic nationalists were represented by politicians, elites, and thinkers like Yevgenii Primakov and to some degree Military Commander Alexander Lebed, Russia’s Choice party member and later state electricity monopoly head Anatolii Chubais, Moscow mayor Yuri Luzhkov, Presidential Council member Andranik Migranian, and presidential adviser Sergei Stankevich. The fundamentalist nationalists were represented by politicians like the ultra nationalist Liberal Democratic Party of Russia’s leader Vladimir Zhirinovsky, Congress of Russian Communities’ member Dmitri Rogozin, and Communist Party Leader Gennadii Zyuganov. These positions were not clearly defined, however, as groupings remained fluid and constantly evolving with individuals also shifting in the extremity of their positions. Nationalist thinking was effectively a continuum, where the liberal westernisers occupied one pole, the fundamentalist nationalists the other, the pragmatic nationalists somewhere in between, with much crossover throughout. That nationalist explanations emerged so strongly is perhaps unsurprising, given nationalism’s tendency to emerge in situations of severe dislocation, upheaval, and

\(^\text{14}\) There are a range of different labels for these positions. Here the definitions used by Margot Light, Alex Pravda, Roy Allison and Neil Light are used. See Margot Light (1996), ‘Foreign Policy Thinking’, in Internal Factors in Russian Foreign Policy, edited by Neil Malcolm, Alex Pravda, Roy Allison, and Margot Light, Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 34.
tumultuous transition. In Russia, nationalism provided a counter-liberal ideology that bound together a coalition of opponents, including the military, neocommunists, and industrial groups, who otherwise had little common ground. In foreign policy terms, it substituted for communism an ideology stressing the role of the strong state in defending Russian national interests against threats, real or imagined, domestic and foreign.\textsuperscript{15}

While the pragmatic nationalists recognised western elements in Russian culture, they saw Russia in a more Eurasian light, as a bridge between East and West, exhibiting characteristics of both. Subsequently, they believed Russia should follow a less slavishly pro-western policy that still pursued capitalist transformation and liberalisation, but concentrated less on emulating the West and more on adapting those features suitable to the Russian environment.\textsuperscript{16} In terms of national interests, pragmatic nationalist analysis was more Realist in context, based on traditional concepts of Russia’s vital interests.\textsuperscript{17} Accordingly, they advocated a more independent, assertive foreign policy path. While they still supported cooperation with the West where it was beneficial, they also recognised that competition would exist, and that Russia should strongly defend and pursue its interests even where it butted heads with the West. They also believed Russia must maintain and further develop its Great Power status. As a part of their more independent, assertive, Eurasian path, pragmatic nationalists also advocated a diversification of relations to balance the West and strengthen Russia’s international position. In particular, they advocated consolidating relations with the ‘near abroad’,\textsuperscript{18} both to protect traditional interests and to cultivate a sphere of influence. The contemporary concept of the ‘near abroad’ itself really emerged during this period of contested thinking on the Russian idea. Though a form of the term had existed in Russia since the 1970s, its modern usage evolved to reflect a differentiated view of Russia’s role, status, and

\textsuperscript{15} Snyder (1996), p. 36.
\textsuperscript{16} Light (1996), p. 34.
\textsuperscript{18} The term ‘near abroad’ was popularised in the early 1990s, gradually evolving from earlier Soviet terminology into a reference for Russia’s former empire. Today, the ‘near abroad’ is typically loosely defined as the states of the former Soviet Union and reflects a differentiation between these ‘newly independent states’ and the rest of the world. It is contrasted with the ‘far abroad’, those states beyond the former Soviet borders.
rights in the newly independent states of the former Soviet Union and the fact that many Russians had not yet accustomed themselves to the loss of the former empire. Although the term was adopted across the political spectrum (and Kozyrev himself was one of the first mainstream users of the terminology) the pragmatic nationalists’ focus on the concept of Russia’s special rights and the resonance of such ideas amongst the general public drove the issue to the centre of Russian political debates. Certainly such views were based on a significantly different reading of the Russian idea, neither completely divorced from an imperialist, Great Power identity, nor entirely anti-western or messianic in its outlook.

At the polar opposite of the spectrum to the westernisers, were the fundamentalist nationalists. While they often shared a Eurasian conceptualisation of Russian identity with their pragmatic counterparts, it was more radical—rejecting the notion that Russia was in any way a part of the West but, rather, had its own heritage to follow. They were advocates of Russian exceptionalism. Unlike the pragmatic nationalists, the fundamentalists were openly anti-Western, identifying Western aid as a conspiracy to weaken the Russian economy, and opposing any further moves to integrate into the world economy. They were ambivalent about market economies, preferring continued state control, and generally advocated authoritarian rule. Although they were primarily preoccupied with domestic issues, what fundamentalist nationalists did have to say about foreign policy was generally more aggressive. They typically demanded reclaiming status as a pre-eminent international power, countering perceived Western efforts to encircle and weaken Russia, and not shying away from the use of force to achieve its goals. In terms of concrete policies, however, fundamentalist nationalists were more abstract, often simply expressing opposition, rather than cohesive, realistic alternatives. In reality, much of their writing about international relations was highly mystical, and this mysticism often made it difficult to imagine that anyone could take fundamentalist nationalist theories seriously. Yet many pragmatic nationalists did adopt elements of their theories and some powerful politicians, like Alexander Rutskoi, were sympathetic to some of their

ideas. Moreover, while the actual components of the ‘Russian idea’ the fundamentalist nationalists championed were difficult to pin down, this very elusiveness contributed to their appeal.

Throughout 1992 and 1993, debates over the Russian idea became important political issues, mobilised in opposition to government policy, and used to justify alternative domestic and foreign policy strategies. Such debates were hardly conducive to stable policy-making. Eventually, the growth of nationalism throughout society and the state apparatus pressured the reformers to moderate their westernising stance. The release of the 1993 Foreign Policy Concept was taken to herald the consolidation of pragmatic nationalist ideas within the government and the emergence of a ‘consensual’ foreign policy. Yet, despite much being made of this apparent revolution, the government’s actual purpose was more to pre-empt the opposition’s growing strength, retake the middle ground and defuse the most extremist tendencies, than to set Russia on an entirely different course. Effectively, the Yeltsin administration sought to ‘sanitize’ foreign policy by hijacking the opposition’s priorities. Motivated by the goal of securing electoral support, Yeltsin responded to rising nationalism by making Russia’s behaviour abroad more assertive, if not aggressive, at least in appearance. However, as the next chapter details further, even after this ‘official’ establishment of consensus, it could hardly be said that pragmatic nationalist ideas achieved hegemony and liberal westernising ideas were dead. Instead, what actually emerged was an illusion of consensus. Documents like the Foreign Policy Doctrine were more a political than an operational necessity; their existence ipso facto intended to signify a more ordered and strategic approach towards foreign policy management. Their role was to imply greater consensus, patching over serious contradictions between the liberal agenda, the imperial syndrome, and great power ideology. For all the rhetoric of a consensual approach, it only ever existed at the lowest level, on ‘motherland issues’ such as a strong,

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26 ibid, p. 69.
unified Russia. Instead, throughout Yeltsin’s tenure, political expedience saw the ideological underpinnings of policy depend more on the political environment and his political capital at the time, than on lasting, reliable, predictable interests. Consequently, policies remained inconsistently implemented, contradictory, impermanent, and the country appeared to lurch continually in different directions. In fact, by reverting to an illusion of consensus, Yeltsin hindered the development of a real, substantive consensus on what constituted modern Russia, what its interests were, and where it was heading.

**Domestic institutional change**

On top of these economic and ideological challenges, Russia faced the demanding and destabilising comprehensive institutional reforms outlined in the previous chapter. In 1991 the Russian Federation inherited a partially reformed Soviet-era constitution and political institutional structures that ensured confusion and competition. This institutional structure required an overhaul if it was to operate effectively, let alone in a democratic manner. Yet, there was no clear blueprint for how these changes should occur. Nor did Russia have any substantive pre-authoritarian experience to emulate. Past Russian experiments with democracy had been short-lived. Although it could imitate the institutional structures of other democracies, quite how these would operate in an environment where authoritarianism had reigned for centuries was not entirely clear. Institutional reform also had to deal with the extrication of the Communist Party, whose withdrawal left the state hyper-institutionalised, but effectively weak, unfocused, and fragmented. Consequently, state-building was a key priority for Russia. However, while Yeltsin quickly set about destroying the old, when it came to replacing it with the new his moves were less decisive, particularly as his reformist colleagues were purged. Instead, institutional reform occurred in an ad-hoc manner, as a series of half-measures with no clear direction. Over the course of the Yeltsin period, the weakness of the state would remain a major issue, affecting all aspects of policy and the success of democratisation.

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27 Interview with Bobo Lo, Moscow Carnegie Centre, Moscow, 27 April 2004.
28 Shearman, p. 3.
In foreign policy terms, the reformers’ failure to take advantage of their initial political dominance meant that few substantial changes to the old Soviet foreign policy institutions were made to force them to implement new radical ideas or policies.\textsuperscript{29} More broadly, the reformers’ failures meant that even in the late 1990s Russia remained mired somewhere between authoritarianism and democracy. Instead of gradually consolidating a clear, predictable political and institutional structure—with a broadly agreed upon form and rules—Russia continued to operate with the type of fluid, uncertain environment that typically characterises the early stages of transition. In the absence of clear processes, mandates, delineations in responsibility, accountabilities, or direction, the institutional context of policy remained highly competitive, confused and unstable. In such a weak institutional environment, it was inevitable that foreign policy actors would instead trust more in the continuity of strong personal ties.\textsuperscript{30} This only drove a further personalisation of politics, greater policy inaccessibility, and subsequent policy instability.

The weakened capacity of the central government only exacerbated this political instability. Once transition had commenced, the central government’s ability to control the political system was seriously undermined, eroded by economic decline and the failure to replace authoritarian era controls. Yeltsin’s government consequently struggled to direct and implement its policies, to ensure compliance amongst other political actors, institutions, and its federal subjects, and to resist encroachments by all range of actors onto its prerogatives. With neither the sticks nor carrots to enforce its will and ensure a stable policy-making environment, foreign policy repercussions were felt particularly in terms of fragmentation and incoherence. Policy-making was not the only victim of weakened central capacity. Democratisation was also compromised by the reformers’ inability to impose discipline and keep reform on track, prolonging transitional upheaval and its negative policy implications.

Moreover, the central government under Yeltsin’s leadership did little to improve this situation. In fact, the institution with the greatest ability to halt the erosion of

\textsuperscript{29} Jackson (2003), p. 55.
\textsuperscript{30} Lo (2002), p. 34.
central power and improve political functioning actually did much to worsen matters. Although the 1993 constitution’s strengthening of the presidency could have contributed to greater stability—if not more democratic functioning—Yeltsin’s political style, instead, exacerbated conflict, fluidity and personalisation. Particularly as opposition mounted and his popularity spiralled, Yeltsin’s attention seemingly turned from constructive reform to political survival. A master of court intrigue and the manipulation of subordinates, Yeltsin used upheaval and conflict to his advantage, manoeuvring continuously and playing political forces off against each other to remain in power, periodically using each without committing to one predictable path. Meanwhile, he cemented his place at the centre of this complex political web, becoming one ‘stable’ factor in the shifting, unstable structure. Presidential power under Yeltsin was thus characterised by continual rivalry and jockeying for position by both institutions and individuals.

What this meant was that even after the worst conflict between the executive and legislature (discussed below) was arrested, contest moved within the branches of the executive, that is, within and between the presidential and governmental apparatuses. Still, this pattern of internecine political conflict, the unceasing struggles for power and allegiance within Yeltsin’s top entourage, had major foreign policy impacts, particularly between 1996 and 1999 when he was both ill and preoccupied with domestic politics. While upheaval and conflict may have aided his political survival and prevented the most dangerous opponents from taking power, by 1998 most identified Yeltsin as Russia’s main problem and no longer up to the task of governing. The constant cabinet realignments and bureaucratic reorganisations; the creation of coordinating councils, one after another; and the endless procession of ministers and advisors contributed greatly to the lack of clarity and coherence in foreign policy. Each faction’s attempts to stamp their authority over policy pushed it

33 This description of the nature of presidential power is taken from Gill and Markwick, p. 136.
34 ibid, p. 171.
37 Donaldson and Nogee, p.175.
in continually different and often contradictory directions. In Dmitri Simes’ words, “this preoccupation with political tactics at the expense of substantive policy” produced a foreign policy that seemed to lurch from point to point.\textsuperscript{38} Political style only exacerbated transitional confusion, permeating all aspects of the institutional change as the following section examines.

\textit{Conflict and competition between the executive and legislative branches}

The most visible institutional conflict throughout the transitional period was between the executive and legislative branches, particularly during the 1992-1993 period. During this time there was particularly vehement legislative criticism of foreign policy. Some of this was, of course, normal principled opposition, stemming from the pragmatic nationalist viewpoints that dominated the Supreme Soviet Committees.\textsuperscript{39} However, more often than not, the legislature’s actions actually spoke of a deeper battle than simply for control over the direction of foreign policy. What in fact occurred during this period, and would continue intermittently throughout the Yeltsin period, was the mobilisation of foreign policy issues as part of the greater struggle over transition and the constitutional division of power. Parliamentary foreign policy criticism was, thus, often aimed not at the constructive adaptation policy but, rather, for oppositionist, competitive means. As Alex Pravda noted, “...the political climate seems to have played a larger part in shaping the conduct of the Supreme Soviet deputies than the actual gap separating their foreign policy views from those of the government”.\textsuperscript{40}

Although the legislature was initially willing to defer much of its decision-making power to Yeltsin in order to rapidly enact reform, by 1992 such cooperative attitudes had evaporated and the Congress of People’s Deputies became increasingly active in efforts to reclaim its power. In part this was a reaction to the consequences of the government’s reform strategy, particularly in economic terms. Yet, because the constitutional system was at this time poorly defined, the conflict quickly moved from arguments about economic policy to constitutional issues and Yeltsin’s


\textsuperscript{40} ibid, p. 207.
perceived efforts to strengthen the presidency at the expense of the legislature.\footnote{Robert G. Moser (2001), ‘Executive-Legislative Relations in Russia, 1991-1999’, in Russian Politics: Challenges of Democratization, edited by Zoltan Barany and Robert G. Moser, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 80.} At the root of the problem were two conflicting notions of how Russia should develop: as a legislative-led, or executive-led system. Of course, personal rivalries and personal ambition were not absent from this equation. Figures like parliamentary chairman, Ruslan Khasbulatov, certainly had their own political ambitions and futures in mind when considering what was best for Russia. Still, however, individual parliamentarians were motivated, the legislature became increasingly antagonistic towards Yeltsin, particularly after he signalled his intention to make more permanent changes through the promulgation of a new constitution.

In an attempt to stem this erosion of its power, the legislature set out on a path of increasing confrontation with the president, attempting to undermine, block or at least confound his government’s policies. Though they were only part of the equation, foreign policy issues proved particularly good currency. Emotive, patriotic issues related to Russian pride and post-Soviet identity resonated amongst the public and mobilised support for the legislature. Hence, as nationalist sentiments revived, the parliament exploited the issue of Russians in the ‘near abroad’, for example, as a weapon in its opposition to Yeltsin.\footnote{Abram Chayes and Antonia Handler Chayes (1997), ‘Transition and Conflict: Russian and American Perspectives on the Former Soviet Union’, in Managing Conflict in the Former Soviet Union: Russian and American Perspectives, edited by Alexei Arbatov, Abram Chayes, Antonia Handler Chayes and Lara Olson, Cambridge: MIT Press, p. 5.} Similarly, the status of Crimea and division of the Black Sea Fleet involved issues of national identity and Moscow’s post-Soviet relations with its closest neighbours, while reservations over the START II treaty and the relative neglect of Russia’s interests in the Yugoslav crisis spoke to those concerned with Russia’s declining international position. Potential negotiations with Japan over the disputed Kurile Islands during Yeltsin’s planned 1992 visit also struck an emotive chord and, as was so often the case, institutional \textit{amour propre} and tensions were as important as substantive policy differences in fuelling criticism and opposition to any potential deal.\footnote{V. Kuzechesky (1992), Rossiiskaya Gazeta, 14 August, cited by Pravda (1996), pp. 214-5.} In targeting such issues, the Supreme Soviet’s activity was often simply rhetoric—making bold statements and resolutions that diverged from official policy and reinforced the impression from abroad that Russia
had more than one foreign policy. Yet, it also had more concrete means, such as attention grabbing diplomatic visits by deputies and the selective, political use of its treaty ratification responsibilities, which saw the Foreign Ministry criticise deputies for abusing their ratification rights in order to score political points in their struggle with the executive. Ultimately, although highlighting the executive’s failures on specific issues sometimes had a valid principled background, the legislature’s actions were often devoid of any context and spoke more of political point scoring and efforts to protect and enhance its position in an uncertain political environment.

Such executive-legislative conflict not only politicised virtually all aspects of policy, but ultimately led to constitutional crisis. While the violent showdown with the rebellious parliament in September 1993 and the subsequent institutionalisation of a ‘superpresidential’ constitution intended to reduce the impact of such political influences on foreign (and domestic) policy formulation, the parliament was never fully emasculated. While both sides searched for less confrontational ways to operate, Yeltsin accommodating nationalist attitudes and the legislature focused more on principled scrutiny and constructive criticism, the opportune use of foreign policy issues was never entirely abandoned. For although a new constitution was in place, the system remained transitional and formative, and many institutions periodically tested the boundaries. Importantly, too, the broad division between a ‘reformist’ president and an ‘anti-reformist’ legislature remained, making conflict a constant feature of executive-legislative relations, waxing and waning depending on the domestic political environment and leaders’ strategic decisions. Intermittently, then, foreign policy issues assumed an exaggerated importance, typically mobilised for domestic ends, though the intensity of this rivalry and the subsequent politicisation decreased. In concrete terms, wrangling over the right of treaty ratification remained, and the Duma was still liable to make bold, opportunistic resolutions contradictory to government policy, with an appropriation of power or political ends in mind.

44 ibid, p. 212.
45 ibid p. 213.
47 Moser (2001), p. 64.
48 As demonstrated by the Communists’ refusal to ratify start treaty: Interview with Bobo Lo, Moscow Carnegie Centre, Moscow, 27 April 2004. See also Pravda (1996), p. 213.
These actions and resolutions had the greatest impact, and sometimes destabilising international consequences, when the executive was divided, as it often was under Yeltsin. At such times, the parliament could enhance executive misgivings or lever splits and differences in opinion between institutions, to undermine consistent governmental positions. As long as the government was unable to resist such pressures and enforce unanimity, it would have to accommodate such views, moderate its position, or override opposition. Generally, however, the legislature’s impact remained more indirect than direct after 1993. Its influence was predominantly felt through its role as a forum articulating and amplifying opinions which affected the political climate in which executive decisions were made, more often influencing the tone and tactics, as opposed to the basic directions, of foreign policy. Still, the parliament’s competitive politicking with the executive exacerbated uncertainty in the foreign policy-making environment and, irrespective of its actual successes, further complicated a coherent, predictable policy. Moreover, though some degree of executive-legislative competition is normal in presidential democracies, the zero-sum nature of legislative calculations, the lack of stabilisers, and disregard for the destabilising external consequences, meant the consequences for foreign policy in the transitional environment were far more destabilising.

**The Foreign Ministry**

Competition also took place between the government and Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) on one hand, and alternate contenders for policy-making control on the other. In theory, the MFA should have enjoyed the restoration of its central policy role in the post-Soviet period. It benefited from the removal of the Central Committee, and theoretically regained many of the external roles and responsibilities the Party had appropriated. Early on, Yeltsin also decreed it the central foreign policy coordinator, and Kozyrev himself enjoyed a close relationship with the president. However, despite these advantages, the MFA struggled to assert

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52 Donaldson and Nogee, p. 148.
itself as the dominant foreign policy actor throughout the transitional period, most particularly between 1992 and 1995.

On one hand, the MFA’s ability to capitalise on its newly acquired primacy was seriously hindered by internal factors. With the dissolution of the Union level structures, the Russian MFA quickly moved to take control of the Soviet Foreign Ministry’s properties, absorb many of its staff, and transfer its responsibilities to the previously subordinate body. Simultaneously, Kozyrev kicked off substantial reform and restructuring. Hence, the Foreign Ministry was simultaneously expanding greatly and pursuing internal reorganisation and restructuring of its external relations, all within the very strict confines of decreasing financing and the failure for much of this funding to be delivered. Quite quickly, budgetary contraction and upheaval had deleterious consequences on the Ministry’s internal machinations. Perestroika and the death throes of the Union inspired a sense of uncertainty amongst many of the MFA’s employees, resulting in growing apathy, fixations and indecision.\(^{53}\) The Ministry struggled with staff retention and attracting quality recruits due to its comparatively poor pay and the growing attraction of private sector opportunities. By August 1995, Ministry Press spokesman Grigory Karasin was describing a crisis in his agency brought about by the outflow of employees caused by “catastrophically low salaries”.\(^{54}\) Add to this problems of morale, concern over Kozyrev’s political direction, his ineffectual leadership and inability to coordinate policy,\(^{55}\) resistance to change from entrenched bureaucratic figures, difficulties in overcoming past habits and thinking, as well as continual high-level political interference, and it is little wonder the MFA struggled to assert itself early in the transitional period.

To make matters worse, the MFA was also troubled by significant external challenges. Though these would decrease in intensity over time, the MFA’s role remained contested throughout the Yeltsin period. It had to resist or accommodate continual encroachments on its theoretical authority by a whole range of actors. While sometimes opposition stemmed from differences over direction or from the


\(^{54}\) Malcolm (1996), 118.

Ministry’s perceived failures, for some powerful government institutions challenges went well beyond simple policy issues. For them the struggle concerned the control over policy-making itself, and the fluidity of the transitional environment provided both the opportunity and the motivation for change. The impact of democratisation and the removal of party controls also gave other ministries and institutions greater scope in which to assert their individual agendas.\textsuperscript{56} In the absence of effective central control, and in the new climate of ideological pluralism, bureaucratic rivalries with roots in the Soviet period acquired a more dangerous character.\textsuperscript{57} Even where opponents were not making an overt play for control, without the protection of its key benefactor the MFA was effectively powerless, meaning institutions like the MoD, state-owned and private big business could simply pursue their own policies with little regard for the official Ministry line. While the worst challenges declined after 1993’s constitutional reform, with central power continuing to wax and wane depending on Yeltsin’s personal political capital, political conflict remained a constant variable. Government bureaucrats, too, quickly realised that the deadlock created by the constitution made them virtually unaccountable to either the Duma or the executive.\textsuperscript{58} Consequently, there remained incentives for actors from all levels throughout the political system to periodically intrude on the Foreign Ministry’s mandate throughout the Yeltsin period.

The interaction of these transitional impacts with Russia’s federal structure also created further tensions and challenges for the MFA. In the same way that institutions were affected by transition to differing degrees and some were more motivated than others to pursue their own foreign policy agendas, some of Russia’s 89 federal subjects (republics, okrugs, oblasts, and krais) also became foreign policy actors in their own right.\textsuperscript{59} Particularly active and successful were those with resources attractive to external investors (particularly oil and gas), those bordering international partners with an interest in expanding economic or political integration, and those republics with an outwardly focused leadership. For these subjects,

\textsuperscript{56} Lo (2002), p. 31.
\textsuperscript{59} In 1991 there were 89 Russian federal subjects. However, this number reduced to 83 after 2005 as a policy of merging commenced.
capitalising on opportunities often meant undertaking independent foreign policy actions or adopting their own policies to ‘fill the gap’ where central policy was found wanting. Their actions demonstrated little regard to the MFA line and further fragmented any coordinated foreign policy. On regular occasion, their actions conflicted directly with MFA policy or the president’s own efforts, causing international embarrassment and contributing to a sense that the government was not really in full control of the country. The further these federal subjects from Moscow and the more independent their own economic base, the more difficult they appeared to reign in. Moreover, as Yeltsin’s political position became increasingly tenuous, his reliance on the support of key federal leaders to ensure the passage of domestic policy and to retain the federation’s unity meant he had to, at times, allow them greater independence and scope that he would probably had otherwise preferred in other areas. Combined with other decentralising trends, the pursuit of these independent foreign (and other) policies by Russia’s federal subjects was seen by analysts as a sign of the inevitability of Russia’s disintegration. It was only in the late 1990s that dynamics began to change and then under President Putin that federal subjects’ external relations again became subject to greater central control within the government’s overall strategy.

Yet, sustained challenges to the MFA did not solely stem from transitional changes and opportunism. A continual proliferation of foreign policy bodies (discussed below) meant that the government and MFA faced challenges not only from outside the executive branch, but also from within it. Yeltsin’s motivations for mandating alternative foreign policy bodies varied. On one hand, they signalled the loss of faith in Kozyrev and the MFA, questions over the ministry’s capacity and its ability to coordinate the diverse influences on it. Yet, just as importantly, Yeltsin’s

60 A case in point is the actions of Primorkii Krai’s Yevgenii Nazdratenko and the complication of his administration’s actions on Yeltsin’s efforts to forge a ‘strategic partnership’ with China. See for example: Glen Hazelton (2001), China in Russian Foreign Policy and Domestic Regional Politics, Unpublished MA Thesis, Auckland: University of Auckland.

61 Ivan I. Kurilla sees three periods of Russia’s regions’ interaction with regional and international systems: 1) an efflorescence of relations during a period of economic collapse when regional authorities sought external assistance to reform regional state institutions throughout the 1990s; 2) an increasing centralisation of power and the severing of direct contacts between regional authorities and foreign states after 1998; and 3) the establishment of unified control over internal political and economic actors. Ivan I. Kurilla (2006), ‘Russian Regions and International Systems: A Trajectory of Post-Soviet Interaction’, PONARS Policy Memo No. 422. Available at: http://www.csis.org/files/media/csis/pubs/pm_0422.pdf (Accessed 10 October 2011)
actions stemmed from his sustained institutional manipulation aimed at perpetuating his relevance and political survival. Particularly as Kozyrev and other reformers became political liabilities, Yeltsin sought to disassociate himself from them, divert attention and buy-off opponents through the inauguration of new institutions (detailed below) with viewpoints more closely aligned to key opposition arguments. Although these bodies would rise and fall over time, at times exerting considerable influence over policy, at other times slipping into obscurity as their political value declined, their existence significantly impacted foreign policy.

The overall impact of the MFA’s inability to secure a policy monopoly was to exacerbate policy confusion and incoherence. Without one body overseeing policy there was little coordination or long-term strategic thinking. New bodies created to supposedly provide such services also failed and only served to detract further from the MFA’s authority. Moreover, with the Ministry’s ability to aggregate and represent the pressures on it compromised and its authority undermined, the whole policy process was exposed to greater political pressures and politicisation. After 1995, under the new Foreign Minister Yevgenii Primakov, the MFA’s ability to achieve a coordinating role did improve. More respected leadership and conservative, predictable policies helped to rebuild respect for the Foreign Ministry, increase its influence, and reduced the necessity for Yeltsin to rely on alternative bodies or undermine the Ministry’s policy input. However, the persistence of other political incentives meant the MFA could never feel fully confident of its position under Yeltsin, and its ability to stabilise foreign policy processes remained highly dependent on the whims of the president.

The military

The military was, perhaps, the most sustained challenger to the MFA and liberal foreign policy. A number of factors gave the military the means and motivation to challenge. Capacity certainly counted on the military’s side, particularly early in transition. Despite growing weaknesses, it retained considerable technical, informational, political and strategic resources upon which to draw. The collapse of the Communist Party and fragmentation of the Union left the military forces (despite

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62 Donaldson and Nogee, p.149.
a chaotic process of redeployments) as practically the only nation-wide, organised structure in Russia—one that also extended throughout the FSU. Unlike the MFA, struggling to establish its authority and strategic reach, the military was already firmly established. It could use this advantage to lever influence or, failing that, undertake independent actions.

The military also became more ideologically predisposed to desiring a political role. The rejection of Communist ideology, which previously made party control over the armed forces a hallowed principle, removed a major psychological block to direct military intervention in politics. Early on, the military was certainly one of the chief beneficiaries of democratisation and the removal of party controls, with greater potential to be a potent institutional influence, lobbying and even prescribing policy options. At the same time, with a new ideology of national patriotism replacing military loyalty to the party and Union, military leaders felt increasingly justified in promoting their views of the national interest. These ideas differed considerably from the MFA’s, based on a more traditionally Realist, or pragmatic nationalist stance. In fact, most military figures saw reformist policies as damaging rather than protecting national interests, and felt ‘obliged’ to step in. The fact that many of the MFA’s strategies appeared to threaten the military’s position and perceived interests, particularly in the ‘near abroad’, only added further impetus to act—to protect not only the general ‘national good’, but also its own selfish institutional interests. Moreover, there is also no doubt that some opportunistic military leaders took advantage of the weakened MFA, declining central power, and the military’s own strengths to either expand the remit of the military itself, or to enhance their own standing. Such a potent mix of arrogance, self-interest, and opportunism heightened military incentives for competing with the government and MFA.

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64 ibid, p. 231.
67 ibid, p. 232.
The military also gained considerable political influence by default, as a result of domestic political conflict. With the government consumed by conflict, power seeped outwards to more stable institutions. The military’s position only increased during the mounting executive-legislative standoff of 1992-1993, when it was identified as a valuable ally and possible power broker. After it backed Yeltsin in October 1993, many argued an indebted Yeltsin became a hostage of the military. Others saw Defence Minister Pavel Grachev’s support of Yeltsin repaid with a freer hand to influence policy in the CIS and over issues like the CFE treaty and NATO expansion. Certainly, backing the president gave the military a more prominent position to advance their interests and policy positions, at least in the short term. Yet, the military not only gained the president’s greater sensitivity to their ideas. Other actors recognised their political potential, and increased attempts to court senior military officers, particularly following the 1993 parliamentary elections. The executive understood the potential for opposition-military alliances, given the military’s endorsement of nationalist strategies, and further increased its efforts to appear responsive to the military’s demands. Across the board then, this greater sensitivity expanded the military’s direct and indirect influence.

This growth of influence through 1992 and 1993 certainly came at the expense of the MFA and Yeltsin and Kozyrev’s Westernising policy, particularly when taken in combination with the military’s sustained unilateral foreign policy activity. In 1992 Kozyrev blamed military interference for the deterioration of relations with several of its new neighbours and sowing the seeds of international distrust. At the end of 1993 he complained that “the armed forces have a foreign policy of their own” in the ‘near abroad’. With the MFA weak and the central government unable, or perhaps unwilling, to bring the military to heel, the perception that Russia was simultaneously undertaking multiple, uncoordinated foreign policies was enforced. The military’s

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68 Ibid, p. 231.
71 Ibid, p. 238.
principal role in the intervention in Chechnya in December 1994, too, appeared to indicate the growing influence of the military over government policies more generally and, worryingly, an increasingly militaristic streak in Russian politics. However, even by this time, the tide was really beginning to turn for the influence of the MoD, as the government’s adoption of pragmatic nationalist rhetoric increasingly disempowered the military as an advocate of such policies. Though the military would still advocate a stronger, more activist line than the government would pursue, and periodically complicate matters with unilateral actions, its ability to set the agenda was diminished.

After 1996 the balance of power continued to shift, as Primakov’s leadership restored the MFA, improving key areas like the balance of military and political aspects in peacekeeping, the military’s earlier pressure had skewed in its favour.\(^74\) The MFA’s efforts to reclaim foreign policy ground from the MoD were also assisted by the disarray in military leadership following Grachev’s dismissal in 1996,\(^75\) growing internal issues, and declining faith in the military as failures in the Chechen campaign mounted. While it clawed back influence on the back of the second Chechen war and divergences of opinion with Washington over this conflict, the military remained badly divided over strategies to reform the armed forces and this continued to weaken their overall policy-making influence.\(^76\) Still, they could never be sidelined entirely, retaining the resources, determination, and high-level political access to make their opinions clear. While they may have failed to permanently wrestle power from the MFA, they were certainly able to moderate its policies and virtually coopt policy on at least one area—issues concerning the ‘near abroad’.

The presidential administration

From an early stage, the presidential administration also emerged as an influential foreign policy participant and potential competitor to the MFA. After 1993, in particular, bodies within the presidential apparatus took an important role in all aspects of policy, something supported by the ‘super-presidential’ constitutional changes. Increasingly, Yeltsin operated within the presidential apparatus. He created


\(^{75}\) ibid, p. 10 and Freedman (2001), p. 62.

duplicate, parallel decision-making structures, incrementally appropriating policy and
decision-making capacity from elsewhere. This growing presidential bureaucracy
appeared intended to replace the Communist Party bureaucracy at the heart of policy
processes. By 1994 the presidential apparatus was already much bigger than its
Central Committee predecessor.\footnote{Gill and Markwick, p. 176.} While this development may have been
theoretically premised on efforts to depoliticise policy and decision-making by
insulating these functions from the reach of the opposition and the worst excesses of
political conflict and upheaval, the presidential branch was hardly more stable than
the rest of the political system, nor immune to manipulation, competition and
conflict.

Yeltsin created numerous bodies within the presidential apparatus with specific
foreign policy responsibilities. Though mostly charged with advisory or coordinative
functions, some duplicated MFA responsibilities. The first of these bodies, and
perhaps the most influential, was the Security Council, first established in April 1992.
The Council was created in an attempt to bring the top foreign policy and national
security officials together in a consultative body that would make recommendations
and proposals, and prepare decisions on security matters for the president to
May, cited by Malcolm (1996), pp. 110-11.} Ostensibly, its purpose was coordinative, to overcome
fragmentation in the political system and to improve the effectiveness of policy-
making. Its mandate on security issues was read broadly, however, and from the
outset its apparent determination to usurp foreign policy-making power made it a
challenger to the MFA. These tendencies were clearly demonstrated in September
1992 when Yeltsin’s long prepared visit to Japan was cancelled at the last minute,\footnote{Moskovskie Novosti 38 (1992), cited by S. Crow (1993), \textit{The Making of Foreign Policy in Russia
result of Security Council opposition to a possible agreement returning the Kuriles to
Japan. The following year, it strongly exerted its conservative views onto foreign
policy debates. While Kozyrev did not officially identify the Security Council Inter-
Agency Foreign Policy Commission’s establishment as a challenge, a fierce
interdepartmental struggle was actually taking place behind the scenes.\footnote{ibid, p. 118.} While the
MFA was not entirely marginalised, it was still the Security Council’s guidelines that Yeltsin endorsed in the 1993 Foreign Policy Doctrine.\footnote{Skak, p. 144.} The Council gave an institutional voice to the more conservative, nationalist, and activist views held by the MFA’s opponents and it appeared to gain favour as an alternative source of foreign policy advice.

The Security Council was not the only presidential body to clutter foreign policy debates. The Presidential Council was a consultative body created on 23 February 1993 charged with preparing proposals on strategies for foreign and domestic policies and determining mechanisms to implement strategies of national development.\footnote{Mikhail E. Bezrukov (1994), ‘Institutional Mechanisms of Russian Foreign Policy’, in The Emergence of Russian Foreign Policy, edited by Leon Aron and Kenneth M. Jensen, Washington, D.C.: United States Institute of Peace Press, pp. 73-4.} In late December 1995, a further body was established, the President’s Council on Foreign Policy, with the task of coordinating the various aspects of Russia’s foreign policy.\footnote{Tiouline, p. 51.} Then, in July 1996, Yeltsin established the Defence Council, making it responsible for many of the Security Council’s defence concerns, though the Security Council reabsorbed these responsibilities when the short-lived Defence Council was abolished in 1998. Such councils, as well as individual advisers like Sergei Stankevich situated within the presidential apparatus, certainly had advantages in their efforts to influence policy-making. Most important was their proximity and access to the president, particularly in light of the increasingly personalised nature of the Yeltsin regime. Also important, however, was that the considerable and growing resources of the presidential apparatus were at their disposal. Such factors increased these bodies’ ability to coopt or pre-empt the MFA’s powers and, through their control over the flow of information to the president, influence the substance of foreign policy.

While all of these bodies were charged with bringing structure, coordination and coherence to foreign policy-making, they only exacerbated confusion and fragmentation. The concurrent existence of the Security Council, the Defence Council and the Foreign Policy Council (not to mention the MFA) in 1995, for
example, spoke of the persistent lack of coordination in foreign and defence policy. In part their failure stemmed from the immensity of their task and lack of requisite support and resources to achieve it: most instead succumbed to becoming additional political competitors and fuelling further politicisation. To a great degree, however, their failure to add value stemmed from the real purpose of their creation. From the very outset, the formation and existence of these coordinating bodies was as much about political expediency as it was a desire to overcome transitional challenges. Sometimes their existence was linked to the need to placate certain interests, sometimes it stemmed from Yeltsin’s paranoiac tendency to play institutions against one another, to consolidate his own political position. Whatever their purpose, such politicised underpinnings also meant their survival depended greatly on their willingness to ‘play the game’.

In this way, the early establishment of the Security Council signalled the executive’s determination to restrict the MFA’s policy primacy and, in the process, lessen its own dependence on an institution that retained many features of the Soviet past. Its creation was also meant to placate the pragmatic nationalists and security-minded opponents. Though it was the one body to survive the Yeltsin period, its importance at any given time depended greatly on the state of the political game, and in particular on the power position of its Secretary, of whom there were ten in the first nine years of its existence. In reality, Yeltsin never fully trusted the Security Council and consciously undermined its efforts to further strengthen its role, fearing it would dilute his power. At times, he blatantly stripped it of any real influence. Under Yeltsin’s perceived rival, Alexander Lebed, for example, it was marginalised and the alternative Defence Council was created. The Defence Council itself was abolished in 1998 once its use as a counterweight to the Security Council was no longer required. The Presidential Council, for its part, virtually ceased to function after 1994 when it voiced public protest to the Chechen invasion.

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84 Donaldson and Nogee, p.147.
87 Donaldson and Nogee, p.147.
88 ibid pp.140-1.
Creating such an unstable environment even within his own administration, again, exacerbated those transitional tendencies towards competition and conflict already discussed, meaning the old Leninist maxim, ‘kto kogo?’ (who will crush whom?) remained the principle concept in post-Soviet politics.\(^\text{89}\) Effectively, it was uncertain who was actually directing policy at any point—the MFA or any one of its ephemeral presidential counterparts. In addition, Yeltsin’s increasing informal reliance on bodies and individuals within the presidential apparatus meant much decision-making power was appropriated, and thus removed from more predictable, constitutional processes. Policy-making became less transparent, and influence increasingly relied on proximity to the president and his personal favour.

By removing policy-making from predictable constitutional practices and diverse societal interests, it was also distanced from the types of influences, constraints, and accountability that could improve its long-term functioning and coherence. In the end, Yeltsin’s actions did more than just complicate the government and MFA’s foreign policy efforts: it undermined the whole process of establishing stable, regularised decision-making procedures.\(^\text{90}\) Particularly after 1996, as Yeltsin’s health made it more difficult to rule over the complex network of informal, personal relations, a certain degree of power bled away from the main arbitrator. Thus, after creating a presidential system that depended on his strong presence, Yeltsin increasingly removed himself from the system, only intermittently reappearing to ward off rivals. This only prolonged the environment of anarchy and chaos where inter-institutional and inter-departmental struggles prevailed. In foreign policy terms, although this meant most competitors had been brought to heel by the late 1990s, it also meant no consistent processes had been institutionalised, and policy inaction or paralysis replaced the earlier fragmentation, with the same negative consequences.

**State economic interests**

While the impact of private sector economic groups will be discussed later, many state bodies also had external economic interests they sought to integrate into policy. Like other government interests, however, their role was limited by transitional

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\(^\text{90}\) Lynch, p. 39.
upheaval and the changing alignments of favoured interests under Yeltsin. At the same time, the unpredictable influence of state economic groups was also influenced by the diversity of their interests and the continued polarisation between those advocating liberal market reforms and those opposing economic reform. The reality was that throughout the Yeltsin period, the many ministries with foreign economic interests and the still-pervasive state-owned business sector disagreed on even the most fundamental questions of economic direction, let alone the foreign policies to best serve these interests.

Despite the absence of consensus on economic policy, some state economic groups successfully exercised influence over foreign policy. Initially, of course, liberal state economic interests were well served early on by a government that favoured economic policy determinants. However, with growing political conflict and upheaval, state economic interests—like other groups—came to rely on less formal means to influence policy, particularly as the increasingly contested MFA became a less valuable ally. In Yeltsin’s personalised system, certain state economic interests turned to cultivating relationships with key figures to advance economic interests in foreign policy, and enjoyed considerable success in doing so. The oil and gas lobby (both private and state-owned), for example, used its close relationship with Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin successfully, in conjunction with its key economic role, to promote its interests. Chernomyrdin’s delays on liberalising foreign imports were an obvious concession to his former employer, state-owned Gazprom.\footnote{John Thornhill (1995), ‘Russia Fails to Liberalise Oil Export Trade’, \textit{Financial Times}, February 3, p. 3, cited by Michael McFaul (2001), \textit{Russia’s Unfinished Revolution: Political Change from Gorbachev to Putin}, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, Ithaca, p. 208.}

The same lobby also used its association with Primakov to great effect, moderating key policy positions on areas of interest. At the same time, they were not afraid to successfully stand up to the MFA on occasion,\footnote{Freedman (2001), p. 61.} as the later case study regarding Moscow’s Caspian Sea policy demonstrates.

While it might have been expected that less liberal state economic interests such as Soviet-era industry would dominate lobbying and influence following the 1993 reorientation, in fact, the survival of many economic reformers in important government positions meant liberal state economic interests also remained influential.
Many even clawed back significant roles, particularly after the 1996 elections. Reformers such as Boris Nemtsov and Anatoly Chubais, for example, were appointed Deputy PMs in 1997, and their liberal influence was felt through such actions as the watering down of the Belarus union and encouragement of the agreement dividing the Black Sea Fleet. Still, although economic interests could rely on both their relationships with sponsors specifically and a continued liberal economic leaning within government, their influence remained somewhat sporadic, unpredictable, and impermanent. While they may have found ways to work around the lack of institutionalisation, these moves hardly contributed positively to foreign policy stability. Instead, they further undermined the MFA and predictable processes, demonstrated an unwillingness to respect institutional authority, and further confused policy-making, something only compounded by the diversity and irreconcilability of the economic interests different state structures articulated. While they could have potentially added value to foreign policy, state economic interests too often became just another influence pushing policy in contradictory directions.

The growth of social influence

*Expanding interest articulation*

As the theoretical chapter outlined, democratisation creates a more pluralist policy-making environment. Advocates of the most liberal, participatory forms of democracy see the growth of interest groups, lobby groups, and general civil society actors contributing to better quality policy-making, increasing its representativeness, its subsequent longevity and, in the case of foreign policy, reducing the propensity for war. It is also ideally expected that the communication of these interests and pressures will be in a more explicit, transparent manner, through participation in a democratised lobbying environment. Certainly, the loosening of controls over political expression throughout the Gorbachev and early Yeltsin periods gave rise to a greater range of groups seeking to articulate a growing diversity of interests on a range of topics, including foreign policy matters. Still, as a coordinated and institutionalised political activity, lobbying remained poorly developed. The effects

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93 ibid, p. 61.
of this underdevelopment meant that growing interest articulation did not necessarily have the expected positive impacts on foreign policy-making.

There were a number of reasons for this failure. One of the most important was the limited scope of change and incentives in the institutional environment. There was no strong history of democratic lobbying in Russia and it would take time before open democratic structures could be established. The responsiveness of target institutions, such as the MFA, to new types of lobbying remained low. Their unreformed authoritarian or immature democratic structures were ill-equipped to deal with the demands of the pluralist political environment. Transitional upheaval meant they also frequently lacked the capacity or strength required to channel, aggregate, and adjudicate the multifarious, competing demands pressed on them. By the same token, changes in interest articulation patterns also required behavioural changes that were slow to occur, particularly without the proper incentives. In an environment where following the new, official rules and adopting democratic behaviours could penalise, rather than reward, interest groups, it was not politically astute to abandon traditional or non-democratic methods entirely. The polarised political climate only exacerbated problems, doing little to dull the voracity of some demands or to improve the willingness to compromise with mutual second-best options. Nor did Yeltsin’s personalised style improve matters. It echoed many non-democratic features of the past, removing much policy-making from public scrutiny and transparent procedures, entrenching conflict and instability, marginalising forums for democratic influence, and generally de-legitimising public participation.

In this environment, it was natural for actors to rely on non-democratic avenues to advance their interests. Given Russia’s history and the patterns of political access under Yeltsin, it is hardly surprising that personal connections and political access also became the most beneficial form of interest representation for non-governmental interest groups. The strongest lobbies were subsequently those that could establish and maintain positions close to important political figures. For the most successful, after 1993 this also meant specifically targeting figures in the executive branch or high-level officials with political capital and clout. And there were certainly plenty of opportunities to gain influence in this branch. Yeltsin, for example, was continually
reaching out for new allies. However, even as a stopgap measure, this reliance on personalised patterns of interest articulation was hardly conducive to enhancing pluralised interest articulation. Moreover, for some, temporary influence itself was not enough; they sought more permanent arrangements. The survival of statist forms of representation saw some interest groups act as if they were political parties, seeking to capture a share of governing power rather than influencing those in government.\(^95\) Such zero-sum patterns of interest representation only heightened the stakes of competition.

Consequently, although democratisation saw the development of a more differentiated spectrum of interest associations, inequality in the political clout of weaker and stronger groups also increased.\(^96\) The unequal, differentiated impacts liberalisation had on civil society also undermined stable interest articulation and broad representation. Factors like economic decline, political and social upheaval, the legacy of depoliticisation, and political disillusionment meant that political freedom alone was not enough to encourage the development of a diverse civil society. Instead, an initial blooming of civil society and lobby groups was followed by a significant retrenchment as groups struggled to survive and people withdrew from the public sector. Increasingly, those groups that survived to interact with the state were those with significant financial and political resources and direct access to government. This marginalisation of those with fewer resources to compete meant some important foreign policy influences and experience was also lost. Academics and foreign policy experts, for example, struggled in the new environment. Institutes of the Russian academy of sciences and their employees suffered severely from cuts in public expenditure and changes in the structure of policy-making undermined their role.\(^97\) With the interests of the most resource-endowed disproportionately represented in policy, not only was real democratic representation undermined. Rather, problems of policy unpredictability and inconsistency were also heightened as the political fortunes of those influencing policy shifted continuously with their sponsors, the business class remained volatile and unpredictable, and new groups continually stamped their views on policy.

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\(^96\) ibid, p. 124.
The role of big business

One such group that did succeed in this environment was private sector big business, particularly from the mid-1990s as huge empires consolidated and began to flex their financial, political, and strategic muscles. Endowed with the resources to compete and strong external interests, big business became the strongest non-governmental foreign policy lobbyer. Often working alongside state sector interests on issue lines, private business successfully used many of the strategies outlined above, such as cultivating government officials, to position itself close to the machinations of real power and project its interests onto policy. Lukoil, for example, worked with state-owned energy companies, cultivating its relationship with Chernomyrdin and Primakov to great advantage on areas like the Caspian, pipelines, and relations with hydrocarbon partners. Many Moscow observers also claimed privately during the signing of the Russo-Chechen peace accord on 12 May 1997 that Yeltsin had been successfully lobbied by Lukoil to settle the conflict, since it needed peace in order to secure the flow of oil across Chechnya from Caspian oilfields to Novorossisk. Although such decisions were certainly motivated by necessity—the vulnerable Yeltsin government was always keen to make policy adjustments that would have positive economic dividends—they were also signs of the business community’s adeptness at using Yeltsin’s need for allies to advance its interests. The benefits of this support were often so blatant that Yeltsin appeared willing to prostitute himself to anyone and at any price for support, irrespective of the potential policy outcomes. His administration was so dependent for support on sympathetic industrial and commercial circles, for example, that it found it difficult to refuse requests for special treatment in the area of foreign trade.

Increasingly, big businesses took advantage of this weakness, identifying direct political participation as a legitimate method of interest articulation. Many big business figures made it to highest political office, holding positions in the Duma and in the government itself. The banking and media magnates, known as oligarchs, in

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particular, were in and out of government throughout the Yeltsin period. Though intensely detested by many for their unscrupulous actions during mass privatisation, where they were perceived as effectively stealing assets from the public, the valuable support of big business and the oligarchs’ media empires in the 1996 presidential elections, for example, was reciprocated with government positions for oligarchs of dubious character like Boris Berezovsky and Vladimir Potanin. Others, such as Roman Abramovich and Aleksandr Khloponin effectively bought their way into politics by standing as governors. Such participation strengthened their ability to advance their lobbies’ interests, with high-level access to agenda-setting and policymaking processes. Given the questionable activities most had pursued to gain their business empires, few had qualms about blurring public and private interests in an increasingly corrupt regime some labelled a ‘kleptocracy’. However, the lengths big business was prepared to go to did little to help stability or policy coherence, introducing further competition and politicisation. As their resources grew meteorically throughout the 1990s, too, not only did they become increasingly active, confident and demanding, but their capacity for unilateral action on foreign policy matters also increased. With organisational capacity in their favour, big business increasingly pursued its own foreign policy line, making it yet another competitor to the MFA and government, should its increasingly assertive demands be ignored.

Yet, in addition to their role as competitors, big business also had some broadly positive policy impacts over the course of the Yeltsin period. Though they may have have been divided and their interests continually challenged in the complex interplay of interests, oligarchs and big business generally shared a similar philosophy of “make money, not war”. They supported a moderate foreign policy in which the pursuit of economic gain rather than strategic advantage was the main goal. They provided a counterweight to the illiberal nationalist, statist views that continually sought to divert Russia from its liberalising strategies. The re-emergence of certain liberal foreign policy elements and the moderation of anti-NATO rhetoric following the 1996 elections, for example, reflected this strengthening of the oligarchs and big

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business in government, and these groups’ interest in economic integration between
Russia and the West. Ultimately, this handful of very profitable corporations and
their political allies were important interests (along with Russian voters) in providing
sustained momentum for continued integration with the West and prevailed in foreign
policy debates over those who opposed integration, something that surely saved
Russia from a worse fate than the mediocrity it endured.

Elections and parties

While elections may have impacted foreign policy through changing alignments of
elites or rewards, more general societal influence was much lower. Elections really
only contributed to foreign policy in the broadest sense. More often than not, what
emerged from electoral debates and contest were the foreign policy expressions of the
domestic policy preferred by voters, rather than specific choices about external
strategies. Public interest in foreign affairs, specifically, remained limited, including
at election time. This disinterest partly reflected the traditional isolation of foreign
policy from public debate. Yet, inactivity also reflected a prioritisation of interests
and demands. Most were simply indifferent to foreign policy issues when there were
so many other more pressing, primarily domestic, concerns. However, while voters
may not have been overly concerned with specific issues, foreign policy ideas were
not entirely absent from electoral debates. Some political elites were quick to realise
the potential of foreign policy issues to mobilise electoral support in the new
competitive environment, if not in terms of precise policies, then in terms of their
relationship to issues of identity, pride, Russia’s place in the world, and efforts to
discredit the Westernising position.

As foreign policy issues became entwined in political struggles, it appeared
Russians were becoming attracted to increasingly illiberal positions. However, rather
than demonstrating society’s frustration with liberalism, this adaptation signalled the

103 Aron, pp. 45-6.
104 James Goldgeiger and Michael McFaul (2004), ‘Russians as Joiners: Realist and Liberal
Conceptions of Postcommunist Europe’, in After the Collapse of Communism: Comparative
Lessons of Transition, edited by Michael McFaul and Kathryn Stoner-Weiss (eds.), Cambridge:
Cambridge University Press, pp. 240-1.
105 Vladimir Abarinov (1995), ‘MID Mezhdu Proshlym I Budushchim—Vybory Zakoncheny,
106 ibid, p. 28.
continued politicisation and immaturity of interest representation. Notional constraint remained under-developed and elite concepts of the issues close to voters’ hearts were somewhat ill-aligned. In reality, the attitudes of elites and public actually diverged markedly throughout the Yeltsin period. While closer on ‘near abroad’ than ‘far abroad’ issues, elites still tended to be more nationalistic and interventionist. In a 1994 study, for example, 56% of a sample of Russia’s foreign policy elite were inclined to “send military aid if asked to aid a country of the FSU”, while only 34% of the public held the same opinion. On the question of Russian national interests extending beyond its current territory, 77% of the elite sample agreed, compared to only 57% of the public. The only question on which the public was more nationalistic concerned the use of unspecified means to “defend the interests of Russians abroad”.107

Generally, polls confirmed the public’s low level of interest and the fact that it was mostly unwilling to express any opinion on foreign issues, where the elite, in contrast, expressed elaborate views.108 This being the case, the unsophisticated nature of the Russian polity led to an excessive focus on issues that were both more ‘accessible’ and easier to politicise; to a large degree, everyone could be an ‘instant expert’ on NATO enlargement, Bosnia, or Kosovo.109 While some of these more emotive foreign policy ideas ultimately appeared legitimised by their sponsors’ electoral success, they did so more by association with domestic agendas or efforts to voice dissatisfaction with the government, than any mass desire to radicalise foreign policy. While voters were actually a driving force in the survival of liberal foreign policy ideas,110 the competitive, unstable transitional environment and disconnect between elite and public opinion saw political elites, the government included, consistently misjudge the public tone and overstate illiberal themes in their foreign policy rhetoric. In this respect, electoral politics did influence foreign policy-making, though in a less consistent and skewed manner than the moderating force envisaged by proponents of the ‘democratic peace’. Had this disconnect not occurred, it is likely

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110 Goldgeiger and McFaul, pp. 240-1.
liberal themes would have been even stronger, the illiberal punctuations less voracious, and foreign policy more consistent.

This somewhat negative electoral impact was only exacerbated by weak party politics. Throughout the Yeltsin period, parties remained fluid, unstructured, and relatively ineffective political bodies. They were mostly unable to formulate and articulate any consistent, coherent, policy strategies and—partly as a result—lacked a reliable base of support. For the most part, their greatest political impact was felt through involvement in the parliament,\(^{111}\) rather than as robust, independent political actors. This party system weakness and lack of strong social anchors heightened the temptation of political elites to trade on dissatisfaction or radicalise issues for expedient political gain. Parties’ foreign policy agendas were often as much about political point scoring as they were influencing real change, with little consideration for the deleterious, polarising consequences of their actions. In the consistently competitive environment, the unstable, fluid parties were generally more interested in mobilising whatever issues and resources they could to fight for political access. Yeltsin’s actions, again, did little to improve matters. His reluctance to become involved in party politics underscored the irrelevance of parties and further discouraged the development of a strong party system. It also meant he lacked dependable party support for his own political goals—something that only added to instability and overly aggressive political competition.

In terms of parties, Vladimir Zhirinovsky’s Liberal Democratic Party of Russia (LDPR) had the most to say about foreign policy. His ultranationalist, anti-Western, neo-imperialist rhetoric certainly grabbed the attention of many, particularly those who saw his policies as a means of restoring Russian pride. His stance was at the polar extreme to the westernising government, and an open challenge to their direction. Although the Communists and their allies were less extreme, they also criticised what they saw as the government’s slavish westernising policy, in an argument spiked with elements of fundamentalist nationalist rhetoric. Both parties performed well in the 1993 parliamentary elections and signalled just how precarious the government’s direction was. In doing so, the fundamentalist nationalist opposition

capitalised on domestic social fallout to make a case for a state that was strong at home and assertive abroad. More liberal, centrist parties like Yabloko also demanded greater defence of Russian interests, though their views were tempered with desires to continuing expanding cooperation with the West, but not at the expense of all other interests. While positions on foreign policy issues at the international level varied greatly, those towards the ‘near abroad’ displayed greater consensus, favouring increased assertiveness. It was these issues too, which resonated most amongst the population, tied more closely as they were to domestic economic and social realities. This gave them greater traction in competitive struggles. It was not only the major parties that campaigned strongly on these issues, however. Alexander Lebed, for example, was launched into politics as the commander of the 14th army on his assertive stance on protecting Russians in the ‘near abroad’, becoming a prime contender in the 1996 presidential elections.

Ultimately, then, aspects of electoral competition had an inconsistent but generally disproportionate policy impact, particularly considering the public’s actual level of foreign policy interest. The effects were mostly more indirect than direct, felt through the transformation of the political middle ground and the parameters of foreign policy debates. Change was driven, however, more by the executive’s willingness to coopt opposition rhetoric to depoliticise foreign policy and compete electorally, than opponents’ ability to fully capture policy-making. For example, although Yeltsin had already begun to shift foreign policy rhetoric in 1992, the 1993 parliamentary elections added further impetus to this process, with the perceived dramatic victory of nationalist forces, like Zhirinovsky’s LDPR and the Communists. In order to recapture some political momentum, Yeltsin adjusted his government’s foreign policy further, accommodating a more nationalist, patriotic, Russia-first tone and activist role, particularly in the ‘near abroad’. Although this assertive change was more rhetorical than substantial and only exacerbated policy fragmentation with its

112 Malcolm and Pravda, p. 541.
113 Aron, p. 35. Lebed did run successfully for a seat in the Supreme Soviet of the Dniester Moldovan Republic in fall 1993 gaining 88%, though he resigned soon after the conflict in Moscow.
114 In December 1993 elections the LDPR received 21.4% of the votes, the Communists 11.2% and their allies the Agrarian Party 7.4% - combined much greater than the 14.5% of the “liberal” Russia’s Choice Party: Russia Votes Website, Centre for the Study of Public Policy, University of Aberdeen. Available at: http://www.russiavotes.org/duma/duma_elections_93-03.php?PHPSESSID=577dfbfa3e357d2b4e638830191a24ef (Accessed 24 March 2011).
inconsistent implementation, it signalled significant evolution in the government’s official approach.

In 1995, with the pro-reform parties unable to provide a liberal majority in parliament, Yeltsin again sought to depoliticise foreign policy issues and neutralise their potential as tools in opposition campaigns in the forthcoming presidential elections. Though Zhirinovsky’s popularity had declined, the resurgent Communists also maintained more nationalistic foreign policy positions. Most importantly, Yeltsin sacrificed controversial liberal Kozyrev as Foreign Minister, despite his earlier political shift, appointing the centrist Primakov as a concession to a significant group of his critics. He also further hardened his foreign policy rhetoric. While this helped remove foreign policy issues from the electoral agenda, such political expediency prolonged their political longevity, as policy appeared to shift directionless, and thus ripe for legitimate criticism. By sustaining the unstable political environment and periodically mobilising foreign policy issues, Yeltsin thus only prolonged the unpredictable and destabilising impact of electoral politics on foreign policy-making.

The changing external environment

Of course it was not only domestic factors alone that shaped Russia’s troubled transitional foreign policy. External influences also acted as triggers and further factors shaping the unpredictable policy-making environment and even the contours of transition itself. As Bobo Lo argues, much of the haphazard course followed by the Kremlin during the post-Soviet period was attributable to an unpredictable and often alien international environment. Yet the unstable domestic environment meant that these external stimuli did not influence transitional policy-making divorced of a domestic context. In many respects, it was ultimately this domestic perception and manipulation of external events that was more important in terms of policy making than the events themselves.

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115 See for example, Gill and Markwick, pp. 193-4 and Malcolm and Pravda, p. 542.
Certainly, the international environment into which Russia emerged as an independent nation was one of great change and turmoil. The end of the bipolar standoff, saw the political, security, and economic contours of the international system shifting to an unknown form. Old alliances and institutions were collapsing, transforming, or adapting, and many believed these changes signalled an entirely new era in international relations. In terms of transition, the international environment was generally believed to be favourable for the implementation of both market and democratic reforms. But for all this optimism and expectation, it was not an easy environment to operate in, characterised as it was by uncertainty as much as fluidity. These challenges were particularly difficult for nations struggling with domestic transition and lacking both the experience and capacity to quickly respond to an ever-changing, complex external environment.

To make matters worse, it quickly became apparent that this was not an environment favourably disposed toward Russian interests. For one, despite hopes for multipolarity, unipolarity began to emerge instead. It appeared that Washington, in particular, was taking advantage of fluidity and the lack of serious challengers to advance its own interests and consolidate a hegemonic position. For a country that still desired a strong international presence, but with a seriously compromised ability to compete, this was a significant threat. This challenge only deepened over time, as those international, multilateral forums capable of facilitating a continued and positively disproportionate international influence for Russia, such as the UN, were also marginalised in favour of unilateral action or selective coalitions, excluding Russia and its major allies. From an early stage, perceptions also grew that the West generally did not understand or refused to take Russian interests seriously. Nor did this situation change over time, as perceived ignorance of similar concerns during the Yugoslav crisis, for example, was repeated during the Kosovo crisis. Rather than feeling like a respected international player, then, Russia had to deal with a sense of powerlessness and marginalisation.

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117 Shevtsova, pp. 282-3.
118 While Light discusses security interests specifically, the same disinterest was perceived in all aspects of Russian interests: Light (1996), p. 85.
Yet Moscow had to face not just the neglect of its interests, but also apparent Western efforts to isolate Russia. Despite attempts by Moscow to improve its international reputation by actively cooperating on a number of issues, even deferring its own traditional interests, it was still treated with suspicion and condescension. Rhetoric of partnership aside, Russia was not welcomed as an equal partner. Russia felt unfairly blocked, for example, from trade and excluded, or at least delayed in joining international organisations. Promises of significant aid from the West also never materialised, failing to offset the massive declines or smooth the path of transition—economically or politically. To make matters worse, the favouritism shown to Russia’s European postcommunist counterparts led many to identify geopolitical goals in the West’s disregard of Russia. It was the subsequent decision to expand NATO membership to many of these former communist counterparts, however, that came to dominate perceptions of the external environment. The political elite took this as a sign of indifference to Russian sensitivities at best, and at worst as the beginning of a campaign to exclude, isolate, and humiliate the new Russia. For the conspiracy theorists there could be no clearer symbol of the West’s real agenda. For the liberal government, too, the blatant disregard for the predicament the West knew it would put them in by expanding NATO, was a slap in the face and cause to reassess their own confidence in ‘Westernisation’. Unfortunately, the West was not wise enough to help Russia out of this humiliating position, to assuage its national pride, and to make concessions to it while it was so weak. Its actions ultimately contributed to the backlash in Russia’s domestic politics and its foreign policy, impacting its relations with the ‘near abroad’ and with major Western powers. Rather than locking in foreign policy liberalism and political democratisation, the West instead pursued a path that only compounded the challenges facing Russian liberals and the potential for the catastrophic failure of their efforts.

119 ibid, pp. 84-5.
122 ibid, p. 24.
Destabilising and uncertain external influences also emanated from closer to home. Establishing and managing relations with Russia’s unstable, constantly changing transitional post-Soviet neighbours proved difficult, particularly with the post-imperial wrinkle added. Unpredictability was heightened by the FSU’s potential volatility, particularly in the south. Here there were many potential sources of instability, including border challenges, ethnic and language divisions, irredentism, economic troubles, and high population growth. Unsurprisingly, a number of conflicts quickly broke out and threatened to inflame the entire Eurasian region. For Russia, these threats were particularly acute, given its porous and poorly delineated borders, which had been practically non-existent internal borders during Soviet times. Given the large degree of ethnic unity across these borders, Russia feared instability could inflame its own restive peoples. In addition to the obvious security threats, such centrifugal forces had the potential to divert energies, attention, and resources from the primary business of constructing a democracy and viable market economy.

Yet while Russia may have wanted to sever long-standing interconnections ties to insulate itself from instability, the destruction of integrated economic and security infrastructure was also damaging and practically impossible. While some saw the ‘near abroad’ as an inescapable economic and military burden, others began to consider means of ensuring Russia gained from the relationship. It was obvious to many that Moscow had key interests in maintaining elements of this previously integrated system, and could not afford to simply abandon it. In addition to key infrastructure resources, the 20 million strong diaspora necessitated continued engagement. Their situation was made more important by the fact Russia could not afford an influx of refugees, should their position in the newly independent states become untenable. Thus, the new Russia remained intricately linked to the FSU. Upheavals and instability in that space would be felt in Russia throughout the transitional period, significantly impacting foreign policy as domestic opponents gained considerable traction from the government’s sustained, ‘damaging’ inattention towards the ‘near abroad’.

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124 Chayes and Chayes, p. 2.
126 Bowker, p. 185.
This fluid, often confrontational, external environment certainly proved a challenge, particularly for a Russian state whose internal upheavals made it that much harder to formulate and implement informed, decisive, and strategic responses. However, without underestimating the importance of these external influences and their independent capacity to impinge on Russian interests and security, external challenges assumed an influence far disproportionate to their actual importance due to their mobilisation and manipulation in domestic competitive struggles. Issues like NATO expansion, the Yugoslav crisis, Russia’s strategic withdrawal from the ‘near abroad’ and the advance of the West, entered the political agenda as much through their politicisation as by virtue of their strategic significance. Perceived international decline provided great ammunition in political struggles, particularly for those highlighting the bankruptcy of the government’s strategy, either for strategic reasons or selfish political advancement. At the same time, the more the government sought to disarm such issues, the more it contributed to their politicisation by apparently substantiating its opponents’ claims of insufficient regard for external challenges. The ultimate result of such domestic utilisation and competitive battles was to exaggerate the eternal environment’s unpredictable impact, compounding challenges Russia already faced and further undermining the effectiveness of its external activity.

Conclusion

The foreign policy environment under Yeltsin, then, was plagued by many problems that fundamentally compromised policy-making and implementation. On one hand, these stemmed from the massive transitional changes occurring in Russia. Economic resources declined dramatically from the Soviet period, placing constraints on what Moscow could achieve and the options open to it. The sustained and extraordinary economic collapse also had major political repercussions, impacting all aspects of politics, including debates about contemporary identity, national interests, and the direction of transition. Economic upheaval certainly strengthened the hands of nationalist political forces and further fuelled the political conflict inspired by transition. Political change had major consequences for winners and losers, and the
potential for political actors to benefit greatly in the fluidity and unpredictability
drove competitive struggles. Conflicts erupted between political actors, with some
between the executive and legislature escalating to dangerous proportions. Add to
this mix a whole raft of new foreign policy pressures, groups and interests born of
liberalisation, trying to interact with the state and influence foreign policy—often
when the state was simply too weak or unprepared to manage pluralised interests—
and the outcome was a volatile and confused policy environment. To make matters
worse, Yeltsin chose a manipulative political style that only exacerbated and
prolonged conflict and upheaval, strengthening his own political capital at the
expense of the system and those who could stabilise policy-making.

Unsurprisingly, then, Russia’s foreign policy under Yeltsin was a mess. With no
clear delineation on who should be involved and how, policy was confused,
inconsistent, and continually contested. Consistently pulled in contradictory
directions as competing forces gained periodic influence, it lurched directionless
while motivated foreign policy entrepreneurs took advantage of the government’s
weakness and general instability to freelance. From the outside, there was the distinct
impression that Russia was pursuing multiple foreign policies, and none particularly
successfully. In 1995 Kommersant Daily commented that “it is impossible to pursue
an integrated foreign and economic policy today (in part) because Russia’s political
and economic elite, including its ruling elite, not only is not consolidated, but has
split into competing, hostile factions, groups and groupings that are openly battling
with each other. It would be simply foolish for our foreign partners not to take
advantage of this circumstance at any talks with Moscow”.127 Certainly, Russia’s
ability to protect its interests—whatever these were—was undermined by domestic
conflict and upheaval, which undermined its inability to achieve anything of
substance during the 1990s. Instead, Russia appeared to stumble from crisis to crisis,
increasingly marginalised from international and regional activity, something that no
amount of blustering rhetoric, periodic showmanship, or unsubstantiated promises
could reverse. The specific effects of this unstable, competitive political environment
on foreign policy and that towards with the ‘near abroad’ and Central Asia,
specifically, will be elaborated in the following chapters, demonstrating just how

significantly domestic troubles impacted Russia’s foreign policy during the Yeltsin period.
Chapter Four

Yeltsin’s foreign policy from a global and regional perspective

With the tumultuous policy-making environment outlined in the previous chapter, it is unsurprising there were significant domestic impacts on foreign policy. The following chapter examines these impacts during Yeltin’s tenure as president between 1991 and 1999 firstly examining Russia’s overall foreign policy direction and then the role of the CIS and Central Asia within this context more specifically.

Russia’s post-Soviet foreign policy approach

The Westernising period

As discussed in the previous chapter, postcommunist Russia’s initial foreign policy was dominated by the ‘Westernising’ or ‘Atlanticist’ ideology, shaped by the reformers who had stamped their authority on all aspects of policy-making. With their concept of identity based on Russia as part of the West, the reformers’ strategy intensified Gorbachev’s ‘New Political Thinking’, in an effort to create an external environment for Moscow conducive to domestic change and form partnerships that could provide Russia with the resources it needed to undertake its transition and enhance its wealth. Yet, their policy was even more idealistic than Gorbachev’s, based not on the objective assessment of reality, but rather on the diplomatic appraisal of the future, a basis that would prove particularly difficult to build upon over the medium term. Though much early foreign policy was as much reactive responses to external events as a consciously implemented strategy, the reformers, Yeltsin and Kozyrev in particular, were keen to demonstrate Moscow’s commitment to cooperation and positive-sum thinking—where all parties benefit—and the abandonment of past attitudes and isolationism. Tentative steps towards cooperation

were swept aside in favour of rapid and comprehensive rapprochement and a practical about-face in Moscow’s pre-Gorbachev foreign policy direction. Russia’s longstanding practical focus on the West moved from competition to efforts to consolidate real partnership and ‘prove’ Russia’s commitment to democratisation and market reforms. At the same time, Moscow practically abandoned its ideologically questionable Soviet-era partners. Foreign policy priorities were increasingly ‘economised’, meaning trade, economic assistance and other financial considerations guided external activity more than the strategic and traditional military-security approaches that had dominated earlier. Even if encouraged solely by pragmatism and the widely-held belief that improved relations would deliver major injections of aid, a convergence of opinion with the US, in particular, began to emerge. On issues like strategic arms reduction, the prevention of nuclear and conventional arms proliferation, human rights, and many other international security issues, Moscow and Washington’s positions began to converge. To consolidate its integration into the West, Russia also sought to join multilateral international organisations, such as GATT (later the WTO), the IMF, Council of Europe, G7 and the OECD. Moscow dropped its previous antagonism towards NATO. A number of high-ranking Russian officials, including Yeltsin, Kozyrev, Vice President Aleksandr Rutskoi, and State Secretary Gennady Burbulis, even went so far as to suggest that Russia could one day become a full NATO member. Suddenly, Russia appeared to be acting very much like the West, not the antagonistic superpower to which the world had become accustomed.

The emergence of policy conflict

As long as Yeltsin and Kozyrev had sufficient capacity to dominate policymaking, the Westernising strategy could dominate Moscow’s interaction with the outside world. However, from 1992 the Westernisers’ policy control was eroded by the unfortunate combination of domestic upheaval, behaviours and unfavourable external conditions discussed in the previous chapter. Foreign policy came under sustained attack from both those with legitimate concerns over direction and ‘opportunists’, seeking to undermine the reformers for selfish political gain. While

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Gorbachev may have been able to suppress domestic opposition to his foreign policy path (except in the very latter stages), Yeltsin did not have this ‘luxury’, being subject to horizontal and vertical accountabilities that Gorbachev was not. These accountabilities and the more open, liberalising political system only increased the leverage points for those engaged in competitive battles with the reformist government. Yeltsin also increasingly lacked the ‘harder’, more coercive tools and sufficient control over the state apparatus to bring unruly political actors to order as political stability eroded. With the reformers becoming isolated and struggling to build consensus around their ideas, initial policy focus gave way to messy, fragmented, foreign policy politicisation and turmoil. More concerning, perhaps, was that amongst this chaos appeared a proliferation of foreign policies, pursued simultaneously by different institutions. In particular, the Foreign Ministry and Ministry of Defence’s competition made it appear they were pursuing quite different policies; the MFA remaining committed to a Westernising strategy, the MoD pursuing more assertive, nationalistic strategies, particularly in the ‘near abroad’. When the MoD found support for its more traditional and assertive position through the formation of the Security Council in mid-1992, with both institutions becoming the repository of more conservative and less pro-Western views, this only brought more conflict to policy-making, rather than the promised consensus.

Disagreement went right to the conceptual heart of policy. Moves to formalise and clarify Russia’s strategic direction similarly became targets. The parliament’s Committee on International Affairs head Evgeni Ambartsumov rejected Kozyrev’s draft Foreign Policy Concept, for example, as “insufficiently concrete”. Such hostility was hardly divorced from the broader executive-legislative struggles. From an early stage, in fact, the parliament commenced the pattern of sustained rhetorical opposition, obstruction, and politicisation of foreign policy issues that endured throughout the Yeltsin period. Such recalcitrance was as much a reaction to both its general political marginalisation as well as foreign policy-making specifically, as it was based on any principled opposition. Though, ultimately, the legislature was insufficiently strong to impose a predominantly nationalist logic on the Kremlin, over

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time it was certainly able to undermine the latter’s commitment and capacity to pursue a liberal post-Soviet vision for Russia’s relations with the outside world. With this initial flexing of its muscles, however, the parliament joined the emerging chorus of opposition demanding a more assertive, active defence of traditional interests that was far less amenable to cooperation with the West. Consequently, with Kozyrev stalled and the reformists increasingly isolated, the Security Council succeeded with its version of the Concept, clearly undercutting the MFA’s authority and fragmenting foreign policy further.

Recognising the potential impact of this rapidly shifting political environment on his own political capital, his reformist government and the future of reform, Yeltsin had himself begun efforts to defuse potentially volatile foreign policy situations and placate the opposition, pre-empting major political battles. Already in late 1992 he began publicly backing away from unconditional support of the liberal Foreign Ministry line. As well as the aforementioned cancellation of his Tokyo visit, Yeltsin unexpectedly proclaimed a decree delaying the withdrawal of Russian troops from the Baltic States on the basis of “human rights abuses”. Rhetoric towards the West became harder and less conciliatory. There was an increasing emphasis on finding a ‘Russian way’ and independent domestic and foreign policy, at the expense of the previous belief in cooperation and Russia’s status as a Western nation. Responding to the changing tone Kozyrev, too, reversed his previously accommodating stance. He surprised delegates to the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) summit in Stockholm in December 1992, when he told Western leaders that they must begin treating Russia as an equal in European matters, especially with regard to the former Yugoslavia.

As 1993 dawned and the perceived hardening of Russia’s foreign policy approach continued, Yeltsin and his allies moderated their liberalism, adopting the rhetoric of

their critics. With opponents, too, continuing to rally against the last vestiges of Atlanticism, the political climate shifted rapidly, leaving those remaining wholeheartedly committed to the liberal agenda isolated and marginalised. Blind pursuit of a Westernising strategy and subordination of traditional interests became increasingly untenable for politicians, particularly where any tangible benefits, domestic or foreign, were difficult to identify. A more nationalistic, traditional policy with perceived resonance amongst a distressed polity was a more attractive means for both those seeking to usurp power and those keen to protect their increasingly shaky positions. Increasingly motivated by the imperative of political survival under conditions of electoral competition, Moscow’s leaders became much more eager to respond to the nationalist mood of conservative groups and the public than to the preferences of the international community.\(^9\) In the most cynical view, a foreign policy campaign to defend national interests even became more politically profitable than attempts to resurrect the collapsed economy.\(^10\)

As well as political survival and opportunism, strategic thinking also drove Yeltsin’s shift. He realised that there was much more at stake in the long term if he was unable to rein in and moderate growing opposition. Adapting his political path, even if more rhetorically than in terms of substance per se, bought Yeltsin some breathing room, allowed him to reach out to new political allies, and prevented the most illiberal political forces from capitalising on blind commitment to an unpopular direction to displace his governments and denounce reform entirely. Even if directed primarily to a domestic audience, the changes through late 1992 and 1993 appeared to demonstrate the crumbling of Russia’s cooperative, Westernising strategy under the onslaught of illiberal domestic opposition. The previously subordinated ‘Russia first’ policies again came to the fore. With even the most committed reformers apparently abandoning liberal paths in favour of more nationalistic, even imperialist, directions, regional and international fears of a more aggressive, confrontational Russian foreign policy grew.

\(^10\) ibid, p. 59.
Through 1993, though foreign policy consistency remained elusive, analysts more confidently talked up the emergence of a consensual Russian foreign policy, as leading political figures increasingly couched their rhetoric in the language of the pragmatic nationalists. The promulgation of the Security Council’s foreign policy concept in April 1993 only appeared to confirm this defeat of liberal Westernising ideas and convergence of ‘establishment’ thinking around ‘pragmatic nationalism’.11

A major change certainly appeared in the offing, given the strategy approved by Yeltsin in favour of his liberal ally Kozyrev’s early draft was one supported by conservative state apparatus figures like Minister of Defence Pavel Grachev, former Minister of Security Viktor Barannikov, and the director of the Foreign Intelligence Service, Evgenii Primakov. Perhaps of more concern to Kozyrev, the MFA and supporters of a liberal foreign policy than the rejection of their draft concept was the fact the Security Council’s concept effectively marginalised the MFA and circumscribed its policy role, stipulating that: “foreign policy activity is guided by the President drawing on the Security Council. The role of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs is limited to an executing agency”.12 Analysts began to question whether the consolidation of a more consensual, predictable policy was at the expense of the survival of liberal, Westernising views and whether Yeltsin’s abandonment of his reformist allies would have graver consequences for Russia’s future and international security than a simple short-term downturn in relations with the West.

While the concept’s tone was not as openly hostile as Marxist-Leninist pronouncements or ‘fundamentalist nationalist’ politicians, it did indicate the move to a more assertive direction,13 and one that differed significantly from the one Kozyrev had initially pursued. References to interdependence and the security dilemma disappeared, “New Political Thinking” was abandoned and geopolitics instead took pride of place.14 International politics were now seen in terms of competition and conflict rather than cooperation and partnership. Kozyrev’s emphasis on good-neighbourliness was replaced with a somewhat isolationist, ‘fortress Russia’ policy

11 Donaldson and Nogee, p. 117.
14 Skak, p. 173.
doctrine. Immediately, changes in Moscow’s behaviour were seen. Activity in the CIS and ‘near abroad’ increased, opposition to NATO expansion more became vociferous, efforts to confound Western-led campaigns in Iraq and Serbia intensified, relations with some traditional allies and ‘ideologically questionable’ regimes were reactivated, and the previous self-restraint in arms sales was abandoned. While relations with the West were not allowed to deteriorate into another Cold War, the strategy and subsequent activity signalled Russia’s unwillingness to be a junior, subservient partner of the Western camp. Instead, Moscow declared its apparent determination to carve out its own niche as a great power in a multi-polar world and its desire to consolidate partnerships with like-minded nations. Relations with China, in particular, a country that shared similar multi-polar interests and the ability to support Moscow’s efforts to constrain US hegemony and the emergence of a unipolar world, were heralded as key tenets of policy and measures to establish a ‘strategic partnership’ to this end, commenced in earnest.

Still, in spite of this apparent emerging rhetorical consensus, foreign policy hardly became more coherent or predictable. Though the liberal Westernising camp appeared to have been delivered a theoretical defeat, the shift towards pragmatic nationalism was hardly comprehensive or convincing. Instead, foreign policy continued to demonstrate tendencies towards fragmentation and inconsistency, something driven by both the deepening transitional upheaval and institutional confusion and Yeltsin’s own continued vacillation between the pragmatic nationalist and Westernising positions. In reality, it remained unclear who was in control of policy or what the primary direction was, essentially leaving all sides dissatisfied and undermining any real forward momentum. This lack of leadership, accountability, focus, and substantive consensus was echoed throughout the political system, and nowhere was the conflict it caused more pointed than between the executive and legislature. Yeltsin’s moderation of his direction ultimately did little to improve relations with the antagonistic legislature, who continued attempts to thwart his every move, further politicising policy-making in the process. Yeltsin’s inability to resolve these problems ultimately led to the violent 1993 showdown and the promulgation of a new constitutional order aimed at forestalling any repeat of the confusion, conflict,

15 ibid, p. 179.
and deadlock that had thus far characterised post-Soviet policy-making. While it was hoped that the subsequent parliamentary elections would deliver the liberals a more substantive mandate, voters instead seemingly eschewed the liberal Westernising approach in favour of pragmatic nationalists and, more worryingly, the fundamentalist nationalists. In doing so, they demonstrated that merely extending democratic procedures such as free elections, does not guarantee liberal foreign or domestic policy. Instead, with a domestic situation characterised by a discrepancy between democratic procedures and illiberal societal and elite preferences, democratisation only made the government more vulnerable to hawkish, nationalist pressures that inhibited its capacity to maintain international cooperation. Although how precisely these results actually reflected the average voters’ preferences towards reform or foreign policy was not entirely clear, justifying the continued pursuit of a Westernising approach was made that much more difficult with another defeat for the liberals.

**The post-consensus period**

Faced with a perpetually confrontational, uncooperative legislature (even though politically circumscribed), and the continued perceived rise of nationalism, Yeltsin and his government were compelled to continue empowering pragmatic nationalism throughout 1994. Sanctioning these ideas through political and electoral debates effectively changed what was politically correct, redefining how Russia viewed itself, its place in the world, its interests, and the methods of achieving these interests. Kozyrev’s replacement by conservative, pragmatic nationalist Yevgenii Primakov in 1995 appeared to confirm the permanence of this shift and the intensification of the ‘Russia first’ approach. Yet rhetoric aside, Primakov effected only minor corrections in relations with the West. He even folded in the face of American determination to enlarge NATO to include Poland, Hungary, and the Czech republic. This meant that while Russian leaders denounced NATO enlargement in words, they continued to cooperate with the alliance in deeds, particularly in peacekeeping forces in Bosnia

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and Kosovo. A continued focus on generally positive relations with the US and Europe also remained. Hence, in spite of the outward signs of a more assertive and nationalist Russia, Moscow remained unwilling to do anything too rash that would damage relations with the West. This caution was partly tied to the re-emergence of a number of liberal Westernising ideas (concurrent to the search to define Russia and its interests based on ‘pragmatic nationalist’ ideas) that became clear in 1996 both before and after the election. With liberal and pro-business figures also finding their way back into relatively high-level positions in the administration, disincentives to extremism were further strengthened. This surreptitious survival of liberal ideas, established a pattern that survived throughout Yeltsin’s tenure: periodic lambasting of the West and the overt pursuit of ‘pragmatic nationalist’ goals occurred simultaneously with the more restrained, understated adherence to aspects of a broadly Westernising direction. Essentially this was Westernising by stealth, behind the pretence of pragmatic nationalism.

Ultimately, then, despite domestic pressures, personnel changes, and rhetorical statements, Yeltsin and his governments never entirely abandoned their overriding objective of emulating domestic institutions of the core states and integrating into the core. In fact, so hollow was the shift in terms of actual substance, that analysts subsequently argued against the common wisdom regarding the Westernising approach’s defeat in 1993. Bobo Lo, for example, argued that notwithstanding the illusion of ‘balance’, Moscow’s approach to international affairs continued to reflect an overriding Western-centrism throughout the Yeltsin period. James Goldgeiger and Michael McFaul agreed, arguing for the liberal agenda’s ultimate victory:

“Domestically Russian liberals—defined here minimally as those committed to markets, free trade, individual rights, and democracy—were challenged repeatedly, be it at the ballot box or in internal elite struggles. Led by Boris Yeltsin, however, Russia’s liberal forces advocating capitalism and

19 Jackson (2003), p. 75.
democracy at home and integration with the West abroad dominated Russian politics. Those in Russia who may have stood to gain from more anti-Western foreign policies—be they radical communists, extreme nationalists, segments of the armed forces, or parts of the military-industrial complex—have persistently lost in political struggles for state control.”

Clearly, then, there was no real consensus at any time during the 1990s, in spite of the impression perpetuated by the government and many analysts. Any consensus was actually the result of illusion and myth-making on the part of the weakly supported Yeltsin and his allies, who sought to deflect criticism and opposition by presenting the appearance of consensus around pragmatic ideas. Such a strategy provided a useful means of avoiding expensive and destabilising tests of the Duma’s strength, for example. There was far less political cost in prosecuting certain foreign policies issues more discretely, in situations where the administration did not want to compromise or enter a lengthy political battle. At the same time, the non-consensual approach was hardly conducive to sustainable or predictable policy. While the liberal agenda may have been protected in some form, the same inconsistency and policy schizophrenia had a devastating impact on policy, as did the continual political shifting and gamesmanship that kept Yeltsin at the hub of the political process. The government ultimately pleased neither domestic allies nor opponents and achieved little of what it intended. The response to the Kosovo conflict was an especially stark illustration of how the factionalisation of elite attitudes over priorities crippled foreign policy. Effectively, with no group able to impose its agenda comprehensively, for

24 ibid, p. 29.
25 ibid, pp. 152-3.
26 ibid, p. 153.
any extended length of time, foreign policy conduct became characterised by lowest-
common-denominator conservatism based on the avoidance of risk. Such an 
unwitting ‘compromise’ effectively anaesthetised policy-making, good and bad alike.\(^{27}\) To the outside world, Russia simply seemed ineffective at best, and stumbling 
directionless from disaster to disaster at worst, an image hardly befitting a former 
superpower.

The Approach to the CIS and Central Asia

*The Westernising period*

Importantly, too, this policy schizophrenia and sustained inability to establish 
consensus on issues of national identity and direction, impacted relations with the 
FSU and Central Asia. For example, under the initial Westernising strategy, relations 
with the newly independent states suffered greatly. Despite formation of the CIS 
encapsulating twelve of the fifteen former Soviet republics, there were few 
subsequent efforts to invigorate or animate what was essentially a hollow shell, or to 
sure up Russia’s regional involvement. Effectively, the sovereignty of the newly 
independent states was respected and that was all.\(^{28}\) Some of this inactivity was 
influenced by challenges for policy-makers and diplomacy. In the wake of the Soviet 
collapse, Russia was suddenly faced with developing, almost from scratch, policies 
towards fourteen new states. Overnight, relations were transformed from domestic to 
foreign policy. A whole range of political, economic, and military relations had to be 
forthed, and Soviet ties either dismantled or rebuilt.\(^{29}\) Yet, there was practically no 
historical precedent for foreign policy towards the other successor states and little 
knowledge about their governments’ intentions upon which to base policy.\(^{30}\) Within 
policy-making institutions there were few regional specialists and little informational 
capacity. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs, for example, lacked a specific department 
responsible for the former Soviet republics. Establishing this institutional capacity 
would be incremental, given the competition state institutions faced for resources and 
staff and the inconsistency of the target states themselves. As the fiscal environment

\(^{27}\) ibid, p. 154.  
\(^{29}\) ibid, p. 1.  
\(^{30}\) ibid, p. 58.
tightened, too, remaining resources were prioritised towards relations with the West, further hindering the potential for dynamic policies in the FSU.

However, minimal regional activity was not solely driven by constraints. To a great degree, inattention was a conscious Westernising policy. The focus on integration with the West and enhancing relations with the US and Europe meant that for the reformers, the states of the former Soviet Union were simply not a priority. The reformers actually called for a strategy that amounted to the benign neglect of the other Soviet successor states. A powerful coalition within the government cited political, strategic and economic considerations for avoiding entrapment in any strongly CIS-oriented approach. At the highest level, Yeltsin moved slowly and cautiously in relations with the FSU in order to demonstrate to the West that imperialism was a thing of the past. The reformers thought it necessary for Moscow to relinquish its former colonies, establish new state-to-state relationships based on respect of mutual sovereignty, and abandon traditional efforts toward regional hegemony. Kozyrev, too, was unwilling to let anything subvert reform or improved relations with the West, devoting primary attention and resources to this task. In contrast to relations with the West, he did not consider the newly independent states an immediate priority, although he did propose that Russia establish long-term military and economic integration through the institutions of the CIS. Yegor Gaidar, too, as Prime Minister and chief architect of economic reform, eschewed close cooperation with the FSU, perceiving the CIS as a form of divorce rather than as a basis for future cooperation. He erred towards isolation from these states so as to unburden the Russian economy and protect its transition from potentially deleterious influences. The consequence of such an approach was that caution or inactivity, if not some type of strategic withdrawal, characterised Moscow’s initial approach towards the CIS.

It was Central Asia that bore the brunt of this disinterest. Within the new foreign policy hierarchy, Central Asia, more so than the Slavic successor states, was at the

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32 Donaldson and Nogee, p.190.
33 Jackson (2003), p. 56.
periphery of priorities. Certainly, the aforementioned CIS policy-making challenges—inexperience, institutions, and information—were partly to blame. Yet, for the reformers, the region held even fewer attractions and greater potential dangers than other parts of the CIS. For one, Gaidar’s government saw the region as an economic burden.\(^{35}\) The reformers essentially perpetuated the longstanding notion that severing ties with Central Asia was necessary to “free” the Russian economy, given it had long been a net recipient of subsidies, rather than a contributor to the Soviet budget. The demands of its economic reform differed in scale and approach, too, given its relative underdevelopment and predominantly agricultural and raw resource extraction-based economy. The reformers sought to steer Russia well clear of the economic quagmire they believed the region would become. They calculated that severing ties was necessary to avoid disruption and spur the Russian economy to new heights, irrespective of the current extent of Soviet-era integration.

Disengagement was also guided by non-economic factors. Westernisation and cultural rapprochement with Europe meant denouncing claims to exceptionalism and ties with Eastern authoritarianism. Given that ultimately, in the minds of the reformers, the cultural bases of Russia and Central Asia were quite distinct, despite recent common history, they saw no real reason to prioritise relations with the region. Russia’s future was clearly with Europe and the West, not with the somewhat foreign (and perhaps backward) cultures of Central Asia. Close relations with these states, whose administrations had already demonstrated a questionable commitment to any type of liberalisation in the Gorbachev period, would only detract from the Westernising task, and ultimately compromise Russia’s efforts to become a “normal” Western political democracy.

In addition to pragmatic concerns, however, a certain degree of disregard and contempt was also evident in reformist attitudes. Such contempt perpetuated the tone of the Belovezh Accords signed by the leaders of the Slavic republics on 8 December 1991, which dissolved the USSR without consultation with their Central Asian counterparts. Despite their leaders being the Communist Party’s most faithful adherents, the Central Asian states were initially omitted from the CIS, something

that caused them to virulently denounce the arrogance of their exclusion.\textsuperscript{36} Even after their inclusion, Moscow’s unilateralist course paid scant regard for the consequences of its policies on the region. The immediate initiation of radical economic reforms, for example, left Central Asia with the choice of either following suit or seeking other means of conducting both economic and foreign affairs.\textsuperscript{37} Despite abandoning overtly hegemonic policies, too, many believed it inevitable that Russia would retain a leadership role, if only by default. Consequently, Russia’s new government believed that the new states of the CIS did not need to be courted because they would be unable to survive on their own or to resist the gravitational pull of Moscow’s economic and military influence.\textsuperscript{38} More precisely, Gaidar’s government felt that Central Asia would have nowhere to go outside the Russian sphere of influence, and would thus fall back to Moscow on more advantageous terms.\textsuperscript{39} Disengagement from costly regional activism for economic and ideological reasons was thus tempered by somewhat arrogant motivations.

The sum consequence of these policies was that over the initial period of separation, continually greater estrangement characterised Russia’s relations with Central Asia and the rest of the CIS, while relations with Washington and other Western capitals improved. While this was partly planned, disengagement did not occur on the terms the reformers had anticipated. In trying so hard with the US and other Western countries, Russia lost practically all the opportunities to preserve its influence in Central Asia.\textsuperscript{40} While the reformist government appeared relatively unconcerned by this development, by mid-1992 the neglect and disengagement attracted growing domestic criticism. As the domestic political environment descended into chaos and the factors that had allowed the relatively consistent pursuit of the reformers’ Central Asia policy (whatever its impacts on Russia’s regional strategy) disintegrated, policy towards the ‘near abroad’ transformed significantly, becoming both less predictable and focused.

\textsuperscript{38} Jackson (2003), p. 59.
\textsuperscript{39} Zviagelskaya (1999), p. 124.
The emergence of policy conflict

With the focus of the Westernising period dissolving, the opposition crystallising, and policy conflict intensifying, most debates centred on the position of the CIS in foreign policy priorities. Opponents referenced the insufficient attention paid to the ‘near abroad’, demanding increased focus on the region, both to balance foreign policy and as a means of rebuilding Russia’s international status and power. Obviously, such views came primarily from those with differing conceptualisations of Russia’s identity. While the most articulate and persistent criticisms came from the ‘pragmatic nationalists’, the ‘fundamentalist nationalists’ also entered the debate, offering more extreme critiques of policy and the ‘Russian idea’. The resurgent Communist Party, for example, emphasised close relations with the former Soviet republics and the need to prevent the West and international organisations from encroaching on Russia’s interests in the ‘near abroad’.\(^4\) However, across the legislature, criticism focused on Russia’s unique identity and the impact of its flagging relationship with the ‘near abroad’ on this identity. Deputies in the parliament and parliamentary committees repeatedly introduced concepts of ‘national revival’ and ‘Russia’s uniqueness’ into the political debate.\(^4\) In July 1992, the parliament conducted a heated three-day debate in which the MFA was criticised for failing to protecting the Russian diaspora, and discussions commenced over whether to create a separate Ministry of the CIS.\(^4\) In the Committee on International Affairs’ rejection of the Kozyrev’s draft Foreign Policy Concept, Ambartsumov and his adviser, Andranik Migranian, proposed turning the post-Soviet area into a sphere of vital Russian interests.\(^4\)

Such views found welcome allies in the ‘harder’ institutions of state. Both the newly formed MoD and Security Council were products of the more security-sensitive environment in which they were established and harboured interventionist tendencies regarding the ‘near abroad’. Their formation allowed the political and military forces they represented to more effectively articulate their views and

\(^4\) Jackson (2003), p. 57.
\(^4\) ibid, p. 60.
\(^4\) ibid p. 61.
influence politics, collectively adding to the pressure on the reformist strategy. The respect and trust afforded to the military and their image as a bastion of Russian prestige and strength gave their arguments significant weight amongst the populace. In an environment perceived to be spiralling into instability, those defending traditional interests tapped an apparent vein in the electorate, becoming heroes to the nationalists and undermining the Westernising ‘traitors’ intent on dismantling Russia’s global and regional role. The aforementioned Alexander Lebed’s political capital, for example, was based on the nationalists crediting him with preventing a ‘second Croatia’ in Moldova and protecting the ethnic Russians effectively abandoned by the Westernisers. His tough stance on Russians in the FSU, overt criticism of the government, and even blatant ignorance of the MFA’s policies added to the chorus demanding a reversal in the Westernisers’ neglect of the ‘near abroad’.

Even within the MFA, the pro-Western direction was the subject of growing scrutiny and dissatisfaction. Influential figures echoed nationalist sentiments in advocating increased attention to the ‘near abroad’. Fyodor Shelov-Kovedyaev, the Deputy Foreign Minister in charge of relations in the FSU, for example, argued in May 1992 that Russia should actively promote integration within the CIS and convince other members of its advantages. Unlike many more nationalist figures, however, he opposed imposing integration, maintaining that successful development of Russia’s economy would turn it into the ‘partner of choice’. His views were thus situated at the liberal end of the pragmatic nationalist spectrum. Such views, though not denounced by any government officials, did appear to contradict official policy at this time, which remained more intent on disintegration than integration, demonstrating that there was considerable disarray within the government. Presidential adviser Sergei Stankevich was another important figure linked to the ruling administration who expressed concerns about the Western orientation and inactivity in the ‘near abroad’. In 1992 he sparred with Kozyrev over the Dniestr Republic and ethnic Russians in the Baltic states. Stankevich’s criticism was

47 ibid, p. 57.
important because he was himself a centrist and a reformer,\textsuperscript{49} neither a conservative categorically opposed to all reform, nor part of the opposition intent on bringing down the government by any means possible. He was also, perhaps, the most influential member of the political elite to criticise the government line, whose position as presidential adviser to Yeltsin allowed him to promote his ‘Eurasianist’ ideas in policy debates.\textsuperscript{50}

Thus, in 1992 various strands of nationalist thought were becoming widespread. To the outside world, Russian national consciousness displayed a certain schizophrenia, with the coexistence of an inferiority complex and megalomania.\textsuperscript{51} Although Kozyrev’s ideas dominated the foreign policy debate until Spring 1992,\textsuperscript{52} the pragmatic nationalists, in particular, enjoyed growing success in agenda-setting and apparently consolidating their views amongst the electorate. They isolated the reformers, making them appear elitist and out of touch with public opinion. The pragmatic nationalists only became more vocal in their insistence that Russia exercise hegemony in the CIS as regional instability, including threats to Russians, grew,\textsuperscript{53} and rapprochement with the West appeared continually less in Moscow’s favour. Although they did not go so far as to advocate forceful revision of Russia’s boundaries, they clearly disagreed with Kozyrev and Gaidar in arguing that Russia should be prepared to make economic, political, and diplomatic sacrifices in order to promote tighter integration of the CIS.\textsuperscript{54} Nor were they necessarily anti-Western; they simply argued for a more ‘rational’ analysis of Russia’s national interests and balanced policy.\textsuperscript{55}

This increasing internal and external criticism was an indication that the political environment was shifting, and shifting quickly. A perceived anti-Western mood was surfacing amongst the public, and growing economic and social problems made the leadership vulnerable to more aggressive tendencies in the parliament, military and

\textsuperscript{49} Bowker (1997), p. 208.
\textsuperscript{50} Jackson (2003), p. 61.
\textsuperscript{52} Bowker (1997), p. 207.
\textsuperscript{53} Donaldson and Nogee, p. 126.
\textsuperscript{54} ibid, p. 127.
\textsuperscript{55} Light (1996), p. 48.
security institutions.\(^{56}\) Yeltsin, and even more so, the MFA were also losing ground to self-willed parliamentarians like Ambartsumov and Oleg Rumiantsev, the head of the Russian Social Democratic Party and executive secretary of the parliament’s Constitutional Commission.\(^{57}\) Such developments did not go unanswered by the ruling administration. Yeltsin, as discussed earlier, was quick to act to deflect criticism, adapting his own rhetoric to suit a more nationalist audience, and encouraging his government to respond. In the hope of depoliticising policy, he broadened involvement into policy-making and attributed greater attention to the ‘near abroad’, whilst maintaining a broadly Westernising direction. Over the remainder of 1992 and 1993, the new, broader range of actors influencing foreign policy discussed in the previous chapter like the Security Council and other military-security interests, figures in the presidential administration, and a whole range of different interest groups, tended to influence Russia’s ‘near abroad’ policy in rather unpredictable and inconsistent ways. Although the MFA had essentially lost its virtual monopoly on foreign policy-making, it was not replaced by any real coordinating mechanism, nor any clear consensus on what the policy priorities for the FSU now were.

While the ensuing confusion has already been addressed previously, for the CIS this also resulted in incoherence, inconsistency, and a proliferation of seemingly independent, uncoordinated and even contradictory foreign policy actions, increasingly, it appeared the government was not entirely in control of policy concerning the former Soviet space, particularly in the military/security sphere; something Yeltsin’s vacillation did nothing to forestall. Effectively, throughout 1992, the reformers’ isolationism from the FSU was increasingly combined with impulsive attempts at political mediation and military activity in conflict areas.\(^{58}\) Russian forces violated their officially neutral position, becoming participants in conflicts in Moldova, Tajikistan and Abkhazia, even in spite of their UN sanctioned peacekeeping role in the latter case, the legitimacy of which their actions clearly called into question. This also made a mockery of any commitment to international

\(^{56}\) Jackson (2003), p. 62.

\(^{57}\) Skak, p. 153.

law, impartiality, or denunciation of interference in the affairs of Russia’s former vassals the reformers hoped to enforce.\(^{59}\) The 1992 dealings with the Baltic states, too, suggested that the military had the upper hand in ‘near abroad’ policies.\(^{60}\) Stalled withdrawals and interference clearly illustrated the MFA and MoD’s inconsistent approaches—laying bare the struggle between the reformers and nationalists.

As pragmatic nationalism looked to be gaining increasing ascendancy in 1992-1993, either by pressure or design, the government’s attitude towards the CIS was modified, and the constantly mounting opposition and shifting political ground caused these views to be continually radicalised. It is not to say that this was a linear, controlled, or entirely spontaneous development. Those who were unable or unwilling to adapt to the new mood, or were perceived as political liabilities from the early liberalising period, soon found themselves sidelined. Hence, by late 1992, even staunch Westerniser Kozyrev began moderating his rhetoric, advocating greater activism in the ‘near abroad’. However, his political chameleon act spoke more of expediency, even desperation to remain relevant to Yeltsin, than it did of anything else. Still, inconsistency remained the key. More committed liberals found the government’s adoption of pragmatic nationalist elements in the approach to the FSU disconcerting. Many were concerned by the overt influence the ‘power ministries’ (MoD, Security Council, and Foreign Intelligence Service (SVR)) were demonstrating in FSU matters. In September 1992, for example, first deputy Shelov-Kovedaev resigned, frustrated with the weakening of the MFA inter alia through the appointment of new hardliners to the MoD.\(^{61}\) While figures like Shelov-Kovedaev had wanted a more active policy towards the ‘near abroad’, the military’s cooption of CIS policy was seen to be driving this activism in the wrong, ultimately unsustainable, direction.

As the much heralded foreign policy consensus emerged in 1993, it apparently centred on the idea of Russia as a Great Power with primary national interests centred


\(^{60}\) Skak, p. 153.

\(^{61}\) ibid, p. 151.
in the ‘near abroad’. The Security Council’s Foreign Policy Concept clearly encapsulated these ideas and focused heavily on the FSU, concentrating on the risks of disengagement and warning that a third state’s military-political presence or the creation of alternative CIS coalitions without Moscow’s involvement could seriously impact Russia’s interests.

“Compared to previous proposals the Security Council’s Concept was explicit in terms of stating the means by which Russia would protect itself from potential threats. These threats included attempts to destroy the integrity of Russia, disintegration among CIS states, violation of human rights and freedoms of Russian speakers, and military conflicts in neighbouring states. The proposed means to protect Russia included the creation of a collective system of defence, the strengthening of the external borders of the CIS, the maintenance of Russian military bases in the CIS, the creation of an integrated military security system and the ability to retain Russia’s unique status as the sole nuclear power in the region.”

Gradually, what began as greater military activism, in 1993 became an increasingly concerted policy to utilise economic, military, and political pressures to advance Russian interests and bring CIS governments into line. ‘Pragmatic nationalism’ now had a clear official expression in a policy statement. Still, the depth of this change remained questionable. Really, what the Concept revealed was political fashion and context—emphasising “the primacy of CIS related affairs, not because the Yeltsin administration was necessarily pursuing a more active policy towards the former Soviet Union, but because it felt the need to advertise that it was doing so”. However, perhaps because the shift was insincere, or perhaps because

63 Jackson (2003), p. 65.
substantive steps to achieve the strategy were too slow to materialise, it failed to reduce political conflict throughout the rest of 1993, as may have been expected. Moreover, although greater theoretical consensus had emerged, this did not mean that ‘fundamentalist nationalist’ elements had reconciled themselves to the disintegration of the USSR, nor that they approved of Russia’s foreign policy. Instead, conflict between the so-called red-brown coalition and the government continued to grow after March 1993, and resulted in the battle for the White House that October.66

Although the extremist opposition failed in its systemic challenge, the rhetorical move towards more assertive, nationalist policies in the ‘near abroad’ did not halt. The Military Doctrine approved in October 1993 again underscored a more active, even interventionist policy in the FSU. It implicitly assumed that the borders of Russian security corresponded with those of the CIS.67 It also asserted Russia’s right to intervene in the CIS, though it stressed that this should only be done in accordance with appropriate international documents and on the basis of mutual agreements.68 In this, the military doctrine did not really set a new plan of action, instead formally legitimising and justifying the role that the Russian armed forces were already playing in the FSU while implying that the government would continue to support such actions.69 Still, this official legitimisation was important, signalling both the continued consolidation of ‘pragmatic nationalist’ thought in government policy and the influence of the ‘power ministries’. The parliamentary election results of December 1993 only continued this trajectory. The success of nationalist, anti-reform forces such as Vladimir Zhirinovsky’s Liberal Democratic Party of Russia (LDPR) appeared to confirm the emergence of a neo-imperial strain in public opinion.70 Their strength, at least in moral terms, given than 1993 constitution stripped the legislature of any real influence, would remain both a constraint and moderating influence on the government.

67 Lynch, p. 79.
69 ibid p. 66.
For Central Asia policy, more specifically, the 1992-3 period remained one of transition, marked by inconsistencies and contradictions. On one hand, some previous inaction was reversed as changing priorities opened the way for greater cooperation between Russia and Central Asia. In April 1992, Kozyrev undertook his first major trip in the ‘near abroad’, visiting a number of Central Asian states.\(^{71}\) In May the Tashkent Treaty on Collective Security was signed. It included four Central Asian states, leading some to see it as acquiring the features of a Russian-Central Asian defence agreement.\(^{72}\) Soon after, Russia concluded a series of treaties of friendship, cooperation, and mutual assistance—with Kazakhstan (25 May), Uzbekistan (30 May), and Kyrgyzstan (10 June). A Russian-Turkmen treaty of friendship and cooperation was also signed on 8 June.\(^{73}\) The increased military-security influence was also more evident, particularly throughout 1993, as these groups pushed the government to recognise the region’s centrality to Russia’s own security, spurred on by the declining security situation in former Soviet republics. In their perspective, Russia’s best defence from potential threats from the South was to keep Central Asia within its sphere of influence, control its independent military development, and maintain Russia’s role as the major arms supplier and centre of CIS military training, research and development.\(^{74}\) Military officials tried to save what remained of the Soviet integrated defence system and emphasised Russia’s vital interests in keeping the air defence complex, space monitoring installations, and existing regional military infrastructure intact and under Russia’s full or partial control.\(^{75}\)

When conflict flared in Tajikistan, Moscow’s response only underscored the continued divisions within the government and the differentiated degree to which nationalist policies had been adopted. It also illustrated the lack of central coordination or control of foreign policy actors. The MoD clearly desired an extensive role in “conflict resolution”, to demonstrate Russia’s capabilities and regional role. Local Russian military leaders, too, simply joined the battle on the


\(^{72}\) ibid, pp. 174-5.

\(^{73}\) ibid, p. 175.

\(^{74}\) ibid, p. 174.

\(^{75}\) ibid, p. 174.
Tajik government’s side, abandoning any premise of neutrality. Kozyrev and his diplomats, on the other hand, although also keen to participate in resolution, advocated a more cooperative, regional and international solution to the conflict. Ultimately, the military’s actions decided the activist, semi-imperialist nature of Moscow’s involvement and the short-term defeat of Kozyrev’s approach.

Following the replacement of the reformist Gaidar government with Viktor Chernomyrdin’s more conservative government in December 1992, the influence of economic groups committed to preserving Russia’s position in Central Asia also increased. Supporters of this industrial lobby succeeded in occupying several important posts in the new government, and Chernomyrdin was seen as a champion of their views. Business interests centred on oil and gas exploitation and other resource extraction sectors profited under the new government. Gazprom, for example, formerly chaired by Chernomyrdin himself, was empowered and clearly sought to influence Russia’s dealings with countries with which it had natural gas supply, exploration, or distribution contracts. Other large emerging resource conglomerates similarly sought to use their improved political access to advance their Central Asian business interests, using Chernomyrdin in an effort to secure unimpeded and, hopefully, near-monopolistic access to the region’s resource wealth. In fact, the first act of the new Prime Minister was to travel to Kazakhstan to negotiate a bilateral economic pact and to discuss the establishment of a CIS oil and gas export organisation. Still, while these groups enjoyed some success, their advances were less overt than the military’s, and it was after 1996 that more significant economic advances were enjoyed.

Opponents of the government’s approach in Central Asia were also able to point more clearly to increasing foreign activity in the region and its negative impact on Russian interests—political, military and economic. Most obviously, the presence of the US increased significantly. Following the dissolution of the USSR, Washington

77 Shashenkov, p. 172.
78 Donaldson and Nogee, p. 173.
moved quickly to recognise the independence of the Central Asian states and establish diplomatic relations.\textsuperscript{80} Although Washington did not immediately seek to supplant Moscow—instead supporting the maintenance of Russian hegemony, and stressed the need for Central Asian states to remain within the CIS—few critics were convinced this would permanently remain the case. While the reformers may have interpreted actions as suggesting that the West generally would continue to view the entire region as ‘Russia plus’ branch offices\textsuperscript{81} and remain relatively well disposed toward Russia shouldering the main burden of peacekeeping, albeit under the mandate of multilateral organisations,\textsuperscript{82} as US-Russian relations began to sour, others saw concerning evolution in the US approach. With concern also growing over the Islamic threat, US Secretary of State James Baker proclaimed America’s intention to save the region from the fundamentalist peril and called upon secular Turkey to take the role of the West’s sentinel in Central Asia.\textsuperscript{83}

Consequently, underscored by American moral support, Turkey struck early and aggressively. During an April 1992 regional tour, Prime Minister Süleyman Demirel concluded a series of important political, trade, economic, and cultural agreements.\textsuperscript{84} Effectively, it promised aid equivalent to 80% of its hard currency reserves in 1992, hoping the US would finance its attempts to influence Central Asia.\textsuperscript{85} Ankara was motivated by economic and geostrategic interests. Economically, it saw Central Asia as an alternative market to offset European dependence, and as a new source of resources. Geostrategically, it saw the Soviet break-up as heralding the emergence of a ‘gigantic Turkic world’, stretching from the Adriatic Sea to the Great Wall of China.\textsuperscript{86} Its active regional participation aimed to consolidate a ‘Turkic belt’ to counter the Islamic threat emanating from states such as Iran. It attempted to draw the

\textsuperscript{80} Only a week after the Minsk Declaration of December 8 1991, Secretary of State James Baker travelled to Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan to meet the leaders of these newly independent states, see for example Gleason (1997), p. 151.
\textsuperscript{85} Globe, p. 3.
republics into its orbit, capitalising on ethnic, linguistic, and cultural similarities. Turkey also promoted its secular developmental model for the region, facing similar challenges of reform in an Islamic setting. Although by 1992 President Ozal was injecting caution, noting “…we have historical and cultural ties…and they want us as a model…but this is getting a bit exaggerated…[and] this could induce over-optimism and backfire…” , Turkey continued to work more conservatively in the region. Its failure, however, would see the US take an increasingly direct role in the region, much to the concern of many Russian analysts.

Many in Russia also viewed Iran’s expanding regional role with concern. In January and February 1992, Iran followed Turkey’s lead in recognising Central Asian independence and establishing formal diplomatic ties. Concern was linked to Iran’s image as an exporter of Islamic fundamentalism and its international pariah status. Both the reformers and opposition identified Islamic fundamentalism as a primary regional threat, with the potential to destabilise Russia’s own substantial Muslim population. Iran, itself, took a more measured approach. It did not openly sponsor fundamentalism. Given its understanding of regional diversity, key denominational, and ethnic differences, Tehran recognised the limitations of expanding relations on solely religious links. Officials and analysts recognised that Islam was not an appropriate basis on which to build relations with the highly secular Central Asian governments. Instead, Iran’s strategy was primarily defensive. Indeed, Tehran was actually initially more ambivalent than enthusiastic regarding the potential independence of Central Asia. It was necessity that demanded action. Subsequently, its primary focus was economic. The fact that it focused on Turkmenistan’s coveted gas reserves rang alarm bells for critics of the reformist approach, who felt that insufficient regard was being afforded to protecting Russian access to such key resources.

88 Hooglund, p. 116.
89 ibid, p. 117.
91 Hooglund, p. 116.
Unlike other powers, China succeeded in significantly and quickly expanding its economic interests. Although China’s regional interests were also primarily defensive in nature, its massive growth and economic complementarity with Central Asia led to a rapid intensification of cooperation. While many Chinese interests appeared to broadly converge with Russia’s—both opposed the revival of fundamentalist Islam, desired regional stability and supported the continuation of the ex-communist elite rule—most analysts were acutely aware that China provided a greater long-term threat than either Iran or Turkey. Clearly, Beijing understood that the longer it could stall reconfiguration of the regional balance of power, the more likely it would be to its benefit. Longer-term, even this short-term blooming of economic relations was foreboding. Though Beijing incorporated Russia into plans wherever possible, recognising the necessity of mitigating Sino-Russian conflict as a component of its broader development strategy, Russian analysts recognised there was only so long this self-restraint would go on.

However, at the same time as the government began demonstrating signs of growing activism to address unfavourably shifting regional dynamics, like conflict and the expansion of external influence in Russia’s backyard, governmental ambivalence towards Central Asia remained. Other areas of the CIS, as well as the world in general, continued to consume greater attention. In reality, Russia’s foreign policy remained strongly focused on the US and Europe, with the CIS and Central Asia a growing, but still secondary focus. This was particularly clear when it actually came to prioritising limited foreign policy resources. Moreover, although Chernomyrdin clearly wanted to create the impression that he was responding to the electoral preferences expressed in the 1993 elections, his policies only changed for a short time, and he remained committed to cooperation with the West. The interests he represented also had more complex strategies for Central Asia than simply advocating integration wholesale. As the following chapter will discuss in greater detail, activism was not pursued consistently across the full range of relations or equally by all ministries and actors. In reality, given the domestic chaos and lack of

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policy discipline, elements of the former strategy, based on efforts to disentangle links and insulate Russia, coexisted with a growing commitment to deepen integration and expand relations.

Ultimately, this instability meant that the activist turn failed to reverse Russia’s declining regional influence. Economically, for example, though the big conglomerates demonstrated greater interest, they were unable to combat Central Asia’s search for alternative partners and the penetration of other actors also intent on exploiting the region’s resource wealth. The government’s efforts to improve regional integration under its tutelage through cooperation on the Tajik conflict also failed. Kozyrev’s approach to resolution focused on encouraging a positive collective regional approach and discouraging Uzbekistan’s renegade actions in interfering in the conflict for its own political and geostrategic gain. His tour through the capitals of Central Asia in November 1993 aimed at finding a solution to the Tajik crisis, and his strained meeting with Islam Karimov focused on persuading Uzbekistan to “search for constructive approaches” and “develop a unified position” with Russia and the other Central Asian states.96 On both counts he failed. Yeltsin could bring neither Uzbekistan or Turkmenistan to heel, indicating Russia’s declining influence over increasingly assertive actors. In the case of Turkmenistan, even Yeltsin’s open displeasure with Ashkhabad’s ban on the use of Turkmen airbases for refuelling Russian cargo planes delivering weapons, ammunition, and military equipment to Tajikistan, failed to budge Niyazov from Turkmenistan’s principle of ‘positive neutrality’.97 It would also be a number of years before Moscow again had sufficient levers of influence over Tashkent or Ashkhabad to overcome their resistance and find a more lasting solution to the conflict.

The post-consensus period

By the beginning of 1994, then, the government appeared to have reclaimed the political middle ground by adopting ‘pragmatic nationalist’ rhetoric and the

construction of ‘consensus’. This new stage of foreign policy appeared outwardly, at least, more assertive,\(^98\) even if the initial activist efforts had enjoyed limited success. With the government declaring its intention to recover Great Power status, the CIS and Central Asia both garnered more official attention as potential spheres of influence,\(^99\) theoretically becoming the primary focus of Russia’s foreign policy strategy. In January 1994, a separate Ministry for the CIS was created.\(^100\) As these changes were occurring, many international actors were voicing concern that the dynamics that had led to the demise of the reformist government and ‘hardening’ of foreign policy would ultimately lead Russia to embark upon neo-imperialist endeavours in the former Soviet space.

In the Fall of 1994, the government’s rhetoric appeared to confirm such fears. In his speech to the UN General Assembly in September, Yeltsin included many of Russia’s ‘neo-imperial’ concepts in one package,\(^101\) and referred explicitly to the ‘near abroad’ as a ‘sphere of vital Russian interests’.\(^102\) Soon after, this assertive, activist policy came to be coined the “Yeltsin Doctrine”. Although the idea of a policy based on economic, political, and military assistance had emerged around 1991,\(^103\) it had taken the aforementioned changes to gain wider official favour. That Winter, in a move many believed was aimed at pressuring Kazakhstan to tow Moscow’s political line, Russia turned off the oil to Alma-Ata, causing the city to grind to a halt, while Kazakh oil continued to flow to Russia.\(^104\) Moscow also pressured Turkmenistan into signing a military agreement legitimising the presence of its troops on the Iranian border and allowing Russian military intervention to protect its interests, including the “protection of Russian minorities”.\(^105\) Such growing assertiveness was not only of concern to external actors; it was also monitored cautiously in Russia. The feeling that the government was deferring to the

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100 Bowker, p. 187.
105 ibid, p. 23.
preferences of the ‘power ministries’ continued to deepen in Moscow’s foreign policy community.\textsuperscript{106} There was also a sense that although some type of consensus had emerged, it had been at the cost of clarity. Questions remained, too, regarding effectiveness. With continued constraints on Moscow’s ability to follow through on its stated intentions and the lack of substantive commitment to the growing liabilities its approach in Central Asia was creating, it was unclear how much could be achieved. Previous arrogance, too, remained; Dr Sergei Blagovolin, Andrei Kozyrev’s foreign policy adviser and a senior official of Gaidar’s Russia’s Democratic Choice Party told a gathering of American academicians that ‘Kazakhstan and Armenia are crawling on their hands and knees to be accepted into the federation with Russia.’\textsuperscript{107} Such attitudes were hardly a convincing demonstration of significantly changing attitudes toward the FSU.

Despite such retrograde attitudes, through the mid-1990s Russia remained officially committed to deepening involvement in the CIS and Central Asia. Even Kozyrev’s language continued its increasingly assertive shift, as shown in the adoption of his opponents’ language to criticise the state Duma for failing to pass a law on peacekeeping operations in 1995, a change he acknowledged was due to a shift in the political debate.\textsuperscript{108} In Yeltsin’s September 1995 presidential decree ‘On the Strategic Course of Russia with the CIS member states’, the CIS was again characterised as a zone of Russian interests. Russia was described as “a leading force in the formation of a new system of inter-state political and economic relations on the territory of the post-Soviet space”.\textsuperscript{109} Again, such statements were viewed suspiciously by many external sources, not least of whom the newly independent states, who saw it as yet another indication of Russian heavy-handedness. Such openly assertive rhetoric did little to improve Russia’s image in Central Asia and


only appeared to confirm the wisdom of ongoing moves of the republics to reduce their dependence on Moscow and diversify their external relations.

Increasingly, the Central Asian states did not have to work hard to find other external partners, either. Partners were not put off by the failure of their initial steps to revolutionise regional dynamics, continuing with incremental efforts and enjoying some successes. For example, despite the failure of its earlier blatant attempts to displace Moscow, Turkey continued to incrementally consolidate relations with Central Asia. In 1994 it initiated an annual Turkic summit,\(^{110}\) and its focus on economic relations began to pay gradual dividends. By 1995 its official trade with Central Asia totalled more than $650m per annum,\(^{111}\) and this figure continued to grow. China, too, continued its focus on expanding trade, which reached $782m in 1995.\(^{112}\) However, it was the change of the American approach to the region that appeared to offer the greatest potential for the Central Asian states, and greatest perceived threat to Russian interests. From 1993, in particular, American policy became characterised by increasingly direct unilateralism. This change was the result of the change of administration in Washington and reassessments regional security. With no actor supplanting failing Russian hegemony, America identified the emerging power vacuum as opening opportunities for destabilising elements. Washington was particularly concerned about nuclear proliferation and the danger of transhipment of technology or weapons from Central Asian states to third parties, facilitated by political, religious or ethnic affinities, or the growth of revolutionary doctrines inspired by terrorist organisations in the Middle East or state sponsors of terrorism, such as Libya or Iraq.\(^{113}\) Keen to extinguish any immediate or potential threats, Washington took an active stance in negotiating Kazakhstan’s denuclearisation. Though Russia participated, it was Washington’s guarantees, aid, and development assistance that secured agreement. In February 1994, for example,


\(^{113}\) Gleason, p. 151.
Washington hosted Nazarbeyev, where he signed the NPT and received a tripled aid package, worth $331m, in return.\textsuperscript{114} American promises of development assistance also helped secure Kazakhstan’s voluntarily relinquishment of weapons and weapons-grade material in March 1995.\textsuperscript{115}

However, the evolving US strategy looked beyond maintaining, to transforming regional dynamics. Washington expressed growing unease at continued dependence on Russia. Previous willingness to defer to Russian sensitivities declined in light of concern over the impact of rising nationalism on Moscow’s regional strategy. By mid-1993, it emerged that Washington had new concerns for the independence of the Central Asian and Transcaucasian states.\textsuperscript{116} Concerned over the direction of Russia’s transition and fearing manipulation of peacekeeping to disguise the pursuit of Moscow’s interests or neoimperialist ambitions, Washington became increasingly critical of Russia’s actions. American strategy subsequently became more incorporative, seeking to intensify bilateral cooperation and integrate Central Asia into broader security organisations independent of Moscow.

Under the new Clinton administration, Washington and its NATO partners envisaged a security strategy encompassing the CIS, conducted through multilateral bodies and mechanisms, such as the UN, CSCE, and NACC, and bilateral links across the old Cold War divide.\textsuperscript{117} In August 1993, a new thrust to US security thinking in the CIS became evident. Reports circulated that Washington was considering a policy document called Directive 13,\textsuperscript{118} which called for external mediation of disputes between Russia and other CIS states.\textsuperscript{119} This reassessment, particularly in light of Washington’s restructuring the CIS aid package, reducing

\textsuperscript{114} Alexander M. Sullivan (1994) ‘Clinton Sees Long-Term Partnership With Kazakhstan’, 14 February. Wireless File, 02/14/94, POL105; 02/14/94, EUR104; 02/14/94, NEA112; 02/15/94, AEF207; 02/15/94, LEF211; 02/15/94, ERF201; 02/16/94, ERF308; 02/16/94, AFF306. Available at \url{http://www.fas.org/news/kazakh/940214-326969.htm} (Accessed 17 September 2004.)
\textsuperscript{115} Gleeson, p. 152.
\textsuperscript{117} ibid, p. 193.
\textsuperscript{119} ibid, pp. 193-4.
Russia’s share to less than half,\textsuperscript{120} illustrated a shift from viewing the republics through the spectrum of Russian relations, to taking a greater independent interest in them. New measures also aimed to encourage reform and facilitate Central Asia’s incorporation into the ‘free world’ as stable, secure and independent democratic states. A May 1993 agreement with Kyrgyzstan,\textsuperscript{121} for example, pledged cooperation and assistance, ostensibly to signal support for Kyrgyzstan as a model for other Central Asian states, because of its “bold pursuit of macroeconomic stabilisation and democratic reform”.\textsuperscript{122}

Besides changing security definitions, undoubtedly, strategy adaptation was pragmatic. It reflected Washington’s growing regional economic interests, particularly in energy development. While no massive reconfigurations of relations immediately occurred, the US policy change signalled the beginning of a gradual, sustained expansion of relations that continued throughout the 1990s. In light of worsening relations with the West and domestic disillusionment with Westernising reforms, American ‘expansionism’ became a pawn in domestic politicking and further ‘evidence’ of the reformers’ policy failures. Criticism of Directive 13 was virulent in Moscow, signalling the irritation of moderates and hardliners alike that Washington and its allies should interfere in Russia’s sphere of influence.\textsuperscript{123} Many Russians regarded the establishment of an American ‘cordon sanitaire’ of aid and investment along Russia’s borders as a revived containment policy.\textsuperscript{124} Moscow’s vocal responses to Washington’s ‘expansionism’ and strong warnings to other states not to meddle in its backyard, reflected concerns that this growing diversification was putting Russia on the back foot and aimed to portray a Great Power ready to act in order to protect its sphere of interest.

It was Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan that most strongly pursued the non-Russian opportunities presented to them. Turkmenistan focused on securing new non-Russian opportunities.

\textsuperscript{122} USIS \textit{European Wireless File} (1993), ‘Bentsen Calls Kyrgyzstan a Model for All CIS Republics’, no 95/93, 21 May, p. 12, cited by Hollis, p. 194.
\textsuperscript{123} ibid, pp. 193-4.
routes for exporting its hydrocarbon resources. It signed an agreement with Iran in August 1994 concerning the construction of a gas pipeline through Iran and Turkey to Western Europe, and memoranda with Pakistan and US oil company Unocal on constructing a gas pipeline through Afghanistan to Pakistan. Turkmenistan then officially declared its ‘positive neutrality’ in 1995, apparently pre-empting future Russian demands for any closer alliance. Uzbekistan also increased its overtures to alternative partners. Its relationship with Washington, in particular, flourished between 1994 and 1996, building on the signing of a bilateral investment treaty in December 1994. Tashkent also sought to counterbalance Russia by increasing relations with NATO. It signed the Partnership for Peace (PfP) Framework Document in July 1994 and the Security Agreement in August 1995, as well as participating in joint NATO exercises also attended by the Kyrgyz armed forces. Tashkent also looked further afield, signing an agreement with Japan on credits for the development of the Kokdumalak oil and gas field and construction of an oil refinery.

However, the context of Russian activism and bluster in 1995 was also important. With parliamentary and presidential elections looming, Yeltsin continued to play up to the still considerable sector of the electorate disenchanted with reform and vestiges of Westernisation. The opposition also remained outspoken on ‘near abroad’ issues. Gennadii Zyuganov and the Communists continued to advocate the “voluntary recreation of a unified nation state”, while ultranationalist leaders like Zhirinovsky argued for a revival of the nineteenth century Russian empire. When political parties linked to the government were resoundingly defeated by these illiberal figures in the parliamentary elections, further movement of policy rhetoric towards the nationalist end of the spectrum occurred. With presidential elections only months away, Yeltsin realised adaptation had still not gone far enough to regain lost public

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129 ibid.
support—he still needed to reinforce that a major reorientation towards the ‘near abroad’ was being pursued. Replacing Kozyrev, so tainted by his association with radical ‘Westernisation’, with the ‘pragmatic nationalist’, pro-CIS Primakov was one such action. Signing an accord with Belarus, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan foreshadowing greater integration in March 1996, and a bilateral agreement regarding the establishment of a union with Belarus the following month, were further measures that appealed to the section of the population that regretted the passing of the USSR. They were also convenient rejoinders to the Duma’s March approval of a resolution denouncing 1991’s Belovezha Accords to dissolve the Soviet Union.

Still, despite the increasingly tough rhetoric and periodic activism, the strongly interventionist strategy many analysts touted failed to materialise. Between 1993 and 1996, there still remained no single, comprehensive, coherent ‘near abroad’ policy, with policies varying by region and issue. In reality, too, the ‘near abroad’ remained of secondary significance to relations with the West, however frustrating these might be. Major divisions within the government remained, too. The expediency which had in part driven the main players to declare their attachment to the policy reversal meant that consensus often turned out to be more apparent than real, and that confusion and ambiguity persisted, albeit with less dramatic effects than previously. On another level, too, the apparent unanimity of senior policy officials was often not echoed at the middle levels, and policy when implemented failed to match top-level declarations. Much of the uncertainty still arose from a sheer lack of coordination and ministries persisted in following their own agendas, particularly in ‘near abroad’ matters. Moreover, earlier expansionism was being replaced with an increasingly isolationist mood in the political elite and public. A growing awareness that Russia lacked adequate resources reinjected caution and spawned policies that were, in many cases, calculated to avoid costly commitments. With Moscow clearly struggling to keep Russia together, most realised any talk of pursuing any type of post-imperial Great Power strategy was a pipedream.

130 Gill and Markwick, p. 193.
131 ibid, p. 190.
132 Jackson (2003), p. 76.
134 ibid, p. 148.
135 Jackson (2003), p. 76.
After 1996 these tendencies only strengthened, as the continued pursuit of ‘pragmatic nationalism’ was joined by the re-emergence of liberal ideas discussed earlier. By early 1996, for example, faced with fact that force was not solving the Chechen situation, many promoted negotiation, a development that also softened the stance towards the ‘near abroad’. Following his re-election, too, Yeltsin brought with him a new government of economic reformers, demonstrating that he remained an integrationist, committed to a Westernising strategy. It did also suggest that Yeltsin had a well-honed sense for knowing how hard, how often, and in which directions to press the West without endangering the pursuit of his larger policy goals. This further underlined the political expediency in Yeltsin’s adoption of ‘pragmatic nationalist’ rhetoric, both for internal and external ends. The resurgent reformers’ commitment to finding solutions to the country’s economic problems encouraged greater conservatism, such as searching for political, rather than military solutions to conflicts. In 1997, particularly, efforts to end all major armed disputes in the CIS and to defuse tensions in relations with neighbours, pointed to the ascendancy of an increasingly moderate and cautious postcolonial tendency, to which demilitarisation of the conflicts in the ‘near abroad’ had always been central.

Such Westernising tendencies were also evident in Yeltsin’s post-election power base. Just as the support of the military-security apparatus had been key to his victory over the fundamentalist nationalist forces in October 1993, his 1996 electoral victory had been won by the support of the business community. And just like the military-security apparatus before it, big business wanted its pound of flesh. Analysts saw that the extremely close relationship that developed between ‘the party of power’ and the country’s leading business interests—a relationship that served the interests of both—seemed to suggest that, absent of a change in regime, the drive to secure Russia’s full integration into the US-led and Western-dominated international economic system would continue, more or less unabated. New influences were thus moderating the

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136 ibid p. 70.
138 Jackson (2003), p. 75.
140 Blacker, p. 191.
thinking that had emerged during the ‘consensus’ period. Although assertive rhetoric towards the ‘near abroad’ remained, it was tempered by these re-emerging Westernising tendencies and efforts to avoid commitment Russia could not afford. The spike in assertive nationalism had been replaced by caution and moderation. Moscow became more interested in how it could benefit from the region economically, than simply committing resources for the sake of prestige.

Interestingly too, although Primakov’s appointment as Foreign Minister had appeared to herald greater activism, in reality he did not undertake any major departure from his predecessor’s policies.\textsuperscript{141} Despite his ‘pragmatic nationalist’ credentials, Primakov was at the forefront of the economisation and rationalisation of policy. His goal was not a reorientation from West to East, but to find a better balance between the two.\textsuperscript{142} This would not be achieved by military activism, but by moderation and adaptation of some of the previous, politicised commitments. Subsequently, Primakov was at the forefront of efforts to reduce Moscow’s more costly security commitments by finding lasting political solutions to conflicts. Understanding the continued importance of integration with the West, though not willing to subjugate all Russian interests for this goal, Primakov was also careful to ensure Moscow’s actions in the CIS neither contradicted this task, nor complicated it by appearing overtly imperialistic. His idea of an assertive regional role appeared based more upon actively pursuing economic interests, than interventionist military strategies. Consequently, policy increasingly centred on oil and financial interests, and a number of initiatives seemed to signal further attempts to use the multilateral CIS to develop Russian reintegration in the ‘near abroad’.\textsuperscript{143} Primakov then, like the re-emerging Westernising tendencies, contributed a moderating influence on CIS policy. Although the idea that Russia should be strongly involved in the CIS remained, some of the more questionable means of sustaining involvement were brought to an end. Moscow increasingly came to view the use of coercive measures as costly and unproductive.\textsuperscript{144} And although liberals, nationalists, and communists still disagreed on the optimal mechanism for achieving greater integration, there was

\begin{footnotes}
\footnotetext[141]{Shearman (1997), p. 12.}
\footnotetext[142]{Simonia, p. 80.}
\footnotetext[143]{Jackson (2003), p. 78.}
\footnotetext[144]{Donaldson and Nogee, p.190.}
\end{footnotes}
a broad agreement that greater economic integration of some type was in Russia’s interests. Under Primakov, then, Moscow’s policy moved away from the interventionist, unilateral militaristic rhetoric of the 1993-4 ‘consensus’ period, towards a more outwardly moderate, economically expansionist, even exploitative approach.

As before, these changes were strongly influenced by shifting internal dynamics. Now that the worst domestic conflict had subsided with the parliament’s defeat, and the strongest forces like the military pushing for an active CIS presence had been disempowered, disabled, or disarmed, Moscow could return to a more benign strategy. While the opposition remained periodically vociferous on ‘near abroad’ issues, Yeltsin was able to moderate their most extreme demands and allow Westernising, liberal allies and ideas to again influence policy. Still, this liberal resurgence was bounded, and would not dominate foreign policy thinking as before, given the political environment had changed so dramatically, and strictly Westernising ideas had been so comprehensively devalued. The reference to certain ‘pragmatic nationalist’ ideas remained a key component of foreign policy particularly in reference to the FSU, even if the more extreme, ‘fundamentalist nationalist’ aspects had been purged. Still, the policy-making environment and Russia’s actual actions barely spoke of “consensus” or a cohesive, coherent, predictable strategy. It was clear Moscow was trying to reconcile two conflicting strategies: one prioritising integration with the West and one focusing on the CIS. Though it claimed this dualism was part of its consensus, its compromise strategy actually meant it did neither successfully and at times lurched clumsily between Westernism and Eurasianism. Re-empowering the liberal camp and certain aspects of their agenda only made reconciling the differences of an already divided government and bureaucracy that much more difficult, feeding conflict, uncertainty, and policy inconsistency.

Increasingly too, the confusion over exactly what Russia was trying to achieve was compounded by the new sources of domestic instability centred on conflict and competing agendas between Yeltsin’s constantly shifting allies discussed in the

previous chapter. Conflict, now increasingly centred amongst the ruling coalition and executive branch, in particular, as this became the dominant, unofficial policy-making site. The confusion caused by Yeltsin’s continual politicking, political manoeuvring, frequent absences and resultant periodic power vacuums meant that previous policy proliferation, fragmentation and crippling stalemate remained unfortunate foreign policy characteristics. Ultimately, the damaging consequences of Yeltsin’s political dexterity and the over-personalisation of politics could be seen in the substitution of show for genuine substance and in the continued undermining of a coherent policy.\textsuperscript{146} In reality, 1993-4’s already questionable ‘consensus’ became even more marginal, tenuously grounded more in Yeltsin’s political expediency than any real basis. For all intensive purposes, Moscow’s activities in the ‘near abroad’ remained limited, constrained, and without a clear focus. Again dynamics returned to the continual decline of Russia’s dominant position in the ‘near abroad’. This negative trajectory was only interrupted at the very end of the 1990s with the ascendance of Putin and the emergence of a more stable domestic situation.

For Central Asia specifically, the ‘post-consensus’ period saw the administration move to strengthen official ties. While economic cooperation was declared the basis of future integration, and the inclusion of two Central Asian states in the Customs Union of 1996 supported this notion, military-security relations remained most vigorous. Moscow focussed most heavily on strengthening security cooperation, particularly in combating the international terrorist threat.\textsuperscript{147} In reality, Russia simply had more to offer Central Asia militarily than it did economically.\textsuperscript{148} Though it could offer little in the way of investment, aid, or industrial technology, Russia was still able to offer much in terms of military cooperation, training, and the supply of weapons on favourable terms. While the closest military partnership was established with the embattled Tajik regime, closer military relations with Kazakhstan were signalled in 1996, and agreements with the other Central Asian states concerning border security were also forged. Russia was also able to benefit from its shift towards bilateralism and a differentiated approach, recognising the limits of

multilateralism and this region’s generally more positive attitude towards Moscow’s offers of security cooperation than other parts of the CIS. Benefits also came from the re-conceptualisation of regional security threats following Primakov’s appointment—particularly in terms of Islam, fundamentalism, and extremism. His better understanding of these issues and what the Central Asian states needed gave Moscow’s strategy a stronger basis for sustainable partnership.

Despite the apparent changes in approach and greater official activism, however, gains were fleeting and unsustainable. While many believed Moscow was winning back the position it had lost after the Soviet fall, the return to the region during the mid 1990s was followed by a process of rapid, though involuntary, disengagement in the second half of the 1990s. In reality, Moscow’s reengagement quickly proved to be little more than a blip in a trend towards marginalisation. Even while pledging a commitment to a more activist strategy, dynamics were not working in Russia’s favour. For one, the tenuous nature of consensus meant Moscow still struggled to construct a coherent, committed Central Asia strategy, something resource constraints only complicated further. The ‘minimalist line’ did nothing to reverse Russia’s trajectory. Moscow also remained preoccupied with domestic issues, and unable to rapidly or convincingly respond to changing external circumstances. This continued domestic preoccupation saw it lose control over the processes taking place in Central Asia. Although a wide range of multilateral agreements were promulgated within Central Asia between 1994 and 1996, in all aside of the Customs Union Russia was afforded observer status at best and its significance as a “locomotive of integration” was reduced within the framework of the CIS.

Moscow’s weaknesses also strengthened another tendency. As the second Yeltsin administration showed signs of weakness, Central Asia became bolder in its disregard of Russian preferences. Uzbekistan’s Islam Karimov led this resistance, though Niyazov, and even Nazarbayev, took similar advantage to reduce their dependence. While still mindful of Russia’s levers of influence and restrained by what Carl

\[150\] Syroezhkin (1999), pp. 103-4.
\[151\] Donaldson and Nogee, p.203.
\[152\] ibid, p. 203.
Friedrich called the “rule of anticipated reaction”,153 where an understanding of Russia’s preferences and priorities affected what leaders in the southern ‘near abroad’ did or not do,154 Central Asian leaders became more confident in testing the limits of independence. External actors like the US, Turkey, Iran, China, EU, UN, and even NATO, also took advantage of disengagement, capitalising on perceived opportunities and more confident overtures from certain Central Asian actors. While Moscow remained the strongest external power and the core player with regard to security in Central Asia, its position as a security guarantor was subsequently undermined as other actors became more engaged, offering more meaningful cooperation.155

The US, for example, stepped up its regional cooperation following the announcement of a ‘New Central Asia Policy’ in 1997. This strategy called for supporting the region against Russia’s traditional influence, the use of Central Asian resources, containment of Iranian influence, and assigning the region a “strategic” status in foreign policy.156 Washington was also a strong supporter of the GUAM/GUUAM initiative (Georgia, Ukraine, Uzbekistan [after 1999], Azerbaijan and Moldova), which attracted the involvement of Uzbekistan, and the continued growth of NATO programmes throughout the CIS. These actions were interpreted as part of Washington’s two-prong strategy of supporting Russia sufficiently at the state level (to sure-up the shaky regime transition) while doing all in its power to isolate Moscow and dislodge it from traditional Caucasian and Central Asian spheres of influence.157 While other external actors remained careful to avoid antagonising Russia by outwardly seeking to displace it, events like the joint agreement to build a gas pipeline from Kazakhstan to China in 1997, and the signing of the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan gas pipeline’s Ankara declaration by Turkey, Azerbaijan, Georgia,

Uzbekistan, and Kazakhstan (overseen by the US) in October 1998,\textsuperscript{158} demonstrated that other powers were also hardly slowing their efforts to gain strategic access to the region’s resources and enhance their regional role.

What prevented Russia’s complete marginalisation was Central Asia’s disillusionment with ‘unrealistic’ Western demands, their fear of China’s long-term intentions, and the subsequent recalculation of Moscow’s value. In the late 1990s, the region’s leaders increasingly realised that closer relations with the West were a double-edged sword and that Russia still had much to offer, with far lower expectations of the, by then, blatantly authoritarian states. Domestically, this authoritarianism and questionable management was also creating instability, with which Russia—more so than the West—could empathise. It was also apparent becoming overly dependent on other Muslim states entailed certain risks, too, which could be mitigated by a more balanced policy and rapprochement with Russia. There was also a certain degree of long overdue rationality that entered the equation. For all Russia’s weaknesses, it was still a dominant regional power and cutting it out completely was neither realistic nor politically astute. Even Karimov, who had earlier vehemently opposed Russia, sought to smooth relations. In May 1998, for example, he suggested a trilateral alliance consisting of Russia, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan. The three subsequently signed a Declaration on Comprehensive Cooperation in October 1998, which included commitments to provide assistance in the event of any aggression against the states, aimed primarily at the perceived Taliban threat but also against ‘domestic enemies’.\textsuperscript{159} A new wave of agreement signing, over all manner of issues, subsequently occurred through 1998 and 1999. Amongst others, this included agreements on economic cooperation and delimitation of the Caspian with Kazakhstan, a joint agreement between Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Russia on intensifying economic integration and contact,\textsuperscript{160} an agreement with Uzbekistan on airbase use in 1999, and resolution of the gas issues with Turkmenistan in 1999.

demonstrating renewed vigour on both sides. The growing Central Asian willingness to
again cooperate with Russia must have been vindicating for actors like
Chernomyrdin and Primakov, who had worked hard over the preceding years to lay
the groundwork in selected areas of cooperation.

Unfortunately, however, Russia remained unable to capitalise on this swing to
substantiate the promises it made in these agreements and recover ground it had
earlier lost. Instead, continued disorganisation meant opportunities went wanting and
the inadequacies of Moscow’s Central Asia policy only became more blatantly
apparent in the late 1990s. As Irina Zviagelskaya wrote in 1999:

“…the problems of Russian policy in relation to Central Asia
stem not only from objective limiting factors and the
discrepancy between the proclaimed goals and Russia’s own
resources but also from the fact that the specifics of the
Central Asian states are not sufficiently taken into account. A
generalised approach, as practiced in the USSR, is frequently
transferred, deliberately or by inertia, to the states of Central
Asia”.161

Zviagelskaya also noted that Moscow’s political course was characterised by an
absence of ideas about the region’s value, an unwillingness to impose restrictions on
itself for the sake of keeping Central Asia in Russia’s orbit of influence, and rather
superficial ideas about the socio-political and ethno-political processes underway in
the region.162 Such tendencies indicated that far from establishing a new approach to
the region, characterised by a consensus on its importance to Russia, and decisive
well-implemented strategies to ensure consolidation of this relationship, Moscow’s
approach remained superficial and bogged down in the thinking of the past. There is
also little to suggest that there had been any radical departure from the policies of the
early independence, or late Soviet periods. While Moscow had officially committed
itself to re-engagement, a number of domestic transitional factors, in particular, not
least of which the inability to establish and enforce a single, clear policy strategy,
meant Russia’s position in Central Asia continued to decline. Put simply, Russia did not want the leadership role and substantive relations with Central Asia *enough*, even when served up perfect opportunities to reclaim this. Although it retained a strong regional influence, it was no longer the hegemonic power it had been, nor the partner of choice some had hoped it would become.

**Conclusion**

Throughout the 1990s then, Russian foreign policy towards the CIS and Central Asia, specifically, suffered from problems of instability, inconsistency, and incoherence. The most important driver for these problems was the protracted regime transition outlined in previous chapters. Domestic problems rooted in such factors as conflicting ideas on Russian identity, inter-institutional conflict and competition, economic reform and shrinking state capacity, the weakening of central control, and even elites’ strategies in the new political environment, detrimentally impacted all aspects of policy. Combined they conspired against any type of predictability, instead prolonging the existence of a fluid and unstable policy-making environment. In the broadest terms this meant that no real, substantive consensus on foreign policy strategy existed at any time during the 1990s. Irrespective of whatever claims may have been made, the belief a short Westernising period was replaced by a consensual reprioritisation of the CIS as the primary foreign policy priority in 1993, is a misnomer. Quite simply such agreement on the CIS never existed. Even within the government there remained significant disagreement on fundamental policy directions, that combined with the lack of strong leadership and weakening horizontal and vertical accountabilities, not only resulted in inconsistency and unconvincing half measures, but also the proliferation of multiple foreign policies. What this meant was that although Moscow may have continually stressed the ‘near abroad’ priority, its actions seldom substantiated this commitment. The primary foreign policy focus on the US and Europe in the Westernising period actually remained throughout the transitional period, even through the period of conflict over priorities and the post-1993 ‘consensus’ policy. While activism and rhetorical attention certainly increased after the initial period of neglect, the reality was that the CIS and Central Asia was always a secondary, or lesser, focus for Moscow. Relations with the US, NATO, EU, and later China, consistently took an overall higher priority, typically because of their
greater strategic or economic importance. Yet, at the same time, Moscow periodically acted in a way in the ‘near abroad’ that could only be termed quasi-imperial. Ultimately, it was never entirely clear what Russia was trying to achieve in the CIS, if indeed Moscow really knew itself, with the result that very little of substance was ever achieved. Moreover, this underachievement only fed further domestic political conflict; as the failures of policy mounted, Moscow’s external relations suffered and reform, more broadly, was discounted through its association with the policy paralysis and violent, unpredictable swings in direction.

The inability or unwillingness of the political elite to establish anything more than a politically expedient ‘veneer of consensus’ dramatically undermined Russia’s efforts to carve out a successful foreign policy strategy at any level of its relations, not least of which towards the CIS and Central Asia. Only on the most basic of issues was it able to establish any subsequent commitment for action. Unable to resolve what, if any, importance the region held, or how to put any policy into practice, Moscow’s incoherent, often contradictory, approach did little to stem its gradual disengagement. Although it officially abandoned its previous isolationist strategy in 1993-1994, the rhetorical assertiveness proved to be only a transient reversal of a continuing decline in relations. While it never abandoned this pledged ‘consensus’ on its commitment to regional leadership, the disparity between rhetoric and reality only grew. Never able or willing to substantively back up its promises or the numerous agreements it signed, by the late 1990s Moscow’s weaknesses were increasingly apparent. Though it remained the strongest external player in the region, its position was more the result of default than success, and appeared increasingly unsustainable. The next chapter will demonstrate these dynamics in greater detail, focussing on key areas of Moscow’s relations with Central Asia.
Chapter five

Yeltsin’s Central Asia policy: Dimensions of Russian engagement

The Political Equation and Economic Equation

*Moscow’s commitment to integration and multilateralism*

While the reformist government initially affor ded a low priority to accelerating multilateral integration in the former Soviet space, or strengthening the CIS, from mid-1992 these goals appeared more regularly in official pronouncements. Yet, these proclamations remained mostly rhetorical, with few concrete efforts to achieve such goals. In reality, despite the official commitment to multilateralism, after 1993 Moscow continued a ‘Russia first’ integrationist policy, differentiated according to region and function and underpinned by bilateral relations.\(^1\) Certainly, there were grounds to adopt a differentiated, selective bilateral approach. The CIS’s nascence and cumbersomeness complicated the pursuit of Russian policy priorities.\(^2\) It simply proved too nebulous a body, lacking a common future vision and commitment to rely on it to any great degree. Russia was better able to regularise its regional security and economic interests in a focused and piecemeal way by pursuing bilateral agreements.\(^3\) Such links allowed Russia to pursue a differentiated approach to the CIS based on national interests and the interests of each specific state.\(^4\) That the organisation exhibited these characteristics, however, was strongly influenced by Moscow’s questionable leadership; its inability to pursue a consistently multilateral path, failure to implement agreements, and inconsistent attention continually undermined the body as much as anything else. As the strongest member capable of fostering integration, Russia’s actions were highly damaging. The resort to bilateralism only further

\(^1\) Lynch, p. 7.
\(^4\) Jackson (2003), p. 77.
undermined the organisation’s credibility, implying that the supposedly strongest proponent had no confidence in it. This did little to encourage other members to take the body more seriously, or to convince anyone of the sincerity of Russia’s continual reference to multilateral integration. In reality, by the end of the 1990s in ‘leading’ a body that had achieved little, Russia was reaping the fruits of its own, very limited, labours.⁵

Of course Russia was not solely to blame. In part, its inconsistent interest in multilateralism stemmed from the unwillingness and unreliability of potential partners; in Central Asia, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, in particular. By the mid-1990s, for example, without formally renouncing the CIS, Uzbekistan was pursuing a policy that was “a far cry from rapprochement with Russia”, seeking out new partners and joining other multilateral forums like the Economic Cooperation Organisation (ECO), and “carrying neighbouring countries along with it”.⁶ Though Turkmenistan’s recalcitrance was based more on its desire to remain ‘non-aligned’, the inhibiting results were the same. While this opposition was frustrating, Moscow could hardly claim it had done everything in its power to make the CIS relevant, or to win over these problematic partners. Moreover, given the rhetorical commitment to integration, one would also expect Russia to embrace opportunities for multilateralism on a smaller, more workable scale, with willing partners, as these arose. Yet, again, Russia’s actions spoke of a disjuncture between reality and the lofty rhetoric. For example, Moscow consistently rejected the idea of a Eurasian Union, originally proposed by Nazarbayev.⁷ Such a body would have pulled together those states interested in reintegration, unimpeded by others who sought a ‘minimal’ CIS. Some analysts attributed this hesitancy to Russian fears of the economic and political implications of singly having to embrace a union with Central Asia and Armenia.⁸ Certainly, closely aligning itself with the CIS’s most authoritarian, economically weakest, strategically lesser important regimes was hardly attractive.

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⁵ In 1996, for example, Minister for CIS Affairs Aman Tuleyev noted that only about one agreement in twenty was being implemented from more than 1300 existing agreements: BBC Summary of World Broadcasts (SWB) (1996) 11 September, SU/2714, B/11.


⁸ Skak, p. 154, see also Olcott (1994a), p. 559.
However, cultural considerations were also important. Realistically, Moscow would have preferred integration with Slavic counterparts, even if only to counterbalance the more ‘Asiatic’ elements. For this reason, March 1996’s Union of Four, which involved Belarus, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan, was seen as a more concrete step towards political, economic and military integration. Yet again, despite the more focused, balanced nature, integration was never substantively activated. Even when presented with opportunities, then, Russia’s desire for integration was limited.

Again, underlying these limitations were the lack of substantive consensus and continued policy-making disorganisation in Russia. In reality, Moscow remained unable to decide whether it actually wanted integration. A dichotomy remained between the nationalist urge to reassert domination over the FSU as a sphere of vital strategic interests and an equally powerful liberal concern to limit the costs of such a project. Importantly, cautious, economic liberals remained influential particularly (and increasing so after 1996), undermining the expansionist agenda, irrespective of the government’s reference to nationalist ideas. As the massive costs of regional economic and security reintegration became more apparent, Russia exhibited mounting caution in transforming its hegemonic power interests into concrete external resource commitments. Fundamentally, then, the integrationist appeals of the Russian leadership towards the CIS had the character of propaganda or illusion and the authorities tried to use all their potential for their own political needs. While reference to integration remained a political necessity, economic pragmatism won out; Moscow’s regional strategy was ultimately more unilateralist and selfish than multilateral and cooperative. In all areas—from the use of peacekeeping forces to banking and currency policies—the Yeltsin government’s public positions reflected national considerations rather than Commonwealth interests. In reality, too, even where the commitment to integration was not solely expeditious, the government could seldom ensure sufficiently cohesive implementation across the state to substantiate its promises. It was unable to wield its remaining resources to encourage multilateral integration or to prove it had anything valuable to offer. Consequently,

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11 Willerton and Cockerham, p. 189.
13 Willerton and Cockerham, p. 190.
Russia was probably the greatest constraint to integration and multilateral cooperation in the FSU, something that the following sections will illustrate further.

The 25 million ethnic Russians living in the ‘near abroad’ following dissolution of the USSR were a key political issue during the 1990s. For the reformers, the diaspora issue was initially politically insignificant, according to their concept of new state building.\(^\text{14}\) While concerned with human and civil rights, they preferred diplomatic means to resolve any issues, respecting the sovereignty of their neighbours and adhering to non-intervention. Like so much of the reformist line, however, this position attracted criticism from forces concerned with the situation of Russians throughout the FSU. External events provided ample ammunition to illustrate the apparent inadequacies of the reformist policy. The refusal of Estonia and Latvia to grant automatic citizenship to Russians living in their territories, for example, rallied Yeltsin’s opponents, who accused his leadership of ignoring human rights abuses perpetuated against Russian minorities in the ‘near abroad’.\(^\text{15}\) Stories abounded about discrimination against Russians and their fears of being stuck in unfriendly states, often their homes for many generations. The declining situation in the FSU, growing tensions and conflict simply fuelled fears that Russians would become embroiled in messy ethnic and civil wars, or worse still, the target of such conflicts. Such concerns fed into domestic politics, tending to further strengthen the most nationalistic and reactionary elements.\(^\text{16}\)

At its heart, the diaspora issue was part of larger debates over Russian postcommunist identity. How groups perceived discrimination and defined potential responses was broadly commensurate with their conceptualisation of Russia and its role in the FSU; the more nationalist the group, the more serious the injustice appeared and the more interventionist their advocated responses. As the issue was picked up across the political spectrum, the voracity of opposition groups and the issue’s politically volatile, potentially controversial nature forced the government to reassess its previously uninterested position. By fall 1992, the diaspora had


\(^{16}\) Chayes and Chayes, pp. 2-3.
apparently become a government preoccupation, with both Yeltsin and Kozyrev feeling obliged to issue tough sounding statements on it.\textsuperscript{17} Henceforth, protecting the diaspora became integrated into the language of all major political forces. The government’s increasingly vocal stance was accompanied by a flurry of efforts to ensure these rights, including the controversial postponement of Russia’s Baltic troop redeployment. By the time Yeltsin issued his September 1995 presidential edict, Russian policy reflected the notion that independence did not necessarily grant CIS states a free hand in dealing with national minorities, particularly where Russian expatriates were concerned.\textsuperscript{18} While the strength of his statement could not be divorced from its pre-electoral context, it was heralded as a ‘consensus’ on diaspora issues.

However, actual activity demonstrated a more cursory commitment to diaspora issues than the imperialistic, aggressive approach many touted. Effectively, while the administration lost no opportunity to claim its solicitude for Russian speakers living in FSU, these words were never really put into concrete deeds.\textsuperscript{19} The constant reference to this theme over time indicated that indeed very little was ever achieved and that infringements on the rights of Russian minorities were scarcely relevant, except insofar as they could be turned to domestic political advantage.\textsuperscript{20} The trials of the dual citizenship policy clearly illustrate this discrepancy. Dual citizenship as a means of protecting the diaspora was adopted by important administration figures during 1993, including Yeltsin, Kozyrev and the Presidential Commission on Citizenship, as well as garnering support from the MoD and some figures in the Supreme Soviet.\textsuperscript{21} In January 1994, Kozyrev declared that protection of ‘compatriot’ rights in the ‘near abroad’ was “the main strategic task of foreign policy” and that dual citizenship was the major instrument for fulfilling that task.\textsuperscript{22} However, the policy ultimately amounted to little. Dual citizenship faced strong opposition throughout the CIS. Moscow was only able to convince two Central Asian states with

\textsuperscript{17} Teague, p. 92. 
\textsuperscript{19} Zevelev, p. 131. 
\textsuperscript{21} Zevelev, p. 134. 
\textsuperscript{22} ibid, p. 135.
small Russian diasporas, Turkmenistan (1993) and Tajikistan (1995), to agree to dual citizenship.

While there were certainly diaspora issues in these states, Moscow’s inability to protect the ‘at risk’ Uzbek Russian diaspora, or reassure the large Russian populations in Kazakhstan or Kyrgyzstan demonstrated the government’s lack of real determination and effectiveness. By the time Yeltsin signed into law his September 1995 policy document, references to dual citizenship had disappeared, replaced by calls for smooth adaptation into host societies, preservation of culture, and the use of trade sanctions in the case of serious violations of their rights. In 1997 the Yeltsin government again changed tack, formally recognising its failure to impose a dual citizenship regime. Instead, it unilaterally offered citizenship to those in the ‘near abroad’ without the requirement of relinquishing their old citizenship, effectively turning to de facto rather than de jure efforts to establish dual citizenship. In doing so, Moscow resorted to a cheap policy that demanded little diplomatically, politically, or economically, effecting changes by stealth. Not only did this encourage distrust in Moscow’s commitment to international law, diplomacy, and respecting its neighbours’ sovereignty, but it also did little for the diaspora, other than offer an escape should conditions deteriorate irreversibly.

A similar fate awaited the strategy of building special relations with ‘compatriots’, initiated in 1994 to supplement dual citizenship. According to this programme, the primary means for defending the rights and interests of compatriots would be diplomatic and economic, such as the use of international human rights instruments and, if necessary, the resort to economic pressure. The programme was, thus, really a continuation of ‘state-building’ thinking, and demanded little substantive governmental activity. It was generally weak, containing abstract terminology, a lack of clarity about implementation, and poor guidelines for coordination among governmental bodies. In fact, “it read as if decision makers...did not truly believe the program would ever be fully implemented”. Such concerns were justified. More

23 ibid, p. 138.
24 ibid, pp. 140-1.
25 The term adopted for Russians living abroad.
26 Zevelev, p. 143.
27 ibid, p. 143.
concrete guidelines for governmental agencies were only developed in the 1996 “Program of Actions to Support the Compatriots Abroad”.\textsuperscript{28} It took another two years to prepare the actual conceptual foundation for this policy, the ‘Concept of the Russian Federation’s State Policy toward the Compatriots Abroad’, whose adoption was delayed, if not buried, by the 1998 government reshuffle.\textsuperscript{29} Again, this programme simply illustrated the government’s lip service, particularly when combined with the continual under-resourcing of compatriot programmes: there even remained no funding for supporting papers, television, \textsuperscript{30} or other ‘soft’ forms of support. Right until 1999, the problem of compatriots remained institutionally marginal for the executive, despite continued rhetoric from politicians and officials to the contrary.\textsuperscript{31}

Zevelev identified three explanations for the gap between the muscular rhetoric and inconsistent half-measures. For one, defence of the diaspora was more important as an instrument for the domination of the FSU, than as a goal in itself. While the Yeltsin administration frequently exploited concerns about institutionalised discrimination to apply crude pressure on FSU governments,\textsuperscript{32} its political nature saw it consistently compromised for the sake of other, more important interests.\textsuperscript{33} Secondly, as discussed throughout this chapter, notwithstanding Russian successes in establishing regional hegemony, there remained a large gap between ambitions of Eurasian domination and the limited ability to meet this goal in the 1990s.\textsuperscript{34} Interventionist actions to protect diaspora groups remained too costly and demanding. Thirdly, policy makers faced constraints stemming from Russia’s internal federal structure, in that they could not afford to prevent other states from consolidating statehood at the same time as attempting to strengthen their own.\textsuperscript{35}

\textsuperscript{29} Draft of ‘Kontseptsiya Gosudarstvennoy Politiky Rossiiskoy Federatsii v Otnoshenii Zarubezhnykh Sootechestvennikov’, cited by Zevelev, pp. 144-5.
\textsuperscript{30} Lo (2002), p. 79.
\textsuperscript{31} Zevelev, p. 146.
\textsuperscript{33} Zevelev, , p. 154.
\textsuperscript{34} ibid p. 154.
\textsuperscript{35} ibid.
Nevertheless, creating the illusion of priority was important. Domestically, the diaspora achieved such significance that it was tantamount to political suicide to question its importance.\textsuperscript{36} Influential political groups and institutions maintained continual pressure on compatriot issues, prolonging their political life. The Congress of Russian Communities (KRO), for example, formed by Dmitri Rozogin to protect the rights of the diaspora and reinforce ties with Russian-speakers in the CIS, bred an electoral association to contest the 1995 parliamentary elections.\textsuperscript{37} Other popular political figures, such as Lebed and Zhirinovsky, also committed to protecting Russians abroad in their 1995 and 1996 electoral programs. The State Duma Committee on CIS Affairs and Relations with Compatriots, too, created the Council of Compatriots in 1995, an analytical-consultative body charged with representing the interests of Russians abroad.\textsuperscript{38} In fact, throughout the 1990s the Duma forwarded a number of more assertive suggestions and drafts of compatriot policy.\textsuperscript{39} While the executive and MFA rejected most,\textsuperscript{40} the government had to at least appear responsive. Hence, it coopted its opponents’ language and made some token gestures, in order to demolish their periodic political intrusions. In succeeding, liberal forces were accordingly able to generally maintain their ‘non-interventionist’ path. Reference to diaspora issues, instead, remained blowy rhetoric aimed primarily at domestic consumption and papering over the cracks in a polarised, non-consensual policy environment.

\textit{Moscow’s commitment to economic integration}

Moscow’s approach to economic integration was also contradictory: although its strongest proponent, it also did most to undermine its perpetuation and intensification.\textsuperscript{41} In practice, Russia pursued economic unilateralism from the outset and its actions did little for either Commonwealth integration or for greater bilateral cooperation with Central Asia. As the reformers sought to insulate Russia from destabilising economic developments in Central Asia, they focused on the West and practically abandoned the region. However, throughout 1992 and 1993, as opposition to the reformist line grew, attacks on this strategy increased. Certain parts of the

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item[36] Teague, p. 94.
\item[37] Jackson (2003), p. 72-3.
\item[38] Zevelev, p. 138.
\item[39] ibid, p. 146-7.
\item[40] ibid.
\item[41] Donaldson and Nogee, p.188.
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economic establishment expressed concern at further disruption in commercial and supply links with Central Asia, particularly when the economy was straining under the weight of numerous problems and shortages, and at a time when the region was eager to maintain ties. Some also argued Central Asia could become a lucrative and convenient future market for industrial and manufactured exports, that its rich natural resources would be extremely useful in Russia’s economic recovery,\(^\text{42}\) and that this recovery also depended on the free movement of goods and labour within the CIS.\(^\text{43}\)

Critics also saw the growing economic interest of external powers as a threat to the future economic potential of ties with the region. China’s growth, in particular, was cause for continual concern. By late 1992, already, Xinhua reported that 50% of Kazakhstan’s consumer goods’ imports were from China.\(^\text{44}\) Increasingly, too, Beijing targeted regional energy cooperation and infrastructure projects to help feed its exponentially growing requirements. Analysts identified Beijing’s emerging long-term strategy as reconstructing a new ‘Silk Road’ of modern railways and highways, as a transmission belt to project Chinese wealth and influence far westward, not only through Central Asia, but also to Iran and the Middle East.\(^\text{45}\) The only real restraint shown by Beijing was the restriction of cross border trade to large companies, probably to minimise links between ethnic brethren and keep a lid on feared ethnic unrest.\(^\text{46}\) While the most successful, China was not alone. When Iran failed to carve out the regional political role it initially aspired to, its focus shifted to the economic sphere. Tehran saw mutually beneficial goals like expanding economic cooperation as a means to consolidate influence and regional stability. While Central Asia required economic assistance, new markets and transit routes to export its commodities, Iran saw expanding economic relations as a means to overcome its economic and diplomatic isolation by constructing an indirect bridge between itself and the West. Its efforts to do so focused on Turkmenistan, for whose natural gas


\(^{45}\) Ibid, p. 235.

\(^{46}\) Martin (1994), p. 35.
resources it perceived itself as a natural outlet,\textsuperscript{47} rather than its ethnic-linguistic, and arguably more needy, brethren in Tajikistan. To advance its pragmatic economic agenda Tehran was also active in multilateral initiatives such as the Economic Cooperation Organisation and Caspian Sea grouping.\textsuperscript{48} After failing in its geopolitical aspirations Ankara, too, turned increasingly to economic cooperation. As the 1990s progressed, Turkey focused on hydrocarbon resources and the construction of pipelines to alleviate the region’s dependence on Russia, trying to cement Turkish participation in Central Asian energy cooperation, something that was an obvious threat to Moscow’s dominance in this area.

Dissatisfied with the government’s approach to economic cooperation with the region and the growing threat of other foreign actors, various economic interests sought to influence policy through forms of lobbying, while some of the larger, more organised companies had the capacity to effectively pursue their own foreign policies. With Gaidar’s replacement by former Gazprom chief Chernomyrdin in December 1992, many analysts noted the resource lobby’s growing access to policy-making. They predicted the emergence of a more activist regional approach, stressing continued integration. And, as in other areas, the government also began to assuage the opposition with rhetoric, stressing integration with the ‘near abroad’ and intensified economic activity in Central Asia. Yet, even while such changes took place, Russia’s subsequent actions demonstrated a contradictory pattern, as the approach to the rouble zone demonstrates. Although a common currency existed throughout much of the FSU, in which many wanted to remain following independence, it was Russia that effectively abandoned the zone in July 1993 when it unexpectedly introduced its own currency. That September, nine CIS states (including Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan) signed an accord pledging to form a new economic union, coordinating monetary and fiscal policies, establishing a free trade zone and a currency union (a new rouble zone), and promoting ties among enterprises across member states. Again, however, Russia’s commitment was questionable, as Chernomyrdin illustrated when, while praising the accord, he stressed the immense difficulties establishing the currency union would

\textsuperscript{47} ibid, pp. 118-9.
\textsuperscript{48} Piacentini, p. 40.
actually entail. Moreover, the terms Russia set for others to use its new currency were so strict that even the most fervent proponents of integration could not accept them; such conditions would have essentially abrogated Central Asian economic independence. Despite wanting to participate, two of Russia’s best potential partners—Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan—had to fold in the face of unrelenting conditions; Moscow’s actions effectively forcing them from the rouble zone, placing the reformist regimes on the verge of bankruptcy. In the end, only Tajikistan agreed to the strict terms, which included keeping its gold reserves and hard currency in Moscow. Although Moscow’s hand had certainly been pushed by certain states’ fiscal irresponsibility, its self-interest and harsh implementation demonstrated little more than a cursory regard for its partners. Nor did its actions demonstrate a consistent approach to integration, or a particular concern to improve its regional image.

If this apparently contradictory policy could be explained by early conflict over foreign policy priorities, it would be expected to improve once these disputes had been resolved. Yet, even after the heralded forging of consensus on prioritisation of the ‘near abroad’, the change in emphasis did not result in a fundamental shift in practice. Instead, Moscow remained reluctant to make material sacrifices for the sake of its CIS partners. There was little enthusiasm to underwrite the CIS’s bankrupt economies, to whom annual subsidies had already reached an estimated $18 billion by 1994. Instead, the tendency towards a proliferation of agreements with no substantive commitment to implementation continued. For example, despite founding of a Customs Union between Belarus, Kazakhstan and Russia in January 1995, little was accomplished in terms of removing trade barriers, even by Russia, despite its pushing the deal. Moscow’s unwillingness to activate the Customs Union was based

50 Menon, p. 117.
56 Kyrgyzstan would join in March 1996 and Tajikistan in February 1999.
on the realisation that its implementation would eliminate the not inconsiderable revenue it earned from transporting energy resources abroad,\(^{57}\) and thus illustrated its continued unwillingness to sacrifice short-term interests for longer-term integration goals. The consequence of such unwillingness was that despite rhetorical reorientation towards the ‘near abroad’, Russia’s trade turnover with the CIS actually decreased sixfold between 1992 and 1994 compared to 1991, and the share of these countries in Russia’s total trade turnover fell by 270\%.\(^{58}\) By 1994, trade volume with Central Asia was only 10\% of what it had been in 1991, falling from more than $59 billion to little more than $6 billion.\(^{59}\) Trade would not recover to these 1991 figures throughout the Yeltsin period (see: Table 2).

This discrepancy between rhetoric and reality was driven by the same transitional factors that affected other areas of policy. Although the Westernisers were weakened, their antagonism towards economic integration with Central Asia was never entirely purged from government. Remaining figures acted as a moderating force, with a more realistic attitude toward the complexities of regional economic cooperation. While few interests were opposed to increased trade with Central Asia—any trade growth was beneficial—many also recognised that expanding regional economic integration did not necessarily equate to economic gains. Figures from diverse backgrounds, such as private business and liberal political groupings, understood that Russian interests lay more in penetrating stable, developed markets. Here, Russia’s efforts would be rewarded with greater aid, investment, and technology transfers required for recovery and transition, more than they would in concentrating on the comparatively underdeveloped, unstable Central Asian markets. Even the strengthening of the energy-resources lobby connected to Chernomyrdin from 1992 continued an isolationist posture in relation to the CIS, because its economic interests did not stipulate integration of former Soviet republics as a priority.\(^{60}\) While this lobby certainly had interests in the ‘near abroad’, its most profitable markets were located in the West. As will be addressed later, access and even exploitation, not integration per se, increasingly guided the resource-based lobbies.

\(^{57}\) Donaldson and Nogee, p.189.
\(^{58}\) Cooper, pp. 101-2.
\(^{60}\) Zevelev, p. 75.
Many economic figures also understood that conditions for integration had already deteriorated considerably, perhaps irreversibly, by the mid 1990s. Interdependence was diluted by the chaotic post-Soviet economic restructuring, the development of new infrastructure, and the reorientation of Russian industry to new sources of raw materials.\(^{61}\) Although Central Asia remained highly dependent on Russian as a source of imports and as an export market in 1994 (Turkmenistan excepted), this dependence was asymmetrical; Russia was much less reliant on Central Asia.\(^{62}\) Throughout the 1990s, the drift on both sides only increased. With interdependence decreasing, integration became progressively more challenging. Increasingly differentiated levels of development, resource endowments, reform directions, and policies towards the West made any union harder to establish.\(^{63}\) Economic integration with Central Asia thus became ever more costly, both in terms of the direct concessions Russia would have to make in order to foster integration, and in terms of missed opportunities or potential returns the investment of resources into other markets could have brought. So long as cooperation did not occur spontaneously and required political intervention, integration, in particular, would remain based more on expedient political calculations than objective economic interests and, thus, more likely to be forsaken for other concrete endeavours.

Moreover, the reluctance of certain Russian factions to pursue economic integration was the fact that key Central Asian states were emerging as competitors. While such competition existed across resource exports broadly, it was most pronounced in the area of hydrocarbon resources, a market in which Russia sought to become a dominant regional and international player. While even in the mid-1990s its partners remained relatively minor players in comparison, some analysts believed that costs, links, and advantages in attracting foreign investment would eventually make other Caspian energy producers more competitive in international energy


\(^{63}\) Cooper, p. 101-2.
markets than Russia. Effectively, then, resources like oil increasingly became a source of division, rather than integration. This emerging contradiction provided a dilemma for policy-makers, trying to balance the demand to expand economic relations with simultaneously protecting national interests.

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Source: International Monetary Fund: Direction of Trade Statistics

Russia-Turkmen relations clearly demonstrated this struggle. Initially, following ‘re-engagement’, Moscow officially sought to establish a strong partnership with Turkmenistan. In 1992, numerous bilateral agreements were concluded; some so comprehensive, analysts questioned Ashghabat’s continued independence. By the mid 1990s, however, the partnership foundered. At the core, Turkmenistan’s large natural gas reserves make it a competitor to Russia. At the same time, geographical, political, and infrastructure constraints meant Turkmenistan’s exports remained entirely reliant on Russian pipelines. Combined, these factors tempted certain

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64 Zubarevich and Fedorov. pp. 134, 137. Oil that costs $5 to $10 per barrel to produce in Russia cost only $3-$4 in the Caspian: G. I. Starchenkov (2001), ‘Caspian Oil and the Routes of its Transportation’ ['Neft Caspiya I puti Yeyo Transportirovki'], in The Muslim Countries on the Boundaries of the CIS [Musulmankie Strani u Granits SNG] edited by G. V. Mironova, Moscow: Institut Vostokovedenie RAN, p. 301.


66 Alternative pipeline routes have been prohibitively expensive or involved transit through Iran, which major prospective purchasers or developers (like the US) of Turkmen gas are unwilling to allow.
interests to manipulate Russian advantages and constrain Turkmenistan’s export capacity. Throughout the 1990s, partially state-owned Gazprom restricted Turkmenistan’s access to the ‘all-Union’ pipeline and, subsequently, to external markets. In November 1993, for example, it shut off Turkmenistan’s gas exports to Europe, a major Russian market. In 1997 the Turkmenrosgaz Russian-Turkmen joint venture was shut down, halting transit to the Ukraine and Transcaucasia. Gradually, Turkmenistan’s export capabilities were constrained, increasingly dependent on Russian benevolence, a lack of competition, or Turkmenistan’s willingness to accept Russian conditions. By 1997, its annual gas production had shrunk to about 10 billion cubic meters—the level of domestic consumption. At the end of the 1990s, it produced just 20-25% of the volume of gas it produced in 1991. Throughout this period, Moscow also refused to purchase and re-export natural gas from Turkmenistan. In effect, Gazprom relegated Turkmenistan to a supplier of solely cash-strapped former Soviet republics, who ran up large debts, while limiting the amount of gas Turkmenistan exported to hard currency markets.

Such a contradictory policy hardly seemed consistent with Moscow’s stated integrationist goals. Gazprom appeared to act unilaterally, irrespective of the impact on interstate relations. For example, it thwarted government efforts to create an understanding with Turkmenistan following the 1997 interruption of Turkmen gas to Ukraine through Russia. Although Yeltsin promised to meet Niyazov’s appeals to resolve the situation, Gazprom’s demand for a 50% increase in transit rates remained a stumbling block. This was hardly an advertisement for policy coordination. However, nor was it a sign of a hegemonic economic policy. Indeed, ‘the terms Russia demanded for the use of its pipelines may have partly reflected the parochial

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69 Zubarevich and Fedorov. p. 135.
and pecuniary interests of bureaucratic cliques within the Russian state, rather than a policy of pressure conceived, orchestrated, and executed from Moscow’. Whatever the source, the outcomes for cooperation were negative: natural gas ‘diplomacy’ was partly to blame for Ashghabat’s consistent hostility to the CIS, whether actions were government- or private sector- initiated. The actions also recalled earlier imperialism, something hardly conducive to increased cooperation and regional integration.

Yet, Gazprom’s actions did not simply challenge the unified government line. They also reflected the continued lack of consensus within the government and embodied an alternative policy strategy: the aggressive protection of Russia’s economic interests. For companies like Gazprom, an active Russian role in Central Asia was certainly welcome, given the interest in participating in proposed gas pipelines to China and India. Yet Gazprom’s policy, like that of other economic pragmatists, was more about benefitting economically from access to and control of the region’s resources, than it was comprehensive integration. Particularly after 1996, as the challenge presented by Central Asian hydrocarbon producers became clearer and economic liberals regained influence, policies aimed at emasculating potential competitors in the international hydrocarbon market became increasingly attractive and influential. Certain factions within the ruling elite actually used the apparent lack of coordination to their advantage, advancing potentially controversial, exploitative strategies without officially committing the government to such aggression. High-level figures with the ability to control Gazprom simply chose not to. Others who paid public lip service to integration similarly remained silent, recognising this developing strategy’s greater benefits.

Certainly, this type of approach was not entirely new. The same aggressive pursuit of economic interests had already been illustrated by the use of controls on Kazakhstan’s oil exports to reinforce Moscow’s demands for shares in the state’s oil industry from May 1994. In the late 1990s, however, its application became increasingly more regular. By 1998, Øystein Noreng described Russia’s overall economic interest as capturing part of the economic rent from the region’s oil and gas

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75 Menon, p. 125.
78 Blank, p. 383.
through preferential access and prices below those of the world market and eventually through transit fees. Its political interest, he noted, appeared primarily denying other external powers control of the region, though not barring foreign actors altogether. Rather, Russia’s ‘devious strategy’ appeared based upon attracting Western capital and technology to modernise the Azeri and Central Asian oil industry, for its own benefit, as it reasserted dominance over the region. By the end of the 1990s, Russia was using “its pipelines to serve its own ends, shutting them down or restricting flow when...convenient, requiring special taxes and tariffs, and using access as leverage” to gain a stake in whatever enterprise required use of its network. Turkmenistan, specifically, was regarded as a primary competitor in Russia’s battle for a place in the world’s natural gas markets by 2000, and Moscow’s natural gas diplomacy was unabashedly directed against its interests. While Ashghabat searched for alternative export options, it was hindered by its own increasingly unpredictable, totalitarian political regime and lack of willing, financially secure partners. This isolation only made Russia’s periodic overtures—like that of Chernomyrdin and Gazprom head Rem Vyakhirev in 1998 to keep Turkmenistan in the Russian sphere of influence by convincing Ashghabat that Russia’s transit routes were the cheapest—that much more attractive, however cynical they may have been. Effectively, by strangling Turkmenistan, Moscow was making Ashghabat so desperate that it would accept any conditions Russia imposed, however preposterous or inequitable they appeared.

However, although this unofficial strategy consolidated as the primary thrust, it remained inconsistently applied and veiled behind efforts to improve mutually beneficial integration. The tension between partnership and self-serving pragmatism remained, causing confusion over what Moscow was really trying to achieve. Again,

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81 ibid.


84 Levin, p. 4.
the lack of consensus and strong leadership had deleterious consequences for the consistency of Russia’s Central Asia policy. Perversely, however, though regional integration may have been undermined, the growing influence of the assertive protection of economic interests would come to have positive impacts on the Russian economy.

Moscow’s broader Caspian strategy demonstrates these same tendencies. Russia’s initial responses were idealistic, but also piecemeal and inconsistent. Officially, it viewed the body of water as a lake and advocated joint sovereignty over it and its resources. Although this position disproportionately favoured Russia, as figures like Energy Minister Yuri Shafranik argued in 1994, Russia’s previous financial support for the former Soviet states’ development justified a greater return than the resources in its national sector would provide.\(^{85}\) While some in Moscow were content for this unrealistic position to perpetuate a stalemate, from 1994 the division and development of Caspian resources became a more pressing issue, driven by external investment, ownership issues, and unilateral actions by frustrated states. Azerbaijan was the first to test Russia, signing a comprehensive development agreement with a consortium of Western oil companies. Kazakhstan soon followed suit with agreements with Chevron. To many observers, the Kazakh and Azeri developments were seen, for all practical purposes, to totally wrest the Caspian’s vast oil resources from Russian control.\(^{86}\) There was also concern about discussions in the Turkish capital regarding restrictions on passage through the Bosporus and Dardanelles—effectively closing the narrow, but essential, waterway linking the Black and Mediterranean seas to Russian oil tankers.\(^{87}\) Again, this was interpreted as part of the broader Western strategy to marginalise Russia’s hydrocarbon interests.

The MFA’s approach stressed diplomatic and legal conventions, including the necessity of political negotiations to resolve the Caspian’s status, before large-scale

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development in contested sectors could occur. It refused to accept the unilateral actions of littoral states in signing development deals with Western companies.  

Political pressure was exerted with a view to blocking the development of the prospective oil fields on the Caspian seabed. On the question of passage, it also stressed legal methods, lobbying Ankara diplomatically and attempting to demonstrate to the international community that Turkey was at odds with the relevant clauses of the 1936 Montreux convention. However, there was only so long that such an idealistic position could be maintained, particularly without success.

Increasingly, the MFA’s unusually tough and uncompromising stance was not maintained across the board. Both Gazprom and Lukoil, for example, were often at odds with the government over policies concerning the development and transportation of oil, and even, on occasion, overruled the MFA. The Ministry of Fuels and Energy, too, was more pragmatic, favouring participation in energy development regardless of the political costs. It feared awaiting a political settlement would marginalise Russia, given development was proceeding irrespective of Moscow’s objections. It had already signed an agreement with Azerbaijan in 1993, in fact, confirming Baku’s rights to the disputed fields and securing Lukoil a 10% share in the Western consortium’s development, even attending the deal’s signing as the MFA denounced it. Angry at being undermined, the MFA attempted to override this deal. Unhappy with this retaliation, Lukoil and the economic ministries enlisted the support of Prime Minister Chernomyrdin’s to override the MFA’s legal and political objections. In what became a very public spat, on 20 October MFA spokesman Mikhail Demurin criticized Russian industrialists “working with

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90 ‘Caspian “Intrigue”-Battle for Oil Could Have Regrettable Consequences for Russia’, p. 11.
Azerbaijan in the Caspian despite the absence of a legal basis for doing so”. Despite such opposition, however, Chernomyrdin assured the Azeri president the following day that Russia had no intention of impeding the deal’s implementation. Although the MFA found support in Primakov’s Foreign Intelligence Service, who declared the contract a threat to national security interests, with the President apparently having no clear position, the scene was set for inter-institutional struggle to confuse official policy. Playing successfully on the lack of consensus and ill-defined roles to make inroads into policy-making, the raw resource and economic lobby gradually reoriented Russia’s Caspian strategy. And although the broader ‘economisation’ of foreign policy may not have been comprehensive, the impact of economic interests was arguably as great as that of more plausible actors, such as the ‘power ministries’. As security interests’ grip on policy was weakened, certain economic interests intensified their efforts to usurp Caspian policy-making.

Consequently, by 1996 a clearer strategy began to emerge, based on retaining control over energy resources in a de facto partitioned Caspian through assertive Russian participation in regional development projects. Marginalised by the strengthening resource and economic lobbies, the MFA was forced to effectively abandon demands to delay development in lieu of settlement. The growing wave of anti-Russian sentiment in the region was also recognised, rooted in the perception of Russian arrogance and neo-imperialist attitudes. The new pragmatic approach played to Russia’s strengths; its trump card was control over existing transit routes. It could cement this advantage through participation in new construction projects. The oil and gas sector’s close relationship with Primakov paid dividends following his appointment as Foreign Minister, and they may have moderated his earlier apparent concern over interim participation. The lobby’s influence was also assisted by the emergence of new institutional fluidity where personal access to key policy entrepreneurs and high-level officials became more relevant than any legitimate

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96 Ibid, p. 12.
97 Lo, (2002), p. 34.
99 Pain, p. 192.
100 Menon, p. 120.
policy responsibilities. The oil and gas sector was particularly adept at cultivating relationships with those that mattered.

Again, however, policy adaptation was motivated less by a desire to improve conditions for integration, than it was to better protect Moscow’s own interests. The actual negative impact on integration became increasingly less important than securing Moscow’s stake in Caspian energy development. Subsequently, activism increased throughout 1996 and Moscow’s approach to delimitation negotiations became more determined and resolution-driven. The fruits of this labour were seen that November, when a draft Russian proposal suggesting extending national economic zones to 45 miles, found favour with all except Azerbaijan. Though this proposal also benefited Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan, manipulation of transit issues certainly influenced their agreement. The degree to which Russia’s increasingly self-serving approach diverged from the earlier MFA policy was also demonstrated by the refusal to pump oil from Kazakhstan’s Tengiz field until a 44% equity stake was signed over to Russian companies. Kazakhstan even accused Russia of tendering areas that were in its sector. Clearly, development was now the main thrust, even if the official position on delimitation had not yet changed.

Towards the end of the 1990s, participation and a defence of interests through development intensified. Efforts to emasculate potential hydrocarbon competitors by controlling regional development as much as possible grew. Consequently, in 1998 in an effort to secure the best possible compromise resolution for its own economic interests, further policy evolution occurred. Moscow changed its position to favour

104 Statement by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Kazakhstan, annexed to a letter dated 29 August 1997, to the UN Secretary General, UN Doc. A/52/318, September 4, 1997 cited by Polat, p. 155.
105 The MFA position, shared with Iran, remained the official position. This approach was based on joint utilisation and development of resources, identifying the Caspian as a lake and a closed water space and, as such, unable to be subjected to the international law of the sea concerning its partition. See for example: Menon, p. 118 and Mozaffari p. 200.
106 The economic importance of the simply pipelines can be seen in the fact that the taxes and tariff earnings from the Tengiz-Novorossisk pipeline alone over its life were estimated at $20 billion: S.S. Zhitlov, I.S. Zonn and A.M. Ushkov (2003), The Geopolitics of the Caspian Region [Geopolitika Kaspiiskogo Regiona], Moscow: Mezhdunarodnaya Otnosheniya, p. 112.
sharing resources in national sectors, something that may also have been influenced by the discovery of more oil in its sector than previously estimated. A rapport developed with Kazakhstan on dividing the seabed on a ‘modified median line’, taking into account both parity in distance and principles of equity. This Russo-Kazakh agreement on demarcation on the northern parts of the Caspian of 6 July 1998 was heralded as a breakthrough in negotiations. Conflict with Azerbaijan was also moderated; Baku saw Moscow’s adaptation as a step in the right direction, and proposed an interim seabed settlement in concordance with the Kazakh agreement, while deferring the issue of the surface waters. Although Turkmenistan remained antagonistic, continued pressure, a lack of leverage and fears of losing out as others resolved their issues meant its opposition was hardly as uncompromising as earlier. With Iran the only outlier, Moscow’s activism and increasingly self-serving approach showed definite dividends in encouraging multilateral reconciliation on Caspian division.

Despite positive changes, however, it remained questionable whether transitional Russia had sufficient resources and ability to bring these political advances to fruition and restrict other developments. Even as some signed agreements with Russia in 1998, a meeting of Central Asian heads of state discussed the formation of a single regional pipeline infrastructure and unified transportation and communications systems. Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan subsequently made a joint statement on their intentions to pool efforts to bring energy resources to world markets, while also indicating they were prepared to step up participation in multilateral and international projects for the construction of transit and export oil and gas pipelines—effectively

bypassing Russia. Russia therefore still faced formidable competition from other actors and the Central Asian Caspian states remained thoroughly unreliable partners, continually shifting goalposts, contradicting promises, and playing Moscow off against the West.

Even observers within Russia questioned its potential, particularly in the face of such determined competitors. An *Izvestiya* article argued that:

“Russia’s inflexible, sluggish policy and its lack of general principles governing relations with the CIS countries will increasingly spur Moscow’s potential allies to look for other routes and other partners. The Central Asian countries’ desire to be as independent of Russia as possible is obvious. And it we don’t pay more attention to our closest neighbours, this tendency will inevitably grow stronger”.

The following month it deplored Russia’s weakness:

“Pressure can be used effectively only by those who have strength-economic, political and military strength. And, what is far more important, intellectual strength. Judging from the fact that the leaders of the Transcaucasus and Central Asia are more and more persistently bypassing Russia as they pave the way to the West for their countries and their resources, our country doesn’t have that combination of strength. Trying to exert pressure without having strength makes one look ridiculous. An individual can afford to do this. But a state, never.”

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112 ibid, p. 2.

The timing of Moscow’s efforts also raised questions about the sincerity of its intentions. As with its responses to Washington’s increasing activity, periodic activism in the Caspian and incentives to remain within Russia’s transit network suspiciously mushroomed whenever Ankara or any of its Western backers, in particular, appeared close to establishing agreements with regional states. Similarly, the persistent domestic intrusions, over politicisation, horse-trading and manipulation, and ineffectual implementation also meant the success of these Russian efforts was limited, even when driven more by the perceived threat to Russia’s emerging oil and gas interests than more egocentric, great power ambitions. Once again, Moscow’s domestic instability and lack of commitment to consensual goals undermined its achievements. However, in this case, policy cooption by actors outside of the MFA ensured some strong gains, even if these did not exactly equate with the official policy of enhancing integration. Instead, Russia treated its counterparts more as competitors, carving out a self-interested, national interest-driven approach that served more the protection of Russia’s economy, exploiting the region, than it did of establishing any substantive, mutually beneficial economic interdependence.

The military-security equation

_Moscow’s commitment to cooperation and re-engagement_

It was equally difficult to establish a consistent, workable approach to security and military cooperation in the region. In the early stages of policy debate, Moscow’s strategy appeared particularly confused. In terms of integration, in particular, seemingly paradoxical policies were adopted. On one hand, Moscow made statements that appeared to demonstrate a desire to maintain, and even intensify, collective defence systems. Russian military leaders openly opposed the idea of national armies, instead hoping to place the bulk of the former Soviet forces under a unified CIS command. Yet quickly, and without warning, this approach was unilaterally abandoned. In March 1992, Moscow instead announced the establishment of a Ministry of Defence and, on 7 May plans to create an independent

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115 Donaldson and Nogee, p.181.
army and establish control over former Soviet armed forces stationed outside Russia.  

Certainly, a national force concept was linked more closely to the reformist strategy, which focused more towards partnership with the West than regional military hegemony. It was also a response to difficulties in maintaining collective armed forces and some states’ resistance to participation. Yet, the Russian government could not abandon entirely the goal of greater future cooperation, given the military’s continued aspirations for regional military integration. The pragmatic compromise was to move instead toward selective integration with those states predisposed to doing so. Accordingly, on 15 May 1992 Moscow signed the multilateral Tashkent Treaty for Collective Security (CST). This treaty served as a ‘framework’ legitimising Moscow’s military-strategic commitment to each of the participants and established Russia as a security guarantor for other signatory states.  

Still, the Tashkent Treaty hardly committed Moscow to anything substantial. Its limited potential and the military’s growing influence subsequently motivated the Russian government to conclude further, more comprehensive bilateral agreements to advance regional military-strategic goals. In May 1992, for example, it signed a Treaty on Friendship, Cooperation, and Mutual Assistance with Kazakhstan, which established a common-military strategic space and provided for the common use of military bases, test ranges, and installations. A May 1992 agreement with Uzbekistan was followed with a March 1994 agreement on bilateral defence cooperation, granting Russia extensive military privileges. In June 1992, a comprehensive Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation and Mutual Assistance with Kyrgyzstan was also concluded. A similarly comprehensive Russia-Turkmen Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation signed in July 1992, envisaged a close intermeshing of the military forces on Turkmen territory with the Russian force structures, which was criticised as turning Turkmenistan into some kind of Russian

116 ibid, p.181.  
117 Shashenkov, p. 175.  
120 Shashenkov, p. 175.
military protectorate. A May 1993 Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation and Mutual Aid with then war-torn Tajikistan continued this trend of substantial bilateral military aid and cooperation. Greater cooperation and integration also found expression in the 1993 Doctrines, along with a reconfirmation of the commitment to multilateralism. The Foreign Policy Doctrine, for example, again professed Moscow’s desire to create a collective defence system. The re-conceptualised official security interests also gave rise to four key policy areas related to integration; the establishment of a joint system of air defence, the multilaterralisation of CIS borders, the creation of a forward positioning network, and the creation of collective peacekeeping forces. As attention to integration mounted and interaction with the region became increasingly security-focused, it even appeared to yield tangible results, though mostly in terms of enhanced bilateral rather than multilateral cooperation.

However, Moscow was unable to sustain this momentum. By 1995, treaties with Uzbekistan had either lapsed or remained blueprints, as Karimov increasingly stressed Uzbek neutrality and referred to “imperialistic” Russian ambitions. Military cooperation was subsequently curtailed between 1995 and 1996, as Tashkent turned increasingly westward. In 1995 Russia-Turkmenistan agreements were also renounced amid mutual recriminations, and Turkmenistan similarly distanced itself from Russia, adopting a policy of neutrality. Although relations with Kyrgyzstan did not suffer such reversals, agreements remained unimplemented. In Tajikistan too, though Russia remained engaged, the relationship failed to develop beyond one of reliance. Kazakhstan appeared the exception to the trend of stagnation, agreeing in 1996 to an integrated military structure. Again, however, little was subsequently achieved to invigorate the rhetoric. At the multilateral level, Moscow, having basically abandoned attempts to establish a Commonwealth security

121 Allison (1999), p. 34.
123 Jackson (2003), p. 65.
124 Lynch, pp. 7-8.
125 Allison (1999), p. 34.
126 Jonson, p. 105.
127 Allison (1999), p. 34.
organisation, subsequently afforded little attention to even the Tashkent Treaty. Of course, it was not all failures or contraction. Russia did retain important specific roles, such as the continued control of border guards,129 and arms provision. The overall trend, however, remained the inability to substantiate or enhance cooperation.

Of course, Moscow was not solely to blame for this situation. The intransigence and unpredictability of its transitional partners, undertaking similar comprehensive transitions, addressing post-colonialism, mobilising nationalism in the pursuit of nation-building, and frantically searching for new regional and international partners, also contributed to failures, certainly made Russia’s task that much harder. Moscow struggled to keep pace with changes. However, the transitional policy-making problems were also a key to the lack of responsiveness and consistency. For example, agreements and intentions often overestimated the commitments Russia could feasibly make in this time of turmoil. In such circumstances, even best laid plans went to waste. However, as elsewhere, the primary constraint was the continued lack of consensus on how to approach regional security, and even on whether greater integration was desirable. What the subsequent policy inconsistencies essentially demonstrated was a divergence between strategic and economic policy, defined as they were by institutions and elites with very different perspectives and priorities.130 While the military and national security elites wanted to draw the ex-Soviet republics closer to create a Russian dominated coalition, their economic counterparts were unprepared to spend a great deal of money to this end or to allow strategic aims, such as binding the ‘near abroad’ to Russia, to hijack economic reform.131 In fact, economic interests went so far as to sabotage resourcing and stall implementation of agreements. Given this divergence of views, it is unsurprising the emergence of a marginal consensus, resembling little more than a temporary rhetorical compromise, did little to harmonise policy or facilitate its implementation.

131 ibid, p. 116.
Even amongst those concerned primarily with security, a considerable divergence of opinion existed concerning security threats, and the role Russia should assume. Differences existed amongst security institutions, and possibly even between the civilian structures of the MoD and the armed forces. Like many nationalist politicians, for example, former border troops commander Andrei Nikolaev favoured a domino theory.\textsuperscript{132} This position, though, was not popular among Russian military officers. While they did not rule out some danger of a spill over of certain conflicts in CIS and Central Asian states, they saw more imminent threats coming from foreign countries.\textsuperscript{133} Moreover, although military leaders certainly recognised the strategic and financial advantages in retaining some key installations and former Soviet military infrastructure, in maintaining an outer defence of CIS borders including a forward air defence system, and in the sharing of military tasks with other CIS states, Russian efforts in the 1990s to create a forward security zone in Central Asia reflected political aspirations for coordination and integration, more than strict military-strategic calculations.\textsuperscript{134} Thus, although the Russian military gained greater policy influence, the policies implemented never fully reflected their desires, but a politicised notion of Russia’s military interests, likely driven more by those on the ground. Unable to construct a meaningful consensus or to impose its will upon all actors, the Yeltsin government instead attempted to placate its opponents with a series of half-measures. The ensuing ‘consensus’ on lowest-common-denominator issues was a compromise in which no group was completely satisfied.

Such tendencies only worsened after 1996, as the quietly resurgent economic liberals worked against expansive and expansionist military policies. Still, Yeltsin’s politicking meant military and conservative figures were periodically rewarded with minor political victories, though these were seldom implemented. For example, although the Russo-Kazakh treaty included provision for a common defence system within a common military-strategic space, its development was constrained by Russia’s reluctance to form regional coalition forces.\textsuperscript{135} Despite its commitment to

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{132} Interview with Andrei Nikolaev, \textit{Argumenty I Fakty} (1995) 27, July 5, cited by Allison (1999), p. 29.
  \item \textsuperscript{134} ibid, p. 49.
  \item \textsuperscript{135} Zagorski, p. 70.
\end{itemize}
border protection too, the government ceased funding for protecting Kyrgyzstan’s borders in August 1998 on economic grounds.\textsuperscript{136} While claiming a commitment to continued intensification of security cooperation then, Russia’s actual policy remained fractured and continually reprioritised.

Still, the appearance of activism was important. Such efforts helped to counteract growing external activism in Central Asia and the region’s drift from Moscow’s influence. Zviagelevskaya, for example, argued the increase in the number of joint defence arrangements was partly explained by concerns over heightened US regional military activity.\textsuperscript{137} Concern also existed over the creation of an anti-Russian alliance along its periphery. Nationalist forces were particularly antagonistic toward NATO, perceiving the PfP programme as an effort to pull these states away from Russia. Despite the fact that PfP participation fell short of full NATO membership, Russian officials warned against Central Asia being viewed within “NATO’s zone of activity”.\textsuperscript{138} Later, Moscow organised the Yerevan meeting of CIS defence ministers and the creation of a military bloc to demonstrate its continuing control over part of the former Soviet empire and to counteract GUUAM’s efforts to become a client of Washington and NATO.\textsuperscript{139} Activism in defence cooperation, even if only in rhetorical terms, demonstrated Moscow’s continued regional commitment. It was relatively inexpensive, and did not commit the liberals to something they could not accept. Moscow could make short-term commitments, which, while remaining unfulfilled in the long-term, made an immediate impact on both its internal audience and the foreign powers it was keen to counter. Concurrently, Moscow was keen to prove its continued relevance to its Central Asian partners, and undoubtedly warn them of limits in their foreign policy independence, particularly where security alliances were concerned.

One area of success, however, was the Shanghai Five multilateral security cooperation body. Born out of 1996’s quinquelateral border agreements, the Shanghai Five was the primary fruit of Russo-Chinese rapprochement. Consisting of Russia, China, and the three Central Asian border states: Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan and

\textsuperscript{136} Allison (1999), p. 54.
\textsuperscript{137} Zviagelskaya (1999), p. 135.
\textsuperscript{138} Allison (1999), p. 39.
\textsuperscript{139} Rumer (2000), p. 15.
Tajikistan, the body contributed to regional cooperation, security and trust. It was also important symbolically, aimed at keeping Central Asia within the Russo-Chinese sphere of influence. By providing an alternative to Western multilateralism, both parties aimed to forestall external penetration and the emergence of an antagonistic alliance on their borders. The expanding mandate over time reflected such aspirations. The Shanghai round of April 1996 discussed security confidence-building measures in border areas. The second summit in Moscow in 1997 agreed on the mutual reduction of military forces in these areas. The third, in Kazakhstan, focussed on promoting regional peace and stability and economic cooperation between members, while Bishkek’s 1999 summit announced enhanced cooperation in combating international terrorism, drug trafficking, and other transnational criminal activities. But for all concerned, Russia included, the Shanghai Five remained a second best option and opportunities for cooperation with the West were still prioritised. It was the symbolism and the astute political use of the body to exact concessions from the West that was more important. It suited too, the minimalist strategy of Russia’s post-1996 ruling coalitions, with less costly compromises to military interests.

As a result, Russia’s military-strategic relations with Central Asia at the end of the 1990s remained unconsolidated and really no more secure than in 1993, when ‘activism’ commenced. By the same token, Moscow had not extricated itself to the degree the reformers initially intended, and some costly commitments remained. Relations with Tajikistan, as will be discussed further, remained the strongest, with Rakhmanov almost entirely dependent on Russian patronage. This situation was hardly ideal. While relations with Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan were stable, both states had scaled down participation in the CST, and no significant advances had been achieved. Turkmenistan, though unpredictable, was increasingly distant from Moscow. Earlier the most eager for comprehensive bilateral security relations, by late 1999 it was unilaterally ending cooperation in guarding the Afghan border. Uzbekistan too, remained unpredictable and unreliable. Though Karimov suggested a

141 ibid.
142 Jonson, p. 109.
143 ibid, p. 106.
trilateral alliance with Russia and Tajikistan in May 1998, and signed the Declaration on Comprehensive Cooperation with those partners that October, his reasons for doing so hardly made Uzbekistan a trustworthy partner. While ostensibly aimed at countering the Taliban threat, the treaty was also directed at domestic enemies with provisions to “coordinate efforts to counter the spread of aggressive religious and other forms of extremism and attempts to use force to alter the constitutional social order from within”. Effectively, Karimov was protecting his regime from internal challengers using Russia’s Special Forces. This was hardly the reformers’ vision, nor a sustainable response to security challenges. Instead, it was a further demonstration of the sporadic, ill-conceived re-engagement and activism, motivated more by the desire to appear to be a relevant regional force than any real endeavours to improve security. Ultimately, real Russian military influence remained precarious and in continual, if only gradual, decline.

Russia’s responses to conflict

Russia’s response to conflict was similarly inconsistent. As conflict surfaced in the ‘near abroad’, questions emerged about what kind of involvement, if any, Russia should have. Consistently, the Westernisers insisted Russia should not become entangled in these conflicts. They preferred internationalising conflict management, citing the economic and political costs of unilateral involvement. They were also aware that Great Power tendencies still bubbled beneath the surface in Russia, and were keen to resist efforts to involve Moscow for the sake of re-establishing regional hegemony. Tempting such attitudes, they realised, could undermine the liberal changes they were seeking to effect. Multilateral involvement with bodies like the UN or CSCE would moderate this potential, share the burden of conflict resolution, and further demonstrate to Western partners Russia’s more cooperative stance and abandonment of imperialist thinking. Outside of these broad principles, however, neither the government nor MFA had well-developed strategies, particularly for the eventuality that international assistance should not be forthcoming.

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The military, on the other hand, pursued a proactive strategy, implementing its own policy line when it failed to moderate that of the MFA. The first real signs of this fragmentation appeared over Transdniestr. With Russian troops still stationed in Moldova, it was no surprise that expectations of some type of involvement emerged once conflict flared. Such expectations were only heightened by regional military commander Alexander Lebed’s preference for active involvement rather than passive observation. With the military pursuing its own Transdnestran policy, the MFA was compelled to abandon non-interventionism and adopt a more forceful line, including formalising the deployment of ‘peacekeeping’ forces in July 1992. This mobilisation also marked the start of more assertive ‘near abroad’ policies generally, wherein the MFA agreed to the use of force within the framework of ‘peacekeeping’, while centrist nationalists abandoned their calls for unilateral intervention.146

However, what underscored this shift was the MoD and other power ministries’ effective cooption of conflict management and ‘peacekeeping’ policy. To do so, the MoD and armed forces, in particular, turned their aforementioned transitional institutional advantages and their continued presence throughout the FSU into political power. With the Russian government lacking a comprehensive strategy, the initiative passed to the military, with real problems between Russia and other CIS members and conflict situations inside those states serving as a kind of springboard for the armed forces.147 Once the initiative had been taken, it proved very difficult to extricate the military. What this meant was that between 1992 and 1996 a division of labour emerged, whereby the MFA was basically sidelined to the role of conveying, rather than formulating, policy, and the subsequent heavy-handed approach of the MoD towards the CIS held sway,148 though it too was often pushed by the armed forces ‘on the ground’ approach. While the MFA viewed peacekeeping as a diplomatic tool representing Russia’s Great Power responsibility for stability in the FSU, and maintained that it represented an activity distinct from traditional combat subject to international precepts,149 the MoD was less discrete in the naked pursuit of

146 Lynch, p. 49.
147 Simonia, p. 62.
149 ibid p. 94.
its interests through peacekeeping and armed intervention.\(^{150}\) It consistently viewed peacekeeping as a means to promote Russian security interests, protect ethnic Russians, and legitimise the Russian troop presence in former Soviet states.\(^ {151}\)

Though the MFA had little option to accommodate the involvement of the Russian military in Central Asia policy, it never entirely conceded defeat, moderating its rhetoric in an effort to disarm the military and reclaim the political middle ground. In reality, the MFA had no real intention of adopting greater interventionism in practice: this was all about perception and depoliticising policy. Consequently, when Kozyrev stated in Fall 1993 that it would be unacceptable for Russia “to pull out completely from the zones of traditional influence which…were won over centuries”,\(^ {152}\) he was not so much supporting the military’s position as hoping to draw support away from it. Other institutions similarly adapted their rhetoric for political purposes, particularly in the lead up to the elections. Yeltsin’s presidential apparatus, for example, also asserted in 1993 that it was both too expensive and impractical to relocate the border troops along Russia’s new frontiers with the post-Soviet republics and that they should simply be left in the existing border installations.\(^ {153}\) Though it may have prevented the complete marginalisation of these institutions, such adaptation had troubling external ramifications. Advocating protection of other states’ borders, for example, was viewed with suspicion by the newly-independent states, awaking memories of Russia’s historical manipulation of internal conflicts that extinguished their independence. And until the military could be more successfully reigned in, which was still some years away, more liberal institutions had to concede to the involvement of Russian troops in Tajikistan and Abkhazia, accusations of covert participation in the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict, and further complicating ethnic tensions in South Ossetia. Critics accused the Russian military of interference and manipulation to keep Western leaning states like Azerbaijan and Georgia weak, preoccupied and dependent on Moscow. And although the military approach

\(^{150}\) ibid p. 96.  
gradually incorporated greater internationalisation of mediation by international bodies, like the UN (Abkhazia May 1994) and CSCE (South Ossetia October 1995), as the armed forces became less a law unto themselves, the military’s ideas of conflict management still differed significantly from traditional Western concepts, arousing suspicions of Russia’s intentions in Central Asia.

It was not until 1996 that changes in the division of labour within the Yeltsin government facilitated evolution of the approach to conflict in Central Asia; a strengthened MFA under Primakov gained power at the expense of the MoD, which was fragmented and in disarray following Grachev’s dismissal. Leadership troubles, debates over much-needed reform, under-resourcing, and the draining, unsuccessful Chechen campaign undermined the MoD’s previous actual and moral advantages. Such reverses saw it increasingly characterised as a backward, reactionary, bankrupt institution, and its reliance on force identified as no longer delivering the gains Moscow sought. Regionally and internationally, the military’s strategy and prolonged involvement in regional conflicts was doing Russia no favours—nor those states in whose conflicts it had intervened. Primakov used these changing dynamics to restore balance between the military and political aspects of peacekeeping, reinforcing more moderate perceptions, and focused Russia on conflict resolution and a strategy more in line with its continued resource constraints. Intensive shuttle diplomacy on his part, for example, contributed to an agreement between Shevardnadze and Abkhazian leader Ardzinba in August 1997. The strengthening influence of the economic reformers and big business interests, too, further rationalised the approach. The prospect of prolonged conflict and instability held little appeal for the reformers. With Moscow subsequently better disposed towards the internationalisation and resolution of conflicts, many of the barriers to peace were removed. And though Russia was not averse to periodic intervention in the following years, given no one group ever completely dominated policy-making, the new, more fiscally beneficial approach to the region demanded a far less overtly manipulative role in conflict.

The Tajik conflict demonstrates this policy transition. Initially, the reformers were unenthusiastic about involvement. They were also quite ignorant about the conflict,

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154 Lynch, pp. 2-3,10.
particularly its Islamic contours. Consequently, they rhetorically supported the
democrats’ struggle against the communists, reflecting their desire to see the
nomenklatura purged and democracy flourish in the CIS.\textsuperscript{155} However, as in Moldova,
Russian troops stationed in the conflict zone were well placed to intervene,
unofficially involving Russia from the outset, supporting the former communists.\textsuperscript{156}
The actual decision to directly involve Russian troops, in fact, seems to have been
made by mid-level and junior military officers of the 201\textsuperscript{st} Motorised Rifle Division,
and as a result of coordination between the Tajik government and local Russian
commanders,\textsuperscript{157} underscoring the military’s independence. During 1992, attitudes
towards involvement in Tajikistan shifted, influenced both by domestic pressures and
developments on the ground. Fear mounted over security of Tajikistan’s porous
border with Afghanistan, given its export of arms, drugs, and, possibly, extremist
ideology. Of all the Central Asian states, Tajikistan was perceived in Moscow as the
most vulnerable to Islamic extremism.\textsuperscript{158} Fears that conflict could destabilise the
entire region were exacerbated by the presence of significant numbers of Tajiks
throughout Central Asia,\textsuperscript{159} the region’s complex ethnic mix, and continued absence
of well-defined borders. Like other foreign policy issues, Tajikistan became entwined
in Russian domestic political competition. Ultranationalist and communist elites, for
example, agreed with Uzbekistan’s warnings regarding instability and Islamic
fundamentalism, invoking these themes to berate the government for failing to defend
a security interest in a vital zone.\textsuperscript{160} Many politicians also referenced the need to
protect the remaining Russian diaspora and forestall a potential flow of refugees.\textsuperscript{161} In
the face of such criticism, Yeltsin’s government was unwilling to appear unresponsive. The MoD’s increasing influence over ‘near abroad’ issues only
increased pressure on the non-interventionist position.

\textsuperscript{155} Jackson (2003), p. 150.
\textsuperscript{156} ibid p. 141.
\textsuperscript{158} Jackson (2003), p. 145.
\textsuperscript{159} Bowker, p. 195.
\textsuperscript{160} Menon (1997), p. 144.
\textsuperscript{161} In 1989 there were 388,000 Russians in Tajikistan, making up approximately 6% of the population,
by 1996 it was about 2% or 100,000: \textit{All-Union Population Census 1989}, Gosudarstvennyi
Komitet SSSR po Statistike (1990), and S. Tadjbakhsh (1996). ‘National Reconciliation: The
145-146.
Recognising the emerging policy contradictions, Yeltsin tasked Kozyrev with coordinating the work of the Ministries of Security, Defence, and Foreign Affairs in coping with the crisis.\textsuperscript{162} This was timely for Kozyrev who, like other liberals, was in the process of moderating his liberalism. Subsequently, in August 1992, Moscow placed the border guards under its jurisdiction.\textsuperscript{163} At the November summit of defence ministers of the Almaty Committee, Russian policy shifted towards engagement and support of the new Tajik government through peacekeeping.\textsuperscript{164} Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, and Kyrgyzstan subsequently agreed to send peacekeepers to protect the border.\textsuperscript{165} Russia, however, bore the brunt of this operation. More specifically, it remained the MoD and 201\textsuperscript{st} Division that effectively called the shots, despite the MFA’s official mandate. MoD thinking effectively became the basis of action, fearing as it did, a regional domino effect should the Rakhmanov regime fall.\textsuperscript{166} This fear contributed to a somewhat myopic, unconditional support for Rakhmanov, irrespective of his regime’s considerable failings. In May 1993, this support was officially manifested in the Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation and Mutual Aid. Regional stability, rather than democracy, had emerged as Russia’s priority.\textsuperscript{167} Policy shifted not only toward greater intervention, but also toward more partisan support of the former communists.

In many respects, however, Russian intervention in Tajikistan was essentially policy by default. It was dominated by the MoD, with a pragmatic resignation by other actors that this was the best Russia could currently manage. Deputy Foreign Minister Georgi Kunadze, for example, saw an alliance with a weak Tajik state supported by Russian troops as the least risky way to ensure defence of the border.\textsuperscript{168} While peace proved elusive, at least primary security concerns were addressed. Policy confusion again became obvious in mid-1993, however, when Russian border post fatalities inspired change. Yeltsin reasserted his control over policy-making and

\textsuperscript{163} Jackson (2003), p. 147.
\textsuperscript{164} Lynch, p. 157.
\textsuperscript{166} Lynch, p. 158.
\textsuperscript{167} Shashenkov, p. 175-6.
\textsuperscript{168} Jackson (2003), p. 163.
took a key step in coordinating its implementation.\footnote{ibid, p. 165.} In August 1993, Kozyrev again began stressing the MFA’s less militaristic approach, publicly stating that, “Russia will not try to make up for the lack of political will for a reconciliation in Tajikistan with the blood of its soldiers, as it once did in Afghanistan.”\footnote{Andrei Kozyrev (1993), ‘What Russia Wants in Tajikistan’, Izvestia, August 4, p. 4, in ‘Tajik Crisis: Russian Diplomats, Military Differ’, in The Current Digest of the Post-Soviet Press (1993) 45 (31), September 1, p. 8.} He again stressed cooperation and collaboration, underlining that Russia could not, and would not, single-handedly defend Central Asia’s interests. Kozyrev also increased overtures to other CIS members, Western partners, and forces within the Muslim world to work with Tajikistan’s neighbours to halt their direct and indirect support of the armed opposition. And, perhaps most importantly, he advocated stepping up the UN and CSCE peacekeeping role.\footnote{ibid, p. 8.} Subsequently, Russia established a formal CIS peacekeeping operation in September 1993, increased its activity in Central Asian security arrangements and promoted an intra-Tajik dialogue to facilitate conflict resolution.\footnote{Lynch, p. 160.} Nevertheless, despite some movement towards multilateralism and demilitarisation, military-dominated strategies remained pre-eminent. The Russian military retained its control if not at the policy formulation stage, then certainly in terms of implementation—something policy-makers in Moscow had little control over. Accordingly, the approach remained somewhat confusing, as Moscow actively promoted its role as a mediator in the inter-Tajik negotiations, while simultaneously supporting the Rakhmanov regime militarily.\footnote{Jackson (2003), p. 165.}

In reality, it was not until after 1996 that more substantive changes occurred. Primakov took a more nuanced approach. His belief that the Islamic threat had been overstated influenced his strategy for conflict resolution.\footnote{ibid, p. 164.} He distinguished between fundamentalists, legitimate actors with whom it was necessary to negotiate, and extremists, with whom only confrontation was possible. He realised that continuing to exclude Tajik Islamists, who actually committed to regional, rather than ideological allegiances, was likely to perpetuate conflict, leading to greater
radicalisation, which could undermine regional stability. With military control over CIS affairs weakening, Primakov and others were able to refocus efforts on actively seeking resolution and reducing Russia’s commitments, rather than maintaining a stalemate. Changing dynamics in Tajikistan also buttressed Primakov’s stance. Throughout 1996 and 1997, the opposition made significant military gains and popular support for Rakhmanov collapsed. Recognising the failing military strategy’s contribution to these developments, and Moscow’s inability to increase commitments to the increasingly shaky regime, policy-makers pushed the Tajik government to sign the 1997 Peace Treaty. Still, there was only so far Russia could extricate itself, given both continued Tajik state instability (and Moscow’s inability to resolve this situation) and the domestic consequences for Russia should downsizing result in collapse. Though Russia’s interventionist forces had weakened, they retained sufficient strength to prevent a complete policy reversal.

The sum result of intervention was that by the end of the 1990s, Tajikistan was, for all intents and purposes, a Russian protectorate. Although Moscow had engineered the peace agreement, stability remained tenuous and dependent on the continued presence of its troops and political patronage of Rakhmanov. Russia was entangled in a situation from which it could not easily extract itself, despite the huge costs involved in staying. These costs only increased once the Uzbek, Kyrgyz, and Kazakh units withdrew in 1998, making Russia again the sole contributor to ‘collective peacekeeping’. Moreover, to ensure Russia’s continued military presence following the impending cessation of the CIS mandate in June 2000, a treaty was signed in April 1999 reorganising the 201st Division and establishing a military base. While there were some benefits for Russia—entrenching its regional position by consolidating relations with a key political ally and securing military basing and forward positioning—this was a costly foothold. In fact, Tajikistan was a weak, unstable partner, offering Moscow little for its huge commitments. Despite continued engagement, too, Russia could do little more than prevent complete collapse or deterioration into war. The minimalist line that resulted from the continued lack of

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176 Continued strong military support allowed Rakhmanov to stall negotiations with the opposition.
177 Jonson, p. 107.
178 ibid.
real consensus in Moscow also meant that although its troops remained stationed in Tajikistan, Moscow invested few resources to countering the threat of Islamic ‘extremism’. Nor was it able to coordinate effectively with Central Asian partners to establish joint security arrangements. Consequently, Tajikistan, the weakest link in Central Asia, had become Russia’s principal ally, and this reflected the weakness of Moscow’s regional position as the century closed. While intervention had broadly achieved much of what the nationalists had sought, the fruits of this labour were much less sweet than expected, and particularly bitter for the reformers who were now presented with the prospect of Russia being locked into Tajikistan for the foreseeable future.

Conclusion

Clearly, then, domestic changes in Russia were mirrored in its relations with Central Asia. The short, but focused, reformist period saw the region practically abandoned as attention turned westward. Central Asia immediately searched for other options, and Moscow’s regional influence was quickly eroded. However, as the reformers’ political control collapsed, so too did efforts to distance Russia from the region. Rising domestic nationalism and domestic upheaval led to competition over foreign policy priorities and inconsistency in policy actions. Although an apparent ‘consensus’ was subsequently established around increased focus on the ‘near abroad’, it was hardly uncontested or consistently applied. Little traction was gained towards the ostensible goal of reclaiming Russia’s sphere of influence. Between 1994 and 1996, as Russia remained mired in domestic political struggles, amid the division of property and formation of new oligarchies and financial industrial groups, Syroezhikin argues that Russia conclusively lost control over events in Central Asia. Though Moscow continued to claim a multi-vectored approach after Kozyrev’s replacement in 1996, continued uncertainty, unrestrained political competition and the resort to an illusion of consensus, meant for all Moscow’s

179 Lo (2002), p. 84.
activism in Central Asia, it could never really substantiate or capitalise on opportunities to maintain or increase its influence.

The unstable, protracted nature of Russia’s post-Soviet transition ensured its Central Asia policy fell short of expectations. Moscow could cite few tangible successes, commensurate with its lofty rhetorical intentions. Clearly, the CIS never truly became the primary focus, and Central Asia remained of peripheral importance. This is not to say, however, that Russia was an entirely disinterested actor, nor that all political forces were willing to simply watch influence deteriorate. Instead, rather than engage in constructive endeavours Moscow, or at least parts of the state apparatus, resorted to obstructive, often reactive, strategies, such as the manipulation of energy transport dependence and intervention in conflicts. Although ensuring continued involvement in the short- to medium-term, these strategies were ultimately self-defeating, proving Russia an unpredictable and unattractive partner. Throughout Yeltsin’s tenure, intermittent fluctuations aside, Russia’s position in Central Asia continually declined. By 1999, any scrap of hegemony was more the result of default than design. While Russia’s Westernisers may have welcomed this development, foreign policy had essentially failed, managing to antagonise most partners and achieved few breakthroughs. It was only following Yeltsin’s departure that substantive change occurred, and it is to this development this thesis now turns.
Chapter six

Russian foreign policy making in the transitional environment – 1999-2008

The direction and contours of Russia’s transition changed suddenly in late 1999 with Yeltsin’s surprise retirement, and the engineered succession of Vladimir Putin. At first, little was known about Putin, given his short tenure as Prime Minister. Opinion about him tended to fall into two categories. Optimists saw his rise as an opportunity to break the transitional deadlock and to advance reform unencumbered by the baggage Yeltsin had accumulated. They pointed to his reformist credentials from working in Anatolli Sobchak’s reformist, modernising administration in St Petersburg,1 and identified a Westernising, economic reform focus in his rhetoric. Pessimists, on the other hand, noted his questionable rise to power, his KGB past, and expressions of statist, authoritarian ideology underpinned by potential neo-imperialism in the FSU,2 as well as his appeal to those who wanted to be tougher on the West.3 They expected that Putin’s rule would actually entail much of the same, or worse—a rolling back of the democratic gains, however inconsistent, made under Yeltsin. In many respects, Putin proved both sides right. Certainly, economic reform was given new impetus, though many still questioned its depth and the sustainability of growth. Politically and socially, while Russia was more stable, there remained a sense that it was a veneer over the same troubles, and that all that maintained stability was Putin’s strong presence. Similarly, in terms of democracy, although Russia did not revert to communism, most agreed that backsliding occurred. For all his protestations of a commitment to democracy, Putin was clearly less inclined to value liberal political freedoms than he was a strong state. At the end of the Putin period, while it was clear change had occurred, its extent, nature and direction were more debated. This chapter examines the significant changes Putin brought to transitional

3 Lo (2003), p. 16.
Russian politics and the specific impact of these changes on the policy-making environment.

**Putin’s foreign policy environment**

**Economic stabilisation**

A key foreign policy issue under Yeltsin was Russia’s dire economic situation following economic liberalisation, both in the direct constraint of resources and the indirect effects on the political environment. Under Putin, Russia returned to a GDP growth trajectory (see: table 3). The foreign trade surplus also expanded: from $76.3 billion in 2003, to $105.9 billion in 2004, $142.8 billion in 2005 and $164.4 billion in 2006.\(^4\) By 2008, it peaked at $201 billion.\(^5\) In part, early recovery was linked to the massive currency devaluation and cheaper price of Russian exports following the 1998 Russian economic meltdown. However, political stability was also important. The recommencement of economic reforms and perception of a more stable investment environment were positive,\(^6\) though the Yukos affair and other signs of political interference still periodically shook Putin’s business friendly image.\(^7\) Greater stability also allowed Putin to capitalise on the most important driver of Russia’s economic growth after 1999—the global rise in oil prices. As an expanding energy exporter, Russia reaped considerable rewards from high oil prices; fuel products including oil and gas reached 53.3% of total exports in 2000,\(^8\) and according to IMF

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\(^7\) A good counter argument that Russia’s increasingly less liberal political state was holding back its economic development is presented in Michael McFaul and Kathryn Stoner-Weiss (2008), ‘The Myth of the Authoritarian Model: How Putin’s Crackdown Holds Russia Back’, *Foreign Affairs* 87 (1): 68-84.

\(^8\) By comparison, manufacturing exports remained low at only16-17%, though this figure did not include considerable arms exports, which are not included in the official statistics: Lesek
and World Bank estimates the sector generated more than 64% of Russia’s export revenues in 2007.  

Table 3: Russian Gross Domestic Product, 1999-2008

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>% Growth</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>6.4</td>
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<tr>
<td>2000</td>
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<td>2001</td>
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<td>2004</td>
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<td>6.38</td>
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<td>2006</td>
<td>8.15</td>
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<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>8.54</td>
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<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>5.24</td>
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Source: www.worldbank.org

While many observers believed that Russia’s inability to diversify would ultimately make recovery unsustainable, in the meantime, the improved economic situation provided Putin with resources for launching and sustaining policy initiatives that were unavailable to his predecessor. More astute economic management and the possession of much-needed energy resources enabled Putin to substantiate his many proposals, meaning they were not only hollow promises so often promised by the Yeltsin government. Better-resourced institutions had greater capacity, improving both policy formulation and implementation. The image of Russia lurching from crisis to crisis, unable to achieve any of its goals began to change, as Moscow strengthened its international position. Russia could now afford an active foreign policy, not just talk endlessly about it. It also meant Russia became a more attractive country to do business with, and more attractive to its neighbours. Less directly, the improving economic situation undercut many of the domestic factors and forces that previously negatively impacted foreign policy making. Although the economic

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10 Berglöf, Kunov, Shvets, and Yudaeva, p. 57.

situation remained challenging, the widespread benefits from economic growth dulled the strongest domestic criticisms of Russia’s direction and the politicisation of foreign policy issues. The sense of pride in Russia’s recovery, too, allowed Putin to incorporate nationalism more positively, meaning Moscow could be less confrontational and antagonistic in its outlook. Putin was fortunate to operate in an economic environment that was less of a constraint on his foreign policy options.

**Greater Conceptual Consensus**

Putin also made considerable progress in stabilising conceptual debates. Under Yeltsin, the ‘Russian idea’—the question of what Russia constituted, what its interests were, and where it was heading—was never fully resolved. Conflicting visions became politicised, and contributed to policy instability. In contrast, Putin was able to develop a synthesised vision of Russia’s place and role in the world, incorporating elements from different ideological strands and, in doing so, restored a measure of consensus on such questions not witnessed since the Soviet period.12

From an early stage, Putin identified nation building a priority. He identified its centrality to all aspects of politics, from policy-making to the survival of the state itself. In particular, he identified the need for a widely agreed set of values to guide state development. Putin claimed that “large-scale changes have taken place in an ideological vacuum. One ideology was lost and nothing new was suggested to replace it”. While insisting that he was “against the restoration of an official state ideology… in any form”,13 he continually referred to the need for a new ‘Russian idea’ and that patriotism, “in the most positive sense of this word”, would be at the core of this new ideology.14 In his view, “patriotism is a source of the courage, staunchness, and strength of our people. If we lose patriotism and national pride and dignity, which are connected with it, we will lose ourselves as a nation capable of great achievements”.15

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12 Lo (2003), p. 16.
Reinforcing this patriotism, Putin advocated a strong political authority [statehood] that could maintain internal order, the integrity of the country and assert its interests abroad.\textsuperscript{16} Putin’s ‘nationalism’ was built on the centrality of state power, and a deep-seated desire to restore Russia’s former greatness.\textsuperscript{17} His re-adoption of certain Soviet symbology, anthems, and refusal to fully denounce the communist period certainly indicated a greater sense of pride in Russia’s past than his Westernising counterparts. His strong rhetoric on the need for Russia to be a respected, strong, independent, multi- vectored international player and key regional power, too, echoed sentiments of the nationalist ranks. Such indications, and remarks that “Russia always felt itself a Eurasian country”, led some observers to believe that the Kremlin was sympathetic towards Eurasianism and that Putin’s accession to power would give the resurgent movement another boost.\textsuperscript{18}

However, Putin’s concept encapsulated greater liberalism than many of his nationalist counterparts. While clearly imbued with a deep patriotism, he had nothing in common with the various trends of Russian nationalist mysticism and was able to marginalise strident Russophilic nationalist statism.\textsuperscript{19} His patriotism actually rejected the exclusivity associated with nationalism, instead encompassing pride in Russia’s diversity, its history and its place in the world—being supra-ethnic and statist—a civic nationalism, pragmatic minimal patriotism lacking nationalist excess.\textsuperscript{20} Despite what some analysts believed, Putin also demonstrated no interest in Eurasianism. As a member of the Petersburg reformers, Putin consistently exhibited Westernising tendencies and repudiated any idea of Russia as a balance holder between East and West, or as a separate civilisation distinct from the West.\textsuperscript{21} Fundamentally he believed that Russia was a European nation.\textsuperscript{22} Although not denying important Asian interests, Putin identified Russia’s civilisational interests as clearly European, stressing on numerous occasions that these included capitalism and democracy, though of Russian variants. Still, his policy was less overtly ideological than his

\textsuperscript{22} Goldgeiger and McFaul, p. 246.
predecessor. 23 While also identifying strong Russian interests in the post-Soviet space, Putin steered away from a neo-imperialistic strategy, 24 and appeared more accustomed to Russia in its contemporary geographical form, shorn of many centuries of imperial gain. However, this was still a Russia to be proud of, and one that would again achieve global prominence, living up to its self-perceptions as a Great Power.

As a consequence, Putin became the first ruler since Nicholas II in 1914 to reconcile Slavophiles and Westernisers in a common patriotic embrace. 25 He managed to articulate a more sustainable vision of Russia than his predecessor that, while imperfect, was a better substitute for communism than opportunistic, antagonistic opposition to the West. Most importantly, Putin succeeded in gaining considerable support for his ‘Russian idea’, which paid significant dividends for his policy-making potential. His success partly lay in the fact that his ‘idea’ was a broad conceptualisation that reached out to diverse groups across the political spectrum. While it was a significant recasting of a non-imperial Russian image, it was not as completely divorced from contemporary realities as the first Westernising strategy. Comfortingly, Putin did not discount all that came before. Moreover, the fact that Putin guided foreign policy successes, convinced many that his ‘idea’ was viable—in contrast to the detracting consequences of the perceived failures of the earlier Yeltsin-Kozyrev ‘idea’. Though disagreements still bubbled close to the surface, and occasionally emerged, Putin’s strong popularity weighed in his favour and meant few could successfully challenge the ‘Putin idea’. Over time, clearly, the liberal elements in this thinking on Russia’s direction decreased. In 2006, as international and domestic concern became increasingly critical about the direction of Russia’s transition and Russia became increasingly concerned about the ‘colour revolutions’, high ranking Kremlin aide and United Russia member Vladislav Surkov delivered a speech that coined a new term for Russia’s political system—sovereign democracy—that was subsequently picked up by important figures in the regime, including Putin himself. Sovereign democracy was defined as:

“A society’s political life where the political powers, their authorities and decisions are decided and controlled by a diverse Russian nation for the purpose of reaching material welfare, freedom and fairness by all citizens, social groups and nationalities, by the people that formed it”.

The concept strongly eschewed external interference in Russia’s domestic politics, defining a Russian variant of democracy. For critics of the Putin regime, sovereign democracy was nothing more than a new label for a ‘managed’ or ‘illiberal’ democracy providing a democratic veneer for the reemergence of a dominant one party system built around United Russia. In specific foreign policy terms, sovereign democracy carried over the concept of rejecting external interference in Russian politics to the ‘near abroad’, where nations should be able to choose their own social and political systems, without coercion. It also backed strongly upholding Russian national interests, supporting multipolarity and opposition to military, economic or other monopolies on power in the global system. Such rhetoric and concepts demonstrated this was a more confident, independent Russia in the eyes of its leadership.

Notwithstanding the concerns raised by these new concepts of Russian political identity, foreign policy benefited from the greater conceptual stability. Whether by agreement or acquiescence, the multitude of ‘Russian ideas’ no longer crowded the policy-making environment, impacting Moscow’s ability to pursue a coherent, consistent policy line. Greater uniformity of purpose emerged, and for the most part this was a country whose leader, at least, apparently had a clear idea of where it was headed. Importantly, this greater clarity also had a positive impact on external perceptions of Russia. Russia was seen as a more decisive, stable, and coherent


international actor than it was under Yeltsin. No longer bogged down in endless debates about what it was, exactly what its interests were, or how to protect them, Moscow had a stronger basis upon which to formulate policy, and a greater potential to successfully operate internationally in pursuit of its goals.

The improved institutional environment

Similarly, the Putin period saw a significant improvement in political functioning, particularly in terms of establishing a more effective institutional system. The most visible change was in terms of stability. While it is important not to overstate the degree to which a fully competent, consolidated and institutionalised system emerged, Putin achieved a great deal. He at least began establishing a normalised, effective political order, with increased intra- and inter-institutional predictability, as well as greater adherence to some commonly held political rules by the majority of political players.

A key aspect of this ‘normalisation’ was the transformation of state power. This transformation essentially included two processes. One involved state reconstitution—improving law, constitutional norms and its operation. A more consistent, predictable, systematic state would facilitate regime consolidation, either in a democratic or more authoritarian direction. The other thrust, pursued under the rhetoric of defending constitutional norms and the uniform application of law throughout the country, was the reconcentration of power. This occurred at many levels, from retrenching regional power and reforming the Federation Council, to undercutting de facto institutional independence. It certainly addressed one of the Yeltsin administration’s key problems: the weakness of central power and inability to enforce its decisions across the political system. From the outset, Putin stressed the importance of recovering state strength. In his first speech, for example, he argued that democracy, a thriving economy and a strong (effective) state depended on one another. The theme remained consistent throughout his term, applied to other issues

28 ibid, p. 89.
29 ibid, p. 89-90.
like the battle against terrorism, though as time wore on it was clear his concept of a strong, democratic state differed from that of his liberal critics. Putin’s vision of Russian democracy, at least for the foreseeable future, was probably more akin to the delegative or illiberal forms of democracy discussed earlier than it was Western liberal democracy, exhibiting a greater degree of centralisation and more restrained competition than its European or American counterparts. Ultimately, however, Putin not only stemmed the erosion of authority that had occurred under Yeltsin, but reversed the process. He concentrated power in the hands in the executive,\textsuperscript{32} within a ‘muscular’ presidency.\textsuperscript{33} The central government was reinvigorated and strengthened vis-à-vis other political actors. The decentralisation of the Yeltsin period—both deliberate and unplanned—was categorically reversed. The central government recovered the ability to enforce hierarchical and horizontal authority. Once again it became an active, confident player, directing the political system, rather than just one of numerous competing political interests. Institutional infighting over policy prerogatives was subsequently replaced by an unparalleled unity of purpose and execution, not so much based on absolute consensus, as much as fearing stepping out of line and risking the wrath of the president.\textsuperscript{34}

Putin’s leadership culture was also ultimately more important than massive institutional reformation. Putin’s relative youth, activism and determination contrasted dramatically with Yeltsin’s problematic, unpredictable political style, and acted to unify the political system. While there were clearly increasing authoritarian elements to his leadership, perhaps more important was that it was authoritative.\textsuperscript{35} Importantly, too, Putin took a great personal interest in foreign policy. This was demonstrated by his diplomatic activism and the fact that he did not require either the advisers or self-confident foreign policy professionals acting under the authority delegated to them that Gorbachev and Yeltsin respectively did.\textsuperscript{36} His efforts to

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\textsuperscript{31} Victor Yasmann (2004), ‘Putin Calls on Security Services to “Curb Terrorism”’. RFE/RL Newsline 8 (237) 20 December.

\textsuperscript{32} Berglöf, Kunov, Shvets, and Yudaeva, p. 56.


\textsuperscript{34} Lo (2002), p. 163.

\textsuperscript{35} Sakwa (2004), p. 236.

empower the Prime Ministerial foreign policy role once in that role only reiterated his interest in a strong foreign policy role. In this environment, one characterised not only by authoritative, decisive decision-making, but a sense of ownership, purpose and direction, previous institutional weaknesses were alleviated, both at the level of individual institutions and across the system as a whole. Putin became the strong central figure the super-presidential system required to work effectively. While his personalisation of politics may not have ensured long-term sustainability and certainly had a negative impact on liberal democracy, in the interim it created a system that at least performed more competently, than previously.

Putin’s authoritative leadership was further strengthened by his widespread popularity. According to opinion polls conducted by VTsIOM, Putin’s approval rating soared from 31% to 78% between August and November 1999. In 2000, he was elected with over 52% of the vote. He increased this to 71.2% of the vote in 2004. While subject to the same fluctuations as any politician, with his popularity falling 22% between January 2004 and January 2005, for example, Putin consistently remained the most popular politician in Russia. Despite growing controversies around his rule, polls consistently showed his popularity rating 60 to 70 percent, climbing as high as nearly 80% in 2007. Importantly, too, in foreign policy terms, 75% of Russians expressed confidence in Putin to do the right thing in world affairs, according to a Pew Global Attitudes Survey conducted in April 2006. Even allowing for the continued weakness of Russian opinion polling, particularly in an environment many considered increasingly authoritarian, such figures are indicative


of a consistently high level of support, however overstated. The engineered election of Dmitri Medvedev in 2008, too, further underlined this support, indicating many Russians’ desire to prolong the stability and growing pride of the Putin period by endorsing his chosen successor and providing for a continued political role for the former president. Putin’s popularity strengthened his authority across the political spectrum, discouraging many from challenging his policies or operating outside their institutional mandates. It imposed greater positive constraints on other political actors to act more responsibly. It also enabled more to be achieved; while Yeltsin’s perpetual unpopularity meant his primary concern was fending off domestic challenges to his authority (and fighting for his 1996 re-election), Putin had the opportunity and inclination to concentrate on real policy issues, like Russia’s international status. The contrast to the Yeltsin period was stark, and it is to a more detailed examination of these changes and specific actors the chapter now turns.

The changing role of the Duma

Perhaps the most obvious sign of enhanced political stability was the normalisation of executive-legislative relations. While Yeltsin had to resort to bullying deputies with threats of decrees and dissolutions, wooing them with material inducements, ruling by decree, or permitting the legal vacuum to be filled by regional acts or government regulations, Putin enjoyed consistent support in both the State Duma and the Federation Council for his policy initiatives. The improved working relationship not only diminished destabilising systemic conflict, but also improved political functioning, increasing constructive legislative activity and improving policy processes.

The transformed situation was strongly influenced by Putin’s popularity amongst Russians. This discouraged many deputies from their previously confrontational stances. Yet, translating popularity into real political capital also demonstrated Putin’s considerable political skill, given he was not formally aligned to any party. To secure himself a supportive legislative majority in the 1999 elections while he was

45 Herspring and Rutland, p. 225.
still Prime Minister, Putin endorsed the newly created Yedinstvo (the Unity Party), creating a strong correlation between his goals and this party’s programme. Subsequently, a vote for Unity in most peoples’ minds was a vote for Putin. In fact, with no programme to speak of and given its leaders were not well-known, Unity’s association with the increasingly-popular Putin appeared the decisive factor in its winning 23% of the parliamentary vote, just behind the communists 24 percent. It also helped that the state media pummelled the anti-Kremlin Fatherland All Russia party who had looked to provide a moderate, non-communist alternative. For the first time, it appeared Yeltsin would have a supportive Duma. However, with his resignation only weeks later, it was Putin who enjoyed this advantage as president. Capitalising on Unity’s success to the degree he did, however, also demonstrated Putin’s political acumen. His adroit manipulation of inter-factional negotiation resulted in a temporary alliance between Unity and the Communists. By 2002, however, Putin had sufficiently shored up his relationship with Unity to dissolve the expedient partnership and move against the Communists. He arranged for their removal from Duma committee chairmanships, thereby eliminating their potential opposition. On 3 April 2002, the Duma voted to remove the Communists from seven of their committee chairs; the Communists then resigned their two remaining chairs in protest. Putin was thus able to do what Yeltsin could not: eliminate the ‘irreconcilable’ opposition, neutralising the most serious threat: the Communists. With a solid bloc of votes behind him, centrists chairing all significant committees and dominating the Lower House’s administrative apparatus, Putin could rely on the Duma’s support for his ‘consensus’ government, reforms and political direction.

47 Moser, p. 67.
54 Unity’s 82 seats, Fatherland-All Russia’s 52, some of Russia’s Region faction’s 55, and also the People’s Deputy group 55 seats.
Increased legislative compliance was also facilitated by reform of the Upper House. The Federation Council was reorganised to consist of appointed senators, rather than democratically mandated regional representatives with independent power bases. Though nominated in the regions, it was under considerable pressure from the presidential administration and allied oligarchs.\textsuperscript{56} Under the new rules, members generally lacked independent resources and were more susceptible to presidential administration influence. This made them generally more faithful to the Kremlin’s interests than to the governors who sent them.\textsuperscript{57} This change reversed prior trends and undermined another potential source of independent opposition. In both chambers, then, Putin was able to “engineer the formation of organised caucuses through which the presidential administration and government could bargain for their legislative priorities, trading off privileged access to the Kremlin in return for reliable voting support”\textsuperscript{58}. While support for Putin and his agenda may not have been entirely unconditional, this mattered little for the sake of political stability. Putin effectively engineered the further emasculation of both chambers’ policy influence that Yeltsin’s constitutional amendments had already significantly downscaled. This restricted, compliant legislature would have much less impact on policy, positive or negative, reducing the uncertainty inherent in democracy and in democratising regimes, in particular.

The 2003 and 2007 parliamentary elections only further consolidated a cooperative legislative role. Following the 2003 elections, the Duma was controlled by an expanded United Russia (306 of 444 deputies), dominated by former federal and regional civilian and \textit{silovik}\textsuperscript{59} bureaucrats, and representatives of state enterprises and Kremlin-allied private business elites.\textsuperscript{60} Though the overall voting percentages between pro-government and ‘systemic opposition’ forces remained about the same (37\% and 25\% respectively), the same votes that went to the Communists in 1999

\textsuperscript{57} Remington (2003a), p. 43.
\textsuperscript{58} ibid, p. 53.
\textsuperscript{59} \textit{Silovik} refers to those currently or formerly employed by the security or military services.
\textsuperscript{60} Hahn (2004).
were shared with Rodina, the Agrarian and Pensioners’ Parties.\textsuperscript{61} This meant that although the simple division of power had changed little, the opposition vote was now spread amongst a greater number of contenders, making a cohesive opposition bloc more difficult to sustain. Facing a more fragmented opposition, the Unity Party’s voting discipline and cohesion reinforced Putin’s power base within the Duma. In 2007, nearing the end of his permitted two consecutive terms, Putin’s association with United Russia became closer, pre-empting his joining the party in order to prolong his political life as a potential Prime Minister. Subsequently, United Russia captured 64.1% of the vote, the Communists 11.6%, LDPR 8.2% and A Just Russia 7.8%.\textsuperscript{62} Putin’s favoured party retained its strong grip on parliament and Putin retained his control of a pliant legislature.

The foreign policy outcomes of this transformation were considerable. For all its setbacks and frustrations under Yeltsin, the legislature continued to play a prominent role in political life. Under Putin, the legislature’s ability to impact and transform policy was circumscribed.\textsuperscript{63} More often than not, the Unity-dominated parliament merely yielded to the executive’s demands: a ‘loyal opposition’ at the service of the president.\textsuperscript{64} A demonstration of this service was the passing of the Kyoto Protocol in late 2004. Despite months of conflicting statements from throughout the political system, including a recommendation from the Duma Foreign Affairs Committee that Russia not sign up, the Duma ratified the controversial treaty on Putin’s endorsement. The circumscription of the Duma’s political role certainly had some positive effects, particularly in reducing politicised parliamentary incursions into policy-making and subversion of foreign policy initiatives. However, while legislative predictability led to more stable and consistent process, the democratic impacts were questioned. Critical voices argued that that the Duma became little more than an extension of the Kremlin—a ‘transmission belt’—rubber-stamping executive initiatives, confirming the view that Russia was becoming a ‘managed democracy’—something more akin to the illiberal or delegative democracies discussed earlier than a liberal, truly

\textsuperscript{61} The protest vote also grew somewhat (by 3-5% points) predominately to the benefit of the LDPR, while support for the liberal parties fell by 1-2% points: Ilya Ponomaryov (2003) ‘Destabilising Power’, \textit{The Moscow Times}, December 11, p. 8.


\textsuperscript{63} Lo (2003), p. 40.

\textsuperscript{64} \textit{ibid.}
competitive democracy. The Kremlin also utilised the Duma in a more calculated manner. It became a mouthpiece for views that Putin wanted the outside world to consider, but preferred himself not to express. Most commonly this was used to voice dissatisfaction in relations with Washington, while Putin himself stressed cooperation, or give expression to Russian concerns over agreements like Kyoto, to extract concessions, while Putin played the liberal saviour, moderating ‘domestic extremists’. Subsequently, while the Duma appeared an open forum of debate, it was actually operating in a more pseudo-democratic way, communicating aspects of unofficial executive opinion and policy limits to attentive external foreign audiences. Where the legislature was now a foreign policy actor it was in a more subdued, controlled manner as a tool of a dominant executive.

Changing struggles for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Another of Yeltsin’s foreign policy victims was the MFA—so much so that many observers no longer identified it as the pre-eminent foreign policy making institution. As well as suffering from the unpalatable reputation of its three Foreign Ministers, the MFA was undermined by numerous transitional constraints and challengers. The improved political environment under Putin, however, facilitated improvement in the MFA’s role. With the worst internal upheavals over, and a sense of normality and procedure returning to politics, institutions like the MFA were able to focus more on strategic planning rather than solely crisis management and response, both in terms of specific policy questions and their own political roles. Merely having a sense of leadership and focus within the political system also inspired institutions to work more effectively. There was greater direction and purpose, and institutions were more certain of their responsibilities and less troubled by opportunist political entrepreneurs. Institutional reforms and the aforementioned reversal of Yeltsin’s decentralisation of the federal system with the establishment of the new Federal Districts saw key challengers the like Russia’s federal subjects and the military

67 ibid, p. 33.
68 Of course, challenges like the low pay of government bureaucrats continued to be a challenge in attracting and retaining staff, as did insufficient flexibility, and the fact some bureaucrats were given jobs in the Foreign Ministry to remove them from other areas of policy: Interview with Vyacheslav Amriov, Institute of World Economy and International Relations (IMEMO), Moscow, 27 November 2003.
(discussed below) lose much of the political and foreign policy independence they had previously enjoyed eroded. While this did not result in the MFA’s foreign policy dominance, by settling previous competition over mandate such changes also assisted it to stabilise its role. It could respond more effectively to the diverse pressures placed upon it, and successfully protect its own institutional prerogatives. Of course, like all bureaucratic agents, considerable improvement to ensure efficiency and effectiveness was still demanded, something Putin himself noted. In an address to the Federal Assembly in May 2003, for example, he criticised the bureaucracy, arguing it “has proved itself poorly prepared to develop and implement the decisions our country needs today”, but “good at obtaining benefits and revenues through use of its powers and position”. Of course, Putin’s strong political presence was also a double-edged sword for the MFA. While his foreign policy interest delivered increased resources and higher status for foreign policy, Putin also perpetuated and intensified the concentration of foreign policy within the presidential apparatus. His competent but un-charismatic Foreign Ministers (Ivanov and Lavrov)—diplomats and bureaucrats rather than politicians—were easily overshadowed by his own activism and leadership. Ironically, then, the MFA’s greatest challenges now probably came from the president, acting as if he was the country’s Foreign Minister.

Still, despite the fact the MFA was still frequently sidelined, Bobo Lo argued that it was not reduced to a secondary or insignificant foreign policy-making actor. For one thing, the MFA remained a large institution whose specialist expertise in a vast range of areas, meant it retained significant power. Secondly, although it may not have been the source of creative ideas, it exerted a significant influence as a ‘braking mechanism’—a conservatism that was particularly influential when political consensus was lacking. Thirdly, the MFA’s longevity, amongst a range of more transient actors meant although it did not prevail on all issues, defeats were rarely decisive. Finally, the MFA, like other institutions, adapted to the changing political

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70 Lo (2003), p. 33.

71 ibid.

72 ibid, p. 34.
and institutional climate, tailoring its activities and advice accordingly. Ultimately, although the MFA did not reach its prestigious pre-Yeltsin heights and influence, it had to deal with fewer challengers: under Putin foreign policy became more concentrated in the Foreign Ministry and the Presidential Administration. The more constrained political environment, with a narrower range of competitors and interest groups, was one in which the MFA could operate more successfully. The MFA could now be assured of a more stable role, constrained in the main part only by Putin himself.

Re-defining the role of the military and security services

One of the primary challengers to the MFA’s role under Yeltsin, the military, experienced significantly different fortunes under Putin. Putin appeared more willing to impose civilian control over the military, something that had earlier appeared tenuous, through such actions as replacing the MoD’s leader Igor Sergeev with his own political ally Sergei Ivanov. Concurrently, however, Putin worked consistently to reanimate the military and improve its image. His initial successes meant the disheartening picture of material degredation, identity crisis and cultural marginalisation suffered in that latter part of the 1990s changed quickly during the second half of 1999. Though Putin’s Chechen war was not ultimately the resounding success it first appeared, initial advances positively affected the army, in particular. The war helped restore its integrity, improve its social standing, forge for it a new identity, and secure coherence in its professional culture. The restoration of Soviet era symbology, harking back to a more glorious past, also sought to rehabilitate the military’s image and morale. Putin first restored the red flag as the symbol of the Russian army and then in 2002 restored the red star as the emblem of Russia’s armed forces, both acts that also tried to reconcile elements of the past with Russia’s future in some positive way. For critics concerned about Russia’s democratic trajectory, such actions made Putin look to be an apologist for the

73 ibid.
74 Interview with Vyacheslav Amirov, Moscow, Thursday 27 November 2003.
77 ibid, p. 127.
communist past at best, and as priming Russia for a return to authoritarianism at worst.

Putin’s moves were more than symbolic, however. Between 1999 and 2000, military spending grew from 109 to 143 billion roubles—from 17.2% to 21% of the budget. In 2001 it increased again, to 219 billion, though this was only 18.8% of budget, and again in 2002, to 282 billion.\(^79\) After 2001, the only year that the budget for military procurement did not increase was 2004, when just 119 billion roubles were allocated.\(^80\) By 2005, however, spending returned to a growth trajectory when 432 billion roubles ($15.4 billion) was planned for the maintenance and equipping of military and security forces—30% more than in 2004—201 billion roubles of which was directly devoted to arms procurement and research and development.\(^81\) The military budget continued this growth through 2005-2008, increasing by 27% in 2006 and 30% in 2007. Much-needed reform, so long stalled because of Yeltsin’s deferral of internal military issues to its leaders in return for their unquestioning support, was also given new impetus. Sergei Ivanov’s appointment to oversee this task indicated Putin’s commitment, given Ivanov’s image as arguably the second most influential politician in Russia.\(^83\) In an address to parliament in May 2003, Putin listed the modernisation of the armed forces as one of the country’s top three priorities, stating that by 2007 Russia’s paratroops, marines, and infantry forces would be entirely comprised of contractual volunteers—a professional military.\(^84\) To back modernisation, the government also approved a re-armament programme in 2007 through the year 2015 with a $240 billion budget.\(^85\)

\(^79\) Baev, p. 127.  
\(^81\) According to General Vladislav Putilin, the Head of Economic Development and Trade Ministry’s Defense Programs Department in Lyuba Pronina (2005), ‘Wasteful Arms Spending Under Fire’,\(^82\) The Moscow Times, January 20, p. 7.  
\(^82\) Plans were for 44% to actual procurement, 22% toward repairs and upgrade works and 34% toward research and development of new weapons systems, ibid p. 7.  
\(^84\) Victor Yasmann (2003c), ‘Putin Sets Military Modernization as a National Priority’,\(^85\) RFE/RL Newsline 7 (93), 19 May.  
Still, though Putin helped restore the armed forces, its ability exercise the active foreign policy role it had through to the mid-1990s continued to decline. The improvement of the Russian military was to be a long road. Increased funding would take time to address the far-reaching, decade or more long military decline. Although defence spending constantly increased, the military still had little to show in terms of actual arms purchasing by the middle of the decade.\(^{86}\) Initially, much of the increased funding instead went to paying debt, arrears, and dealing with emergencies like the Kursk sinking, rather than modernisation.\(^{87}\) In 2001, Aleksei Arbatov, Deputy Chairman of the Duma’s Defence Committee, noted that no more than twenty percent of the Russian army’s weapons were modern.\(^{88}\) The same year, the Defence Minister announced that given the country’s economic situation, it would not be able to increase spending to the level required to reequip until 2008-10.\(^{89}\) Reform, too, had limits of success. Though the military’s social and political image was rehabilitated, internal change was not comprehensive, and problems like draft evasion and hazing remained troublesome.\(^{90}\) Turning the military into modern, professional forces met a great deal of resistance. The perceived failure of the military’s intervention in events like the Beslan school hostage crisis, too, with the subsequent death of more than 380 civilians at the hands of Islamic militants and the ongoing grind in against the insurgency in Chechnya, made it clear that this transformation would be more challenging that initial successes had indicated. Perhaps in recognition of this, in late 2003 Putin apparently backtracked on earlier timeframes, signalling the government’s intention to transform only *one-half* of the army to volunteer status by 2007.\(^{91}\) Thus, clear constraints to military influence remained, not least of which was the continued focus on internal reform.

However, it would be incorrect to surmise that the military’s influence was diminished altogether. Though certainly the MFA won out where issues were more

\(^{86}\) Pronina, p. 7.
\(^{87}\) Baev, pp. 128-9.
\(^{90}\) Baev, p. 129 and McDermott (2007).
political than defence oriented, the military remained influential in certain foreign policy areas. For example, it appeared to remain a leading player in strategic disarmament, where its technical expertise assured it an equal carriage and status with the MFA in negotiations. It was also clearly influential in the later 2000s when America’s European missile shield plans were announced. What was clear, though, was that institutions like the military were working more to role and in their area of speciality under Putin, rather than exploring policy ‘free-lancing’ as they had under Yeltsin. It was also more clearly the bureaucratic structures of the military (the MoD) that influenced policy, rather than forces on the ground, indicating intra-institutional discipline had also been improved. Such moves increased respect for the MoD as an effective political actor, involved where it was appropriate. Putin’s keen security interest and the elevation of security issues on the foreign policy agenda likely also increased scope for the military to influence policy-making constructively. Putin and the military’s views more often converged, meaning there was a lesser need for the military to challenge official policy as actively it did under Yeltsin. Instead, its interests were incorporated and addressed more imperceptibly, during the policy making process. Though significant differences existed between Putin, the MFA and MoD on many strategic issues, such as the early alignment with Washington following September 11, the MoD pragmatically realised there was more to gain from cooperation with Putin than by challenging him. Thus, unlike the Yeltsin period, when the military’s fitful incursions and unsanctioned external excursions destabilised foreign policy, the clearer division of roles and responsibilities meant Putin could now rely on the military as an instrument of foreign policy, rather than a fearing it as an architect or competitor to the governmental line.

For many observers, the apparent decline of military influence was balanced by the growth of other security institutions. While Putin certainly brought a number of liberals into powerful positions, he also brought many from the security services—the siloviki. Domestically, commentators argued that these forces were behind policies odds with democracy, such as those related to restricted media freedoms, greater controls over civil society, and the more aggressive methods in the battle against

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92 Lo (2003), p. 35.
93 Ibid.
terrorism. Yet, despite suspicions, it remained unclear exactly what foreign policy roles these groups played. What was clear was that the Putin administration’s greater emphasis on security matters increased the scope for experts in these bodies to influence policy. Moreover, Putin’s own security background likely meant he had a natural tendency to rely on the security apparatuses for information and advice. Still, a monolithic view of these groups could not be taken, neither in terms of their influence nor the interests they pursued. While some individuals and institutions from the security field mattered, others did not, and in the personalised political environment, importance itself could be a temporary commodity. Putin also appeared characteristically wary of becoming overly reliant on any self-interested policy actor. He fought hard to ensure that no particular group captured presidential policy, the security services included. Again, his personnel choices suggested efforts to regulate their influence. Recognising the security services’ important contribution to certain aspects of policy, he was also keen to avoid interference where their expertise was weaker and could ultimately hinder his broader goals or lead to costly diversions from pragmatic economic policies.

In concrete terms, changes in the roles of key security agencies did occur. While the Security Council continued to experience mixed fortunes, generally speaking, its role appeared to decline. In May 2003, for example, Kommersant Daily noted that the Council mainly prepared advisory documents for the president, most of which were quickly forgotten, and characterised it as weak. The same year FSB head Nikolai Patrushev expressed frustration with the Security Council’s inability to define border policy. He noted that the 30 September meeting was the twentieth time the Council had discussed the issue in the preceding decade. Such criticisms demonstrated frustrations with the Council’s perceived ineffectiveness, and potentially explained its less visible policy role. After Putin’s own tenure as head in 1999, the Council’s leadership changed four times (Sergei Ivanov 1999-2001, Vladimir Rushailo 2001-2004, Igor Ivanov 2004-2007, and Valentin Sobolev 2007-2008). This possibly

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94 ibid, p. 36.
97 Victor Yasman (2003g), ‘…As FSB Director Focuses Attention on Southern Borders’, RFE/RL Newsline, 7 (187) 1 October.
indicated efforts to inhibit any consolidation of power in the Council or its secretaries to challenge Putin. Whatever his actual motivations, Putin’s management of the Security Council, minimised its foreign policy role, weakened its influence over executive power, and refocused it to a more clearly advisory role.

In contrast, the FSB (while likely always a long-standing behind-the-scenes player) gained more visible foreign policy responsibilities. Putin’s 2003 reorganisation of the FSB saw it comprised of departments of Counterintelligence, Protection of the Constitutional Order, Military Counterintelligence, and the Border Guard Service. These encapsulated considerable foreign policy responsibilities, particularly in the CIS with assumption of the former Federal Border Guard Service’s functions. The FSB itself was also active in advancing its foreign policy role. For example, when it could not wholly subsume the SVR (Foreign Intelligence Service), it created its own department for gathering foreign intelligence and operating abroad, entering the field previously dominated by the foreign intelligence service and military intelligence. The FSB was a clear winner in this complex foreign policy equation. In an environment where foreign policy making shifted away from transparent processes it is hardly surprising that a secretive organisation like the FSB, where Putin had long worked, was favoured over more political security bodies.

The dominance of the presidential administration

The growth of the presidential administration under Yeltsin and its duplication of policy-making processes contributed to the belief that it was centralising policy making within its own structures and presidential advisers were capturing key policy areas. The perception of the presidential apparatus as an alternative Foreign Ministry was strengthened by such events as the attendance of presidential peace secretary Sergei Yastrzhembsky at the 1997 Yeltsin-Hashimoto summit, rather than Foreign Minister Primakov. Initially under Putin, many observers argued this trend continued. They pointed to reforms establishing seven Federal Districts within the

100 Lo (2003), p. 37.
administration, Putin’s separate meetings with ‘power ministers’, economic ministers and other members of the Federal Government, meant to indicate the Prime Minister’s nominal power compared to his own, as well as the fact that many Yeltsin-era officials survived the presidential change, among them Alexander Voloshin (presidential administration head), Yastrzhembsky, and Sergei Prikhodko (foreign policy adviser). Concerns were raised over this continued dominance, given the presidential administration’s lower level of expertise compared to the MFA; something illustrated by the flawed proposal for resolving the Moldova crisis, or the decision for Putin to attend the Organisation of the Islamic Conference against MFA advice. However, the absence of a sizeable autonomous information base, the small size of the administration’s foreign policy office, and limited personal and institutional knowledge of international economic issues, also restricted the administration’s influence to selective issues rather than substantively contributing across the board.

Other factors also undermined any presidential administration foreign policy dominance, particularly in Putin’s second term. For one, where it was previously advantaged by its relative unity and better access to the president in comparison to other actors, greater political stability eroded some of this advantage. Other institutions were increasingly able to regain functions it had previously appropriated. Significantly, Putin also signalled reform of the presidential administration shortly after re-election. His confidence in the government meant the administration could afford to lessen some of the duplication of the government’s work. Alexei Zudin of the Centre of Political Technologies argued that:

“…the administration acquired these functions in Boris Yeltsin's era, and it retained them under Putin. The presidential administration was both the curator and the controller of the

101 See for example Dr. Stanislav Tkachenko’s discussion on the presidential administration: Stanislav Tkachenko (2005), ‘The Institute of President in the Russian Federation’. Database for Business and Public Administration. Available at: http://www.balticdata.info/russia/politics/president.htm (Accessed 1 January 2011)
103 Interview with Georgii Kunadze, Institute of World Economy and International Relations (IMEMO), Moscow, Monday December 1, 2003
government, which has not always been compatible with presidential power. However, such compatibility has been achieved, the government and the President speak the same language. The presidential administration can now be relieved of technical functions and its political functions can be strengthened”.

Importantly, Putin’s popularity, political management and constraining of political pluralism also reduced the need to divert policy-making to the presidential administration in order to avoid policy sabotage. His close management of the political system, drastic improvement in the efficiency of policy-making processes in the executive itself, including careful preparatory work to minimise opposition from within the state bureaucracy and important external interests, reduced the Kremlin’s reliance on loyal parliamentarians, and contributed to success in advancing his legislative programme. Putin simply had less need to circumvent the political process, either to advance his goals or remain in power—something that only positively influenced policy predictability, though this was also clearly at the expense of representative, truly pluralist politics.

A growing role for the economic ministries

Economic ministries also gained in standing under Putin. Though previously they had some influence, Yeltsin’s swings between reform and nationalist detours meant it was only ever intermittent, and often downplayed. Putin’s increased reference to economic interests, his ‘economisation’ of priorities, and the more visible role of economic experts in his government, however, reinvigorated the economic ministries. The influence of economic figures was most pronounced in two areas, both priorities in Putin’s foreign policy: firstly, regarding interaction with Western economic and financial institutions, particularly on priority issues such as Soviet-era debt and accession to the WTO and; secondly, on obtaining Western support for economic reforms, and recognition of Russia as a full market economy. Given his own lack of expertise and the security service’s inability to advise suitably in such areas, Putin

107 Lo (2003), p. 36.
recognised the need to utilise specialist expertise.\textsuperscript{108} In terms of actual institutions, the liberal, pro-free trade Economic Ministry\textsuperscript{109}, headed by German Gref between 2000 and 2007, was the major driving force behind WTO accession, and also managed legislation concerning trade regulation and economic reform. The Finance Ministry shared the liberal economic agenda, with responsibilities for managing Russia’s foreign debt and interests in Russia’s participation in foreign financial markets.\textsuperscript{110} These bodies’ pro-trade, integrationist policies were clearly visible in the Putin administration’s external economic policies, with the MFA also promoting Russian economic interests abroad, if in not quite as an overtly liberal fashion.

While recognising the importance of economic recovery and global integration, and perhaps even subjugating many ‘traditional’ interests to these goals more than his predecessors, Putin was careful to nurture the image of his continued pre-eminence over the economists. Their role was as part of the policy process in their area of expertise; not as the dominant group holding all other interests captive, as characterised portrayals of the early Yeltsin period. The interests of economic ministries were also more successfully reconciled with other ‘traditional’ national interests. This meant the pursuit of their advice did not necessarily contradict the interests of sectors guided by more Realist or geopolitical mindsets—such as in the area of hydrocarbon resources where security and economic interests gradually converged. However, tensions did remain. For example, Deputy Prime Minister and Finance Minister Aleksei Kudrin argued in January 2008 that Russia's foreign policy was “pragmatic, and very often…seen [in the West] as…hostile”. He proposed adjusting foreign policy goals to guarantee stable investment.\textsuperscript{111} Moreover, the lobbying unity of the economic ministries should not be overstated: there often remained differences and inter-institutional tensions. In addition, there often existed a disjuncturce between the ministerial line and the views of middle- and senior-level

\begin{footnotes}
\item[108] ibid.
\item[109] Officially the Ministry of Economic Development and Trade. The Ministry of Economy merged with the Ministry of Trade to form the Ministry of Economic Development and Trade under the order of President Vladimir Putin in May 2000. German Gref was appointed Minister of the agency upon its conception.
\item[111] Patrick Moore (2008), ‘Finance Minister says Foreign Policy Should be “Adjusted”’, RFE/RL Newsline 12 (20), January 30.
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bureaucrats. Importantly, however, these intra-institutional cleavages, as well as the ways in which the institutions themselves pursued their foreign policy interests, now had a less disruptive impact. As with other interest groups, both inside and outside the government, the influence of the economic ministries became ‘normalised’ and clearly subjugated to the President himself, if never fully consolidated in an entirely predictable, formal manner.

The influence of non-governmental actors

The growing role and coordination of big business

Business groups had also long worked to explore their interests through foreign policy. In fact, one of the hallmarks of the late-Yeltsin period was the political influence of the so-called ‘oligarchs’. Under Putin, the role of the oligarchs changed considerably, though perhaps not as comprehensively as the Kremlin portrayed. Recognising public antipathy towards the oligarchy, Putin immediately sought to demonstrate that his was not an administration controlled by big business. His anti-oligarchical image was promoted throughout his rule, perhaps to balance his strengthening links to the economic sector. Early campaigns against high-profile oligarchs Boris Berezovsky and Vladimir Gusinsky were backed with later attacks on Platon Lebedev and Mikhail Khodorkovsky. The oligarchs were an easy target. Their perceived emasculation contributed greatly to Putin’s domestic popularity.

Following Khodorkovsky’s arrest, for example, Putin’s poll ratings rose from an already high 70 percent to an impressive 80 percent. Still, there was evidence these were more than cynical publicity stunts. Moves against the oligarchs had to be well-timed, even opportunistic. Few interests, particularly those of the economy, were served by a radical, sustained campaign against big business. The basis on which

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113 The economic wealth of the oligarchs should not be understated. A 2002 report by Peter Boone and Denis Rodinov, two analysts for Brunswick UBS Warburg, found that the oligarchic apex of the private sector out-earned the state in 2000. The biggest state-controlled companies—Gazprom, RAO EES, Sberbank, and Svyazinvest—posted revenues of $47 billion; the top eight FIGs (Financial Industrial Group) hauled in $62 million, Daniel Kimmage (2003a), ‘Power and the Money, Money and the Power…’, RFE/RL Business Watch 3 (17), 13 May.
Putin did act was a pragmatic deal cut with the oligarchs soon after coming to power. Putin promised he would not interfere with their businesses or renationalize state resources as long as they stayed out of politics. Those who refused to abide by these new rules were the ones to suffer. In attacking a few, he was disciplining the rest. For example, Khodorkovsky's financial shenanigans were hardly exceptional. However, like Gusinsky and Berezovsky before him, it was the criticism of Putin and ‘audacity’ of his direct political interference, supporting opposition parties and candidates, that made him and his Yukos subordinates targets.

Still, the oligarchs and ‘big business’ remained important political players, if only due to their immense size and wealth. In fact, the growth of the super-rich continued unabated under Putin. In 2003, some observers estimated that more than 70% of Russia’s $330 billion gross domestic product remained controlled by just twenty conglomerates. Certain oligarchs were also growing more powerful, poised to gain control of remaining state assets, including the electrical system and the oil pipelines. By 2008, it was reported that there were more than 100 Russian ‘dollar billionaires’, a number second only to the US. Moreover, as the oligarchs became more business-like and corporate in their outlook, they moved to diversify their interests abroad. In 2007, Russia’s outward direct investment had reached an all-time high of US $48 billion, and it was now increasingly global in outlook.

Examples include Oleg Deripaska’s Basic Element holding company, controller of aluminium giant Rusal, made a series of acquisitions abroad, including stakes in General Motors, Magna International, the Canadian auto parts group, and Hochtief and Strabag, the German and Austrian construction groups. With such wealth and expanding

123 Parfitt.
regional and global reach, the oligarchs—like big business anywhere—sought and expected foreign policy influence, particularly given their potentially instrumental role in Putin’s primary task of rebuilding Russia’s economy.

Putin himself recognised this growing symmetry between his own economised interests and big business. He afforded the oligarchs continued significant attention, though in a more managed fashion. He met regularly with the Russian Union of Industrialists and Entrepreneurs (known informally as the ‘oligarchs’ trade union’), whose members accounted for more than 70% of Russia’s gross domestic product, discussing important issues such as diversification of the economy. Names such as Lukoil, Surgutneftegaz, Sibneft, TNK-BP, Norilsk Nikel, RusAl and Alexei Mordashov’s Severstal joined state-owned giants like Gazprom, RAO EES, Rosneft, and pipeline monopoly Transneft in lobbying for policy influence. They also went further, seeking influence through the direct role of their representatives. Roman Abramovich (Sibneft) and Aleksandr Khloponin (Norilsk Nickel) both became regional governors, situated within the halls of power. This meant that big business exerted by far the greatest influence on foreign policy of all non-government players—to a great degree because in a very real sense, it was inseparable from government. In certain areas, at the level of individual priorities like oil production and export, Caspian Sea development, and delivery of gas to Europe it was obvious that they remained strong and growing players. At the same time, however, their relations with government became more formalised and distant. While Putin met regularly with business leaders, the days of oligarch dominance were over. The replacement of Gazprom director Ram Vakhirev with Alexei Miller, and the Yukos

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127 Ibid.
dismantling were clear demonstrations that the politicians (and Putin specifically) were in charge. It was also evidence to some that the rule of law and private property rights remained tenuous and that the delineation between public and private was becoming somewhat blurred by the regime. As if to underscore this, increasingly, those who benefited most in terms of foreign policy influence, were not only those who abided by the new rules, but those who were willing to work constructively with Putin to coordinate state and private interests to deliver key strategic outcomes, as examples in Central Asia will later demonstrate. In this way, the involvement of big business in foreign policy became more constructive. Despite the changes in the overt political role of the oligarchy, it was not to say that their foreign policy influence declined. In fact, in certain areas it may even have strengthened, though it was in far less controversial and visibly self-serving ways than before.

The role of civil society

For other non-governmental interests, however, trends were not as favourable. For one thing, civil society remained troublingly under-developed. Near the end of Putin’s first term, though a civil society of sorts existed if measured by the quantitative development of public and associational life, taking a more qualitative measure found civil society wanting.\textsuperscript{130} It remained ‘embryonic’ and could “only to a very limited degree define the domestic or foreign policies of the state”.\textsuperscript{131} In reality, few impediments facing the development of a vibrant civil society had been substantively alleviated. For example, despite economic improvement, the economic situation remained a constraint. People generally remained unwilling to participate in NGOs or devote time to foreign policy problems, instead concentrating on daily struggles and economic advancement.\textsuperscript{132} Unsurprisingly, the social-cultural legacies

\textsuperscript{130}Richard Sakwa cites qualitative measures such as the “autonomy of social actors, their ability to intervene effectively in decision making processes, to mobilise public opinion in a way that can change the approach of public authorities, the reach of the public sphere in all the far-flung regions of the country, and indeed in the ability of civil society to modify traditional notions of public order, to ensure the impartial application of law, and to ameliorate its own pathologies”, see Sakwa (2004), pp. 126-7. See also:\textit{ NGO Sustainability Index for Central and Eastern Europe and Eurasia.} (2009) Washington D.C.: United States Agency for International Development, pp. 182-187.


\textsuperscript{132}Interview with Vyacheslav Amirov, Institute of World Economy and International Relations (IMEMO), Moscow, Thursday 27 November 2003. Interview with Sergei Lounev, Institute of World Economy and International Relations (IMEMO), Moscow, Monday 1 December 2003.
of authoritarian demobilisation and totalitarianism also remained problematic. Deeply ingrained behaviours and attitudes melded with contemporary struggles to form cultural habits unconducive to the expansion and intensification of civil society.

As Putin’s term unfolded there was also evidence that independent civil society was under sustained attack. Though not discussed in depth here, tightening NGO regulations, crackdowns on dissent, reduced media freedoms and campaigns against leading civil society groups, sparked further political disillusionment and discouraged the growth of a stimulating civil environment or mobilised, politically active citizens. Institutional constraints compounded these problems. Though the increasing stability could be expected to improve civil society capacity to influence policy, the accompanying re-centralisation tended to extinguish these opportunities. Instead, the process further insulated the state from such influences. The centralisation of foreign policy in the executive branch and presidential administration, for example, further isolated foreign policy from public processes and accountability. Nor were great advances made in making the state apparatus more responsive to public demands. The establishment of a Public Chamber of Non-Governmental Organisations (2005) during Putin’s second term was widely criticised. It was seen as a further way of restricting and controlling social influence, rather than as a method of “feeling the pulse of society”, creating extra, direct links to society or encouraging the growth of stronger civil society bodies as the administration claimed. For its critics, it demonstrated efforts to introduce even more circuitous paths into policy making for societal interests and efforts to carefully manage representative structures. That the proposed chamber’s functions clearly overlapped those of the legislature also illustrated the value placed upon the legislature’s representative functions and ability to transmit broader societal interests. As discussed previously, the Duma itself had been further subjugated to the executive. In its manipulated, marginalised state it simply did not provide accessible routes into policy making for civil society. This new body would do nothing substantively change this situation.

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133 A good round up of these issues can be found in Human Rights Watch 20 (1) (2008), ‘Choking on Bureaucracy: State Curbs on Independent Civil Society Activism’, February.
The sum outcome of these developments was that meaningful civil society influence on foreign policy remained low. As in the Soviet and Yeltsin years the wider public had neither the interest nor the means to involve itself seriously in international affairs. Even where active, few NGOs managed to carve out a sufficiently sustainable, predictable relationship to enable them to advance their interests, particularly as suspicion of independent bodies increased in Putin’s second term. While some non-governmental interests, such as the academic and think tank community retained a modest role, it was not as a community as such, but at the level of individuals and their relationships with key policy-making figures. It was this personalised, informal—though still unpredictable—mode of advancing interests that generally remained most effective. Ultimately, because of such constraints and increased centralisation, critics claimed that two-thirds of the foreign policy community was excluded from policy influence under Putin. Thus, although stability in some ways improved the opportunities for independent civil society bodies to interact with the state, many old constraints remained. New barriers also meant such relationships remained limited. Ironically, perhaps, while civil society was limited by the weakness of the state under Yeltsin, in many respects, it was now the growing strength of the state under Putin that constrained its growth and effectiveness. Still a lower influence also lessened opportunities for unpredictable, destabilising civil society incursions into foreign policy.

Elections also failed to improve as sites for conveying societal influence onto foreign policy making. Most importantly, foreign policy issues remained only peripheral election issues. In the 2000 presidential election, for example, foreign policy did not figure highly, except in so far as a vote for ‘opposition’ forces had the potential to redefine external relations. Exactly what foreign policy path Putin would pursue was unclear. Instead, it was what Putin symbolised that was important—the end of revolution and a volatile period in recent Russian history. Putin’s lack of a record as a public leader effectively allowed voters to project onto him their wishes...

135 Lo (2003), p. 42. Interview with Vyacheslav Amirov, Institute of World Economy and International Relations (IMEMO), Moscow, Thursday 27 November 2003.
136 Ibid, p. 41.
137 Interview with Georgii Kunadze, Institute of World Economy and International Relations (IMEMO), Moscow, Monday December 1, 2003
138 Interview with Vyacheslav Amirov, Institute of World Economy and International Relations (IMEMO), Moscow, Thursday 27 November 2003.
and desires for the future. Understanding this mood within the electorate, Putin and his campaign managers deliberately refrained from articulating a programme or set of policies before the election. To more nationalist voters he was perceived as someone who would stand up to the West and assert a more independent line, for liberals he was a Westerniser committed to Russia’s global integration. While not clarifying which constituency he would represent was politically shrewd, this meant that even if voters were making decisions based on foreign policy direction, their preferences were essentially meaningless—it was just as likely that they were not voting for someone who would actually represent their interests at all.

If Putin’s predispositions became any clearer before the 2003 parliamentary or 2004 presidential elections, it was to reveal a strategy so pragmatic and all-encompassing that voters could still find in Putin anything they desired. Any nationalist concern that Putin was too pro-Western was offset by his stronger regional focus and diversification of external partners. For liberals, his successes in relations with the West and international ‘normalisation’ could not be tarnished by occasional deviations from this Westernising direction. Overall, while considerable misgivings existed over such issues as perceived acquiescence to Washington, specific foreign policy issues remained of marginal importance. It remained that voters were mainly concerned with Russia’s political and economic transformation to a market economy—rather than with foreign policy issues.

Thus, Putin’s *domestic successes* ensured his re-election. These relegated external concerns to the periphery. The high level of trust in Putin also inspired many voters to leave him to his own devices in foreign policy matters. A 2004-2005 poll found that 61% of citizens believed Russia’s international position had improved under Putin, while only 5% felt it had declined, indicating most approved of his actions. Still, Russians remained focused on domestic issues, with the same poll finding 20-30% of Russians rarely followed external events. While they may have broadly supported his foreign policy, for a large amount of people the specifics were not really that important. Even support for

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142 Vladimir Rudakov (2005), ‘Test for the West’ [‘Test na West’], *Profil*, 21 February, p. 25.
the return to a global superpower role was hardly a specific policy, but rather an aspirational goal that all manner of strategies could support.143

Similar factors explain foreign policy issues’ minimal significance in parliamentary elections. Party campaigns and manifestos overwhelmingly focused on domestic issues and were short on foreign policy specifics.144 Instead, where foreign policy did enter electoral calculations was again as part voters’ perceptions of party strategies. Parties that would be expected to take a more nationalist or statist foreign policy line (the Communists) and the centrist (Unity, Fatherland All Russia) were most successful, while the ‘extremists’, both the highly liberal Westernisers (Yabloko and Union of Right Forces) and more aggressive imperialist parties (Zhirinovsky Bloc), had more limited support.145 However, this was only a tenuous link. Moreover, parties themselves tended to remain focused domestically. What did become clear was that even if voters were voting for a preferred foreign policy approach, they would have been disappointed. For even though Unity might have espoused a nationalist line to attract votes, its unqualified support for Putin once in parliament saw it ensuring the passage of a more pragmatic strategy in practice, with significant Westernising elements included.

In the 2007 parliamentary elections, the Putin-United Russia146 association was further strengthened in voters’ minds, when Putin ‘accepted’ the offer to head United Russia’s candidate list. Similar nationalist-statist themes were also stressed in the campaign, though the Ukrainian and Georgian ‘colour revolutions’ saw these again take an increasingly anti-Western vein and external factors take a more prominent place in electioneering. In a speech to supporters that November, Putin said that he had agreed to head the party list in order to prevent the Duma from becoming “a collection of populists paralysed by corruption and demagoguery”, as in the past. He

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143 Two thirds of Russian voters supported this goal according to VTsIOM: Vladimir. Rudakov, (2005) ‘Test for the West’ [‘Test na West’], Profil, 21 February, p. 27.
145 Election results can be found on the Centre for the Study of Public Policy, University of Aberdeen, Russia Votes website. Available at: http://www.russiavotes.org/duma/duma_elections_93-03.php?S776173303132e07a36100a76f6ca95874a8e21da6d1d7 (Accessed 4 January 2011)
146 The re-named Unity Party.
warned supporters that Russia’s stability and peace were still threatened by three groups: the supporters of Soviet-era politicians, the supporters of former president Yeltsin, and “those who scavenge outside foreign embassies, foreign diplomatic missions, [and] rely on support from foreign foundations and governments.” He further warned that members of such groups were campaigning for parliamentary seats and staging demonstrations as taught by Western advisors in the hope of “restoring the oligarchs’ regime based on corruption and lies”.147 While United Russia’s landslide victory (garnering 64.3% of the vote)148, may have benefited from this tough anti-Western rhetoric, the uneven media playing field and new electoral rules made it harder for smaller parties to gain publicity and win seats were also factors. However, in reality this rhetoric was hardly carried over into foreign policy. Though there was certainly increasing tension with the West, United Russia continued to support Putin’s pragmatic and predominantly cooperative approach, based on prioritising integration to maintain economic growth. Thus, even where foreign policy considerations potentially influenced parliamentary electoral choices, they again meant little when it came to implementation. In part, this stemmed from the legislature’s minimal foreign policy role. But it was also partly due to the continued indifference of elected officials to their electorate and evidence that notional constraint remained underdeveloped as a moderating force on Russian decision makers.

The representativeness and quality of electoral outcomes was also a problem that did little to improve during the Putin period and potentially declined further. The main problem was not so much see widespread electoral fraud and ballot stuffing, per se, but the increasingly pronounced manipulation and use of the state to manage elections to deliver the outcomes most favourable to the Putin administration, as had earlier been seen in Yeltsin’s successful 1996 presidential campaign. By the time of the 2007 parliamentary elections, this management of elections had become a well-oiled machine. In their analysis of these elections, observers from the Council of

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148 Election results can be found on the Centre for the Study of Public Policy, University of Aberdeen, Russia Votes website. Available at: http://www.russiavotes.org/duma/duma_today.php (Accessed 4 January 2011)
Europe, the OSCE, and the Nordic Council criticised the placement of most governors, as well of the president, on the United Russia list as “an abuse of power,” the use of government resources to support United Russia, and “widespread reports of harassment of opposition parties.” They believed the active role of the president turned the election “into a referendum on the president” and that it was difficult for voters to make informed choices because “state-funded media failed in their public mandate to offer balanced and objective coverage.”

Like other areas of the regime, then, the electoral system became increasingly managed and less liberal, with opportunities to truly influence politics and the administration’s policy directions more limited and circumscribed.

The continued underdevelopment of the party system, too, did little to help this equation or transmit societal influence into foreign policy making. Putin did, however, take steps to transform the party system after expressing concerns over party development at an early stage. In his July 2000 state-of-the-nation address, Putin suggested that “perhaps only public and political associations should have the right to nominate candidates to the post of head of state”, hoping to stimulate the development of a party system that had more impact on political processes. To this effect he signed a law on parties in 2001.

Ostensibly, this reform sought to improve their quality and influence, by consolidating the prerogative of parties as representatives and the only actors with access to elected position, while reducing their number and making them genuinely national organisations through membership restrictions. Further changes in the 2007 elections intended to enhance the Duma’s stability and cohesion by increasing the parliamentary threshold from five to seven percent.

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152 Under the new law, parties must have a membership of no fewer than 10,000, with a minimum of 100 members in at least 45 regions, and 50 members in each of the remaining 44, see for example: Sakwa (2004), pp. 114-15. An amendment in 2004 saw this become membership of 50,000, with a minimum of 500 in half of the regional branches, and not less than 250 in each of the remaining regional branches. See: ‘Federal Law No. 95-FZ of July 11, 2001 on Political Parties’. Available at: [http://www.legislationline.org/documents/action/popup/id/4375](http://www.legislationline.org/documents/action/popup/id/4375) (Accessed 4 January 2011)
However, critics questioned Putin’s motives. They argued that Putin’s ‘stability’ model was hardly a pluralist or inclusive democratic political system characterised by bounded uncertainty. Rather, it was a managed, top-down democracy. His political system appeared to be one in which a pro-Kremlin party dominated, with weak opposition parties on its right and left to provide safe outlets for political dissent. With United Russia casting itself as Putin’s parliamentary pawn and criticism of Russian democracy growing, rather than trying to stimulate independent party growth, the administration apparently instead created a left-leaning alternative—A Fair Russia. Though formed from three existing left leaning parties (Rodina, Russian Party of Life and Russian Pensioner’s Party) and claiming to be in opposition to United Russia, its unqualified support for Putin confirmed suspicions of its actual independence. In this controlled system, parties only weakly transmitted societal demands upward onto policy-making; they were more pawns for the Kremlin to manage politics within a veneer of pluralism.

Moreover, these measures were unlikely to make a great difference, given most of the institutional, attitudinal, and economic constraints to party development had not been ameliorated to any degree. The survival of Yeltsin’s super-presidentialist system and the fact that real decision-making power remained independent of parties, meant few incentives for party development existed. Though some changes were initiated near the end of Putin’s term, with efforts to devolve power outside the executive to his new role as Prime Minister, at least while president he had limited use for parties. The powerful role of governors too, as leaders of non-party political machines, meant they occupied most local political space and left little room for parties. The continued narrowness of media space also worked against parties, making it difficult for most to disseminate their message or acquaint themselves with citizens. Although stronger ‘parties of power’ were formed, they lacked clear ideologies and consistent policies, other than supporting anything Putin put forward. Consequently,

157 ibid, p. 10.
while the party system was certainly more stable under Putin, parties were hardly independent, weakly integrated into society, ineffective in representing social interests and projecting social desires, divorced from real political power, and thus unable to substantively influence foreign policy in any meaningful way.

Changes in the external environment

Putin’s arrival in power provided an opportunity to transform Russia’s external environment, if not necessarily by improving Moscow’s ability to mould transforming global dynamics, then at least by normalising external perceptions of Russia and improving relations with those powers most central to its security. Importantly, too, changes to political functioning had the potential to reduce the distorted domestic value of external events and thus make coherent, de-politicised responses more likely.

Relations with Washington, always of key importance to Russian perceptions of the external environment, initially remained unchanged. Contacts remained cool, the tendency following 1999’s Kosovo crisis. Clinton’s June 2000 visit did little to improve this situation, with relations entering a holding pattern until it became clear who would replace him.\textsuperscript{158} When this was known, it hardly appeared promising. Bush’s new team—Condoleezza Rice, Donald Rumsfeld, and Dick Cheney—made it clear that they were intent on downgrading relations, characterising Russia as politically, economically and militarily ‘washed up’\textsuperscript{159}. Overtures for a leaders’ summit were resisted. Rumsfeld refused to meet Sergei Ivanov at a 2001 international security conference where he did meet with NATO leaders, something that was interpreted as being based on a desire to avoid discussing strategic issues, and signal that he saw Russia as less important.\textsuperscript{160} Such actions indicated a challenging path ahead. However, it was not simply indifference, but also a sense of threat that came with the new administration. Rice referred to Russia as problematic and a possible enemy, while the Pentagon’s Nuclear Posture Review identified Russia as one of

\begin{footnotes}
\footnote{158 Herspring and Rutland, p. 233.}
\footnote{159 Peter Truscott (2004), \textit{Putin’s Progress}. London: Simon and Schuster, pp. 270-1.}
\end{footnotes}
seven countries that presented a potential threat. A spying scandal in 2001 did little to assuage such impressions. The Bush administration also signalled its intention to pull out of the 1972 ABM treaty, to continue supporting NATO’s expansion into Russia’s former sphere of influence, and demonstrated a certain degree of disregard towards the UN, one of Moscow’s last levers of international influence. It was also highly critical of Russia’s Chechen campaign, and political direction more generally. This was a confident, self-assured US administration, more unilateralist in its outlook; at best disinterested in Moscow, at worst seeking to further isolate it. If Putin was hoping to improve Russia’s external environment by improving its relations with Washington, early signs were discouraging. They gave him little collateral to sell a new Westernising effort domestically.

As relations with Washington stalled, however, Putin devoted considerable energy to establishing warmer ties with European leaders. He focused particularly, though not exclusively, on Britain, France and Germany in an effort to improve previously strained relations. Despite greater normalisation and a general consensus that Putin was a better leader to deal with, however, considerable hurdles remained, including Chechnya, continued EU-Russia issues—particularly with its prospective members, NATO’s advance, concerns over Russia’s democratisation, and Russia fatigue in European capitals. Despite efforts by European leaders to put a calm face on matters, Russia remained an ‘uncomfortable guest’ at G7 banquets. While cautiously extending the possibility of greater cooperation and less antagonistic than Washington, Europe remained cautious. Moscow had played the “this is a new era of relations” card before, and most actors wanted to see evidence of change before responding too eagerly. While not an adversary, Russia was still not considered an ally.

It was a similar story elsewhere. Certainly, Putin brought greater activism to foreign policy. His early foreign policy was ambiguously polygamous, seeking allies

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161 ibid, p. 272 and 292.
163 Herspring and Rutland, p. 233.
from Pyongyang to Ottawa and all points in between.\textsuperscript{165} But while welcoming this activism, few believed he could deliver all he promised. They saw little departure in his pragmatic political prostitution from Yeltsin’s desperate efforts to offset Russia’s decline with ultimately meaningless, rhetorical ‘strategic’ partnerships. Russia had hardly reversed the massive decline of its previous global reach. It remained constrained and mostly a subject of external influences, rather than a vector of change. Thus, while the external environment had begun to improve, it remained challenging, as Moscow remained somewhat isolated, mistrusted, with few real friends and little real capacity to comprehensively transform these tendencies.

In 2001, this situation changed. After June’s positive Ljubljana summit, Washington began to speak of a “partnership between allies”.\textsuperscript{166} However, it was September 11 that radically changed Russia’s external environment. While also facing a potentially heightened terrorist threat as a part of the Western, industrialised world in the disaster’s immediate aftermath, September 11 provided the opportunity and impetus needed to comprehensively transform relations with the international players most central to Russia’s own security perceptions. Practically overnight, it created a basis for cooperation that did not exist previously. Once Washington had targeted Afghanistan for retaliation, Russia became a vital partner in the battle against terrorism.\textsuperscript{167} In America’s search for global partners, earlier indifference declined, and a more pragmatic approach emerged, including softened criticism of Moscow’s Chechen policy. Symbolic of this change was the signing of the Declaration on the New Strategic Relationship in May 2002, in which Moscow and Washington declared that an era in which they saw each other as an enemy or strategic threat had ended.\textsuperscript{168} Again in 2004, a joint statement was signed reaffirming mutual commitment to fight terrorism in all its forms,\textsuperscript{169} indicating that despite differences, cooperation remained the dominant trend. Relations with Europe, and even NATO, also warmed considerably. At Tony Blair’s initiation, a joint council of the 19 member states and Russia was formally endorsed in Reykjavik on May 14,

\textsuperscript{166} Truscott, p. 275.
\textsuperscript{167} Derluguian (2001), p. 6.
\textsuperscript{169} ibid, p. 151.
2002. Russia, it appeared, was being welcomed wholeheartedly into the West. This was an opportunity that Putin believed Russia could not afford to lose, and his specific efforts to capitalise on these events will be discussed in the following chapter.

Still, not all in Russia viewed the situation so positively. A sizeable proportion of Moscow’s political establishment maintained that September-11 was more damaging than beneficial to Russian interests. In his survey of ‘The World After 11 September’, for example, Primakov insisted that little had changed except America’s improved geopolitical position in Central Asia and the Caucasus and the increased dangers of US unilateralism. Most importantly, despite rhetoric of cooperation and partnership, it was obvious this relationship was based largely on expedience and that underlying, fundamental issues remained unresolved. As the war in Afghanistan advanced more quickly than expected, these differences resurfaced. Washington’s position on Chechnya, in particular, again became more critical, a revival that many Russians perceived as a betrayal of the post-9/11 ‘understanding’. Although the subsequent war in Iraq prompted Washington to renew efforts to narrow the gap between the two countries’ understandings of the Chechen problem, differences over this war again increased tensions and renewed feelings of Russian disappointment. While the relationship recovered, Bush’s perception of an enhanced mandate to pursue his ‘morally’ driven foreign policy following re-election, again signalled troubling times ahead. Relations remained punctuated by problematic issues like future nuclear arms limits, Washington’s plans to deploy anti-missile systems in Europe and perceived interference in the CIS. ‘Partnership’ certainly became increasingly tenuous and the rhetoric of both capitals became increasingly antagonistic, with Moscow accusing Washington of unilateralism and the US stressing Russia’s backsiding and ‘neo-imperialism’. However, while critics noted consistent signs of decline and potential crises, the leadership of both nations

170 Herspring and Rutland, p. 245-6.
173 Azizian (2003), p. 153,
remained sufficiently pragmatic to identify the continued benefits to preventing relations deteriorating into a new Cold War.

Relations with Europe, while more stable, remained troubled by the same, persistent issues. Of course, the biggest concern was continued NATO expansion into former Soviet territory, regardless of Russian sensitivities. Such actions proved to those critical of the improved external environment that greater NATO cooperation with Russia simply aimed to placate Moscow while the inevitable expansion continued. As Russia’s domestic and regional behaviour became more offensive to the US and other Western democracies, certainly European criticisms increased. However, Western European leaders were less critical of Moscow than Washington or their newer East European EU and NATO counterparts. Some critics put this moderation down to Western Europe’s growing dependence on Russian hydrocarbon resources. Growing trade and the strategic importance of Russia as ‘lever’ on certain issues with an increasingly arrogant Washington also entered considerations. Moscow, too, recognised the softer European stance and tailored its approach accordingly. This mutual pragmatism meant Moscow remained more welcomed in Europe than in Washington, though critics both in Russia and Europe also argued that the problems with relations indicated it was in reality no more a part of the West than it had ever been. Substance to partnership remained wanting.

Regionally, too, Putin’s Russia continued to face an environment of considerable instability, but one that had improved somewhat. Certainly, few of its neighbours had moved closer to democracy, and for the most part regional conflicts remained frozen, rather than resolved. Still, for all its long-term inadequacies, deepening authoritarianism in the short-term shored up some previous instability and frozen conflicts were ultimately better than continued fighting. Declining integration with its former Soviet counterparts also meant that Russia was slowly becoming, if still not completely divorced, more insulated from destabilising regional influences. While significant numbers of Russian speakers remained outside Russia’s borders, too, sufficient time had passed for these populations to become naturalised or to migrate, making their delicate situation a less pressing concern for Moscow. The advances of

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The Taliban and growth of Islamic fundamentalism in Afghanistan, however, were viewed with concern. Given the large Russian Muslim population and contiguous nature of ethnic and religious brethren across still porous borders, many argued this was the major challenge facing Russia, and one that was only exacerbated by its support of the corrupt, increasingly authoritarian regimes.

Following September 11 this regional environment also changed. On one hand, some analysts identified the fall of the Taliban as a stabilising factor. Federation Council Foreign Affairs Committee Chairman Mikhail Margelov, for example, expressed the opinion that “I am absolutely certain that if the United States had not come into Afghanistan, then we would have had to do so ourselves in order to defend our security from the Taliban”. Pragmatists saw that Washington’s increased presence in Central Asia could also share the burden of guaranteeing stability there. Certainly, increased regional attention from various quarters had the potential to mitigate some of the contributing factors to the growth of fundamentalism, such as poverty and governance issues. For critics, however, increased Western activism was confirmation of efforts to encircle and disempower Russia. If US military basing in Russia’s ‘backyard’ was not evidence enough, the ‘revolutions’ in Georgia, Ukraine, and Kyrgyzstan bore hallmarks of subversive intervention to foster pro-Western governments and further undermine Russia’s regional influence. Certainly, the governments that emerged were far less friendly towards Russia than their predecessors. Moreover, even for those less inclined to see conspiracy theories or perceive activism in a zero sum ‘Washington wins, Moscow loses’ manner, questions existed over the extent to which America’s increased presence would actually diminish, rather than exacerbate the growth of fundamentalism and other social ills.

Such contrasting conceptualisations of the changes in Russia’s external environment were, as previously, based in differing perceptions of national interests and the best way to protect them. Under Yeltsin, such differences destabilised policy-making, as transition dissolved the boundaries between the external and domestic spheres, and politicisation undermined the government’s ability to make decisions.

178 Interview with Vyacheslav Amirov, Institute of World Economy and International Relations (IMEMO), Moscow, Thursday 27 November 2003.
based predominantly on external dynamics. Importantly, from an early stage, Putin had greater success in separating the two spheres, insulating responses to external stimuli from potentially disruptive domestic politics. As discussed, there were simply fewer points through which opponents could influence policy-making, given the decline in institutional fluidity and competition, and important changes in comparative domestic power relations. Moreover, Putin’s dominance meant few actors were willing to openly challenge his vision of the external environment. However, this is not to say that external events had no relationship with the domestic sphere. Though direct social input may have been low, Putin was keen to demonstrate the toughness of his foreign manoeuvres to his constituency, stirring the Russian nationalism that he had so successfully harnessed. While his actual external actions were seldom as uncompromising as his rhetoric, like Yeltsin, his ability to actually back up his bluster, unlike his predecessor, meant his rhetoric certainly did not seem as hollow.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the foreign policy making environment under Putin transformed dramatically. Whereas under Yeltsin the destabilising consequences of comprehensive reform undermined consistent policy, regime transition came to matter less in the formulation and implementation of foreign policy under Putin. Economic recovery improved the state’s capacity to achieve its goals, and mitigated one of the major sources of opposition to the government and reform. Though precise, clearly articulate conceptualisations of identity and national interests were still lacking, greater agreement on important strands of these arguments emerged. Putin’s conceptualisation of the ‘Russian idea’ appealed to a broader cross section of society, and established a more stable conceptual basis for policy. Perhaps most importantly, though, Putin transformed the institutional, political environment in which policy-making occurred. Two main, interconnected, factors were at play. For one, the entire political system became more tightly controlled, even authoritarian, than it had been under Yeltsin. As with other managed or illiberal democracies, a smaller range of actors were able to influence foreign policy making and their
involvement was more predictable, directed and constructive.\textsuperscript{179} Subsequently, foreign policy became less politicised. It shifted from the previously reactionary nature where it catered more to immediate political interests, to a situation in which a greater long-term focus was apparent. While political stability certainly came at the cost of liberal democracy, most Russians did not really care. After years of upheaval, stability was welcomed. Even internationally, while democratic leaders publicly expressed misgivings about Putin’s democratic credentials, most were also undoubtedly thankful for the greater consistency and coherence he brought to foreign policy.

The second factor, something that contributed to the successful imposition of the more authoritarian regime, was increased personalisation around Putin himself. Putin’s widespread popularity, active leadership, successful installation of loyal staff and ministers, and vast political acumen and skill made it possible to tame the chaos that Yeltsin never could, and really capitalise on the super-presidential system that his predecessor instituted but never successfully harnessed. Putin not only had the structures to ensure he was at the heart of every important political process, but also the political weight and standing to ensure others fell into line. In the bigger picture, Putin’s re-authoritarianisation essentially gave a sense that consolidation around a core set of rules and values was occurring; that the rules of the political game were becoming more generally agreed and adhered to, and that regime transition was coming to an end. However, the excessive dependence on Putin for stability, both institutionally and politically, made the system inherently unsustainable and potentially dangerous. Like other highly personalised and non-democratic regimes, with the key to acquiescence and stability focused on one political figure or institution, questions would remain about the regime’s ability to reproduce and sustain consent under conditions of change. While it was not challenged in the short-term, as Putin delivered consistent successes, once these successes began to falter its ‘consolidation’ certainly began to look less inevitable. For now, however, the focus

\textsuperscript{179} While a number of academics focused on the negative aspects of the more limited foreign policy transparency during the Putin period, former Deputy Foreign Minister Georgii Kunadze saw this as a positive step away from the excessive transparency of foreign policy making under Yeltsin: Interview with Georgii Kunadze, Institute of World Economy and International Relations (IMEMO), Moscow, Monday December 1, 2003.
remains on the greater stability Putin’s changes brought to foreign policy, and it is to these the following chapter now turns.
Chapter seven

Putin’s foreign policy from a global and regional perspective

As the initial contours of Putin’s foreign policy emerged, it appeared little had conceptually changed from the late Yeltsin period. The three major foreign policy documents promulgated in Putin’s first year perpetuated this perception; the National Security Concept (January 2000), the Military Doctrine (April 2000) and the Foreign Policy Concept (June 2000). Formulated predominantly under Yeltsin, these documents drew strongly on previous strategic thinking and were coloured by events like the 1998 economic crisis, NATO enlargement, the war in Kosovo, renewed conflict in Chechnya, disagreements over strategic arms control, and generally more tense relations with the West. Their tone was subsequently more pessimistic and antagonistic. The National Security Concept, for example, replaced ‘partnership’ with the West with a greater emphasis on more limited ‘cooperation’.1 The new Military Doctrine abandoned ‘no first use’ of nuclear weapons and hinted at the forward deployment of troops outside Russian territory, sparking concern over renewed expansionism.2 While these documents were similar to foreign policy statements in being highly contradictory, their re-assessment of the external environment certainly reflected the views of a large part of the political elite and captured the political atmosphere in Moscow at the turn of the century.

The Global Context

From an early stage, however, Putin demonstrated a keen interest in greater foreign policy activism in which he himself, unlike Yeltsin, took a leading role. In his first 18 months in power he travelled widely, pursuing an “ambiguously polygamous”

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policy. He visited many of Russia’s former Soviet partners in the ‘near abroad’, a range of states in the ‘far abroad’, including Britain, Canada, South Korea, Japan, India, and China, as well as more controversial former partners like North Korea and Cuba. While this activism was generally internationally well-received, most were sceptical any new activism would be substantiated. Concern and suspicion also remained over his choice of partners and exactly what he was trying to achieve by strengthening contacts with states Washington considered part of the ‘axis of evil’. Given American indifference towards Moscow in this pre-9/11 period, some saw Putin’s efforts to befriend practically everyone else as a cynical attempt to push Washington’s hand; showing the Bush administration that Russia had alternatives, and that it could be a nuisance factor if it chose. Whatever his motivation, Putin was clearly demonstrating that despite contemporary weakness Moscow still held pretensions to global influence, that it should be treated as a ‘Great Power’, and that only through international activism could Russia reclaim this status. Though on the surface such goals did not appear radically different to Primakov’s—sharing themes of integration into the global economy, defining and consolidating a multipolar constellation of forces to strengthen Russia’s voice in international affairs, and pursuing an independent foreign policy not beholden to Western preferences—Putin’s pursuit of these goals did rapidly demonstrate some significant divergences.

Perhaps the most important change centred on increasing, substantive efforts to improve relations with the West. In early 2001, for example, Putin stated that integration with Europe was becoming a key foreign policy direction. Already, attention westwards had reaped rewards. A close working relationship with Tony Blair had been quickly established, with the leaders meeting five times in 2000 alone. Other ‘old’ European leaders also responded positively to Putin’s language of economic and political development, integration, and the desire to reaffirm Russia’s place in Europe. His greater predictability and propensity to play by the rules were also welcomed, being traits that Western leaders had long wished to see in their

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4 ibid., p. 243.
7 This included a visit by Putin to London in April and by Blair to Moscow in November.
Soviet and post-Soviet counterparts. Still, as the last chapter outlined, considerable hurdles remained. Putin’s response to these barriers, however, was more constructive and pragmatic than his predecessor. Rather than looking for other partners or “throwing the baby out with the bathwater”, Putin focused on common interests wherever possible. His attention turned particularly to expanding economic cooperation and consolidating perceptions of Moscow as a more predictable partner through positive dealings in resolving specific, mundane day-to-day issues. Putin clearly understood the need to better integrate Russia into the European and global economies. He identified intensifying energy supply as a particular area of focus to do so. In 1999 Russia already supplied 21% of the EU’s oil and 41% of its gas. Increasing this dependence further was rightly perceived to have not only economic, but also positive political and strategic benefits.

Similarly, despite Washington’s initially cool response to Russian overtures, Putin devoted considerable energy to improving relations. While many analysts identified the Ljubljana summit of June 2001 or September 11 as turning points, those successes were a culmination of Putin’s patience. In spite of concern over the future of America’s Russia policy, Putin made it clear from the beginning that Moscow was prepared to talk. He also made concrete moves, delivering the Duma’s Start II ratification, something Yeltsin had never achieved. Indications of potential cooperation in other areas like space exploration, fighting international terrorism, and increasing economic cooperation, proved Putin’s more business-like approach and effective political control. It also differentiated him from his somewhat ineffective predecessor. Still, many were surprised just how successful his approach was when Bush very publicly appraised Putin positively at the Ljubljana summit and began to speak of partnership between the two countries.

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10 Herspring and Rutland, p. 235.  
What Putin’s emerging strategy clearly showed was a more pragmatic\textsuperscript{13}, flexible, and realistic approach. While he certainly supported the general consensus that Russia should be a Great Power, he was more willing than his predecessor and many of his peers to acknowledge the huge gulf between the rhetoric and reality of self-perception and current constraints on influence. As an advocate of Realpolitik, Putin understood better than most that Russia was playing with a very weak hand.\textsuperscript{14} However, rather than abandoning aspirations to global influence, this meant pursuing a far more conscious attempt to match ambitions to resources.\textsuperscript{15} If Russia was ever to become a significant international actor again, it needed a strong economy and a foreign policy that served this end. As Putin himself stated, “…it is our duty [to use diplomacy] to really guarantee and, if you like, to service the interests of Russian economy”\textsuperscript{16}. Foreign policy thus began a process of ‘economisation’. Policy approaches increasingly considered more long-term economic benefits and profit than immediate political, perceptual, or geopolitical loss or gain in order to assure Putin’s task of doubling GDP by 2015—something that certainly required greater global integration. However, to facilitate this integration he had to overcome the isolation the Yeltsin administration had brought to Russia. Putin’s goal was that Russia was to be treated neither as supplicant nor potential disruptor, but as just another ‘normal’ Great Power.\textsuperscript{17} Economic pragmatism deemed that Moscow focus on improving relations with those powers who could most assist economic recovery, namely the West.

To improve Moscow’s international image and the predisposition of key actors to engage Russia, Putin understood his policy would not only have to contain a clearer economic purpose, but also that the country had to reconcile itself to some cold, hard realities. Russia had to abandon idealistic notions such as inflated claims of global importance, national exceptionalism, and Eurasianism that had been maintained under Yeltsin. If Russia was ever to achieve the status it felt it deserved, it had to

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{13} This is something discussed by Lo (2003) and Mousa Al-reza Vahidi (2001) ‘GUUAM and the CIS: The Challenges and Opportunities of the Russian Foreign Policy’, \textit{Amu Darya} 6 (9), p. 241.
  \item \textsuperscript{14} Herspring and Rutland, p. 225.
  \item \textsuperscript{16} ITAR-TASS (2001), ‘Putin: Foreign Policy Must Rest on National Priorities’, April 3.
  \item \textsuperscript{17} Sakwa (2004), p. 207.
\end{itemize}
follow a strategy that served long-term national interests, even where this meant deferring some immediate interests. Importantly, too, reference to traditional geopolitical ideas had to be circumscribed. Putin played down previous zero-sum concepts, and instead cast foreign policy in more positive terms. This involved dropping the Primakovian notion of multipolarity and embracing ideas of cooperative balance. Putin also avoided references to spheres of influence and recognised the value of engagement more for its own value than as an instrument to counter Western strategic advances. The strategic partnership with China was also swiftly de-emphasised.

While Putin may not have liked many of the characteristics of the new global environment, he understood Russia could do little more than work to turn it to its advantage wherever possible. In doing so, he moved to defend and promote Russia’s interests in the world as it was, not how it used to be. Rather than resorting to Yeltsin’s posturing in dealing with challenges—overreaction, outbursts of anger, antagonistic, overblown rhetoric, and the tendency for all aspects of relations to be subsequently hindered—Putin’s approach was more rational. Most of all, Putin rarely railed against the inevitable. He instead demonstrated an ability to concede graciously and move on. In doing so, he quickly stepped out of Yeltsin’s shadow, differentiating his foreign policy style and establishing an approach independent of the doctrines he was bequeathed. To implement what undoubtedly challenged many in the administration, and diverged so greatly from what was expected, Putin drew on the changes discussed in the last chapter. With the economy recovering from the dark depths of financial crisis, Putin was able to undertake activism with a greater sense of confidence. The political establishment, too, so long in disarray, offered few impediments to a younger, focused leader who could finally take full advantage of the super-presidential regime, backed by a supportive legislature following the 1999 elections. With his own preferences still unclear, and all political persuasions projecting what they wished on him, Putin the relative unknown had greater freedom

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18 Lo (2003), pp. 75-82.
20 Herspring and Rutland, p. 226.
21 Truscott, p. 277.
22 See for example Alexei Arbatov’s positive appraisal of Putin’s activities after the “defeat” in Ukraine in his interview with Vladimir Rudakov (2005a), ‘The Peculiarities of Reactive External Politics’ ['Osobennosti Reaktivnoi Vneshnei Politiki'], Profil, 21 February, p. 32.
to act. His early political moves as Prime Minister had demonstrated national pride, determination and a focus long missing from Russian politics. Such symbolism and optimism offered Putin huge political capital and opportunities his predecessor had similarly enjoyed, though later squandered. Putin would not make the same mistake.

At the same time, Putin’s ‘new direction’ masked significant consistencies. Vestiges of past approaches, such as geopolitics and the military dominated cooperation, for example, were not entirely purged from policy. In effect, the economisation of foreign policy actually occurred in concert with sustained, even intensified, securitisation.\textsuperscript{23} State and regional security, international security and, of course, the dominating theme of the battle against terrorism remained leading policy issues—as they would throughout Putin’s terms. The need for foreign policy economisation was underpinned by security, as much as the desire to improve living standards. For Putin, economic and security issues were linked; significant economic development would enhance Russian security, help Moscow better achieve its security-related goals and project its influence abroad. Putin’s dual approach also reflected his KGB past and loyalties, his trust in the security apparatuses, and efforts to consolidate the tough, uncompromising political image his actions in Chechnya had built. Unlike Yeltsin, however, Putin was better able to reconcile the two approaches and pursue the two simultaneously in a more cohesive strategy.

Understanding this curious mix of increased pragmatism and continued security-centrism demonstrates that Putin’s post-September 11 strategy was less an aberration or revolution, than a continuation and accentuation of policies pursued in the first 18 months of his presidency. What September 11 did, though, was make Washington more receptive to Russian advances. Putin’s vision was in his ability to identify this event as a significant transformation of the external environment offering the potential to \textit{comprehensively} transform Russia’s external dealings, and to swiftly seize the subsequent opportunities, pulling the political system with him. So long unable to gain significant traction with Washington, Putin was not about to lose the opportunity for rapprochement and to rehabilitate Russia’s global political position. A broad alliance with Washington in battling terrorism provided Putin with a golden

\textsuperscript{23} See for example: Lo (2003), p. 73.
opportunity to again make Russia a major actor on the world stage. Putin also identified potential economic gains, both through American economic incentives to ensure Russia’s participation and generally closer cooperation. Certainly, a rich and contented West was a more preferable partner than a resource-starved and insecure China. Moreover, it was thought a less discriminating Washington would afford Russia greater political leeway and allow Putin the opportunity to deflect international criticism over such questions as democratic backsliding or the war in Chechnya. Putin could even attempt to recast this war in terms of the ‘war on terror’ to a more sympathetic international audience. Publicly, Putin argued that Russia had a shared interest with the US and Europe in jointly combating terrorism, recognising this as the primary common threat. Still, Putin lost no opportunity in leveraging off perceptions of a more cooperative, valuable Russia to further jumpstart already improving relations with other Western nations and organisations, as all attention moved toward constructing a united front against terrorism.

Subsequently, Putin was the first leader to contact Bush in the wake of the disaster and express his unconditional moral support. He also quickly moved to share intelligence information about the infrastructure, locations, and training facilities of international terrorists, agreed to the use of Russian airspace for humanitarian flights in areas of anti-terrorist operations and the use of former Soviet airbases in Central Asia, and supported and armed the Northern Alliance in Afghanistan. This was a controversial policy, opposed by many entrenched domestic interests. It would have been difficult to sell, had Putin actually required public or political support. With the Duma subjugated, institutional functioning and predictability improving, and the more restricted, directed nature of the political system giving key opponents and the public fewer opportunities to resist, his ability to move ahead with his plans was unrivalled. Putin also took advantage of continued disarray amongst potential opponents, high levels of trust and confidence borne out of his early successes, and

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24 Herspring and Rutland, p. 240.
increased control over the media to push his agenda. His well-oiled political machine made him increasingly independent of other political and social forces and thus both willing and able to override those more conservative views, opposed to any Russian concessions and clinging to older, more antagonistic conceptualisations of relations with the West.

Nevertheless, subsequent American actions provided strong ammunition for domestic critics. They criticised Putin’s pragmatism and deference, and accused him of failing to defend key interests or enhance Russia’s global power. Certainly, as Washington enjoyed initial successes and its immediate need for Moscow’s assistance declined, it became increasingly obvious that this was a relationship based largely on expediency and that underlying issues remained unresolved. As differences between Moscow and Washington over the war on terrorism became public, Russian analysts suggested that their relations better resembled a ‘negative mutual dependence’ based on significantly different interests, rather than partnership.28 Tangible benefits were also slow to materialise as far as Russia was concerned. Although no formal deal had been struck, Moscow had expected trade restrictions29 to be lifted in return for its support in Afghanistan and ‘permitting’ the use of Central Asian bases. However, these remained in place long after 9/11.30 Renewed criticism of the Chechen war, and the willingness of some American lawmakers to meet members of the Chechen resistance too,31 incensed many Russians, who believed the US was not only breaking a post-9/11 understanding,32 but also pursuing an inconsistent line on terrorism. Such actions complicated Putin’s Western policy, eroding some of the unquestioned faith in his judgement, even alienating some of his staunchest supporters, and building stronger coalitions between those who opposed his approach.

29 Particularly the Jackson-Vanik Amendment which denied most favoured nation status to certain non-market economies and still included Russia in this restriction.
In light of these concerns, Washington’s decision to invade Iraq in March 2003 only heightened domestic tensions. Putin was criticised for apparent confusion between protecting economic interests in Iraq, defending the international legal order and the UN, or remaining on good terms with the Washington.\(^{33}\) His response was criticised as being ambiguous and inconsistent—from trying to block invasion through the UN, to expressing rage and aligning with ‘old Europe’, to then seeking to kiss and make up—acting much like Yeltsin had years before over Kosovo.\(^{34}\) Where Putin differed, however, was in his swift efforts to minimise the negative repercussions of his opposition and return official rhetoric to its positive predisposition. Sensing Bush’s interest in expressing his displeasure at ‘old Europe’ for its criticism of his Iraq policy, Putin quickly shifted into damage control. His efforts meant not only did Moscow become the first of Washington’s critics to score an official visit following the rupture, but it also benefited from the improved cooperation with important European powers. Once again, despite some vacillation, pragmatism triumphed, and immediate concerns were outweighed by a longer-term focus. Domestically, too, there was almost something for everyone in the shifting response, again demonstrating there may have been something more strategic in Putin’s ‘schizophrenic’ approach.

Concerns over the West’s apparent disregard for Russian interests were again sparked by renewed NATO expansion. Enlargement proved to critics that ‘partnership’ simply aimed to placate Moscow while continuing the process of encircling and undermining Russia. Interestingly, however, criticism was voiced not only from the expected opposition quarters. Defence Minister Sergei Ivanov, for example, argued that “…the security of some must not come at the expense of others…[and] any plans to bring the NATO infrastructure closer to our borders prompts an absolutely understandable, explicable concern”.\(^{35}\) Russia also remained committed to the active deployment of its military resources both in the pursuit of security and to remind the West it was not simply a second-rate global actor, however it was being treated. A clear symbol of this was Chief of General Staff General Yuri Baluevsky’s claim he was ready to launch pre-emptive strikes on terrorist bases

\(^{34}\) Truscott, p. 297.  
anywhere in the world in the wake of the Beslan school terrorist attack by Ingush and Chechen Islamic militants. For Putin, however, NATO expansion was mostly a non-issue. It was something which Moscow had already been briefed about, and had no real ability to counter. Thus, while not being averse to using very public opposition from other government branches to remind the West of Russia’s continued discomfort over expansion, Putin himself avoided unnecessary confrontation. He was, though, increasingly inclined to openly criticise Western policies, both for domestic consumption and to indirectly voice his frustration with challenging ‘partners’.

Following the Beslan incident, Putin slammed Western criticisms of the Russian siege, claiming double standards in the ‘war on terror’ and that “certain people want Russia focused on its internal problems. They pull the strings so that Russia won't raise its head”. While he stressed that Bush remained a “predictable and reliable partner”, it was clear Putin felt Washington was insufficiently strong in its support of Russian campaigns against threats from domestic terrorism. What sat even less comfortably, however, was increasingly overt American activism in the FSU generally, and in the political ‘revolutions’, more specifically. While Putin had been able to deflect broad domestic concerns over the presence of US troops in Central Asia by stressing their short-term nature, defending Washington’s assistance of political opposition movements in the ‘near abroad’ was more difficult. If the fall of Georgia’s Shevadnadze was not bad enough, the failure of Moscow’s high-profile efforts to stave off the Viktor Yushchenko’s victory in the Ukraine was a major foreign policy defeat. When followed by events in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, a worrying trend was seen to be emerging. Domestically, critics took aim not only at Washington, for clearly showing its encircling intentions, but the Putin

36 Elizabeth Piper (2004), ‘Russia Ready to Strike Against “Terror” Worldwide’. Available at: http://hinduvoice.net/cgi-bin/dada/mail.cgi?flavor=archive;list=NL;id=20040910152939 (Accessed 29 January 2011).
administration too, claiming political upheaval in places like the Ukraine was facilitated by Moscow’s miscalculations.  

If these events were not enough to shake Putin, the rhetoric coming out of Washington following Bush’s re-election in 2004 appeared ominous. New Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice spoke of American concerns regarding Russia on numerous occasions. Other American political actors, too, weighed in. They criticised Russia and, by inference, Washington’s pursuit of close relations with Putin. A Senate hearing in early February 2005, for example, discussed the Yukos affair and Russian democratisation. Critics of Putin’s domestic policies argued that democratic reversal was unquestionably setting Russia on a course that would alienate it from the West. National Security Adviser, Stephen Hadley, reiterated such sentiments, announcing that at the 2005 Bratislava summit Bush would point out to Putin the necessity of advancing along the path to democracy and freedom for Russia-America relations to reach “full maturity”. Set against such a growing list of challenges, the Bush administration was more outspoken and moralistic in the context of US-Russian relations, while Putin demonstrated increasing frustration over US unilateralism and double standards. However, while the tone at Bratislava was perhaps not as war-m as Ljubljana, the two pragmatic leaders downplayed their differences and remained publicly committed to partnership. Again, this was a significant achievement for

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39 Alexei Malashenko, for example, noted that ‘the revolution will enter as a separate chapter in textbooks as classic political idiocy’ see: Alexei Malashenko (2005), ‘Revolutionary Colours Are Not Growing in Central Asia’ [‘Revolyutsionnie Tsveti ne Rastut v Tsentralnoi Azii’], Nezavisimaya Gazeta, 21 February, p. 9.
40 Boris Volkhonovskii (2005), ‘The U.S. Supercharges Democratic Intensity in Relations with Russia’ [SSHA Nagnetayut Demokraticheskuyu Napryazhennost v Otmosheniyakh c Rossiei’], Kommersant, 19 February, p. 4.
42 Volkhonovskii, p. 4.
Putin. He deflected the significant domestic and international pressures on his strategy to preserve a longer-term outlook, confident that Russia’s interests would be best served by continuing to work at this relationship, however hard it may be. He remained hopeful that similar dynamics of ‘pragmatic reciprocity, such as had developed with Europe—so clearly demonstrated by Europe’s trading of WTO accession approval for Putin’s commitment to Kyoto ratification—would also develop with Washington. As the tenures of both leaders advanced, however, frustration on both sides only intensified. Though a complete meltdown of relations was prevented, relations certainly became frostier. Sceptics continually foresaw an impending re-emergence of the Cold War in any mutual tensions, over such issues as growing Russian arms sales, Russia’s nuclear cooperation with Iran, its increasingly forceful energy and forceful diplomacy, domestic politics, and America’s deployment of the Missile Defense System in Eastern Europe. A calculating Putin remained careful, however, to consistently bring relations back from the brink, smoothing his tough domestically-directed rhetoric at key moments to maintain a broadly cooperative relationship. At the same time, as America’s global image suffered, Moscow’s relations with other nations improved. And as its economy boomed on the back of soaring hydrocarbon prices, Putin could afford to be increasingly confident. He calculated that dynamics were shifting, and that he could now worry less about what a hypocritical Washington thought. So long the focus of Russia’s foreign policy, Washington now began to diminish in importance as Putin diversified Russia’s foreign policy.


45 In addition to growing elite criticism of the US, the lack of common values between Putin’s approach and the US was seen to be becoming a complicating factor for Putin to moderate: Georgii Bovt (2005), ‘Martians and Hungarians’ [Marsiane i Veneriantsi’], Profil, 21 February, p. 23.


Over time, with growing economic might and highly attractive resources, Putin’s personal activism, and a more coherent foreign policy, Moscow increasingly pursued the multi-vectored approach it had long aspired to. Putin sought partners across the globe, not because of a failure to integrate with the West, but because national interests apparently demanded it. Relationships with China and India, for example, developed positively. Putin also sought to improve Russia’s relations with the Muslim world, strained over Chechnya, attending the October 2003 Organisation of the Islamic Conference (OIC) summit with a large delegation that included Foreign Minister Ivanov and many Muslim representatives. Sustained efforts with the Gulf States, too, saw Putin visit Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Jordan in early 2007, and Iran later that year, something that was certainly seen as the sign of renewed Russian confidence and reach. Worldwide, Putin’s more calculated, business-like approach improved relations in regions as diverse as Asia and Latin America. Though there were no huge revolutions, it became increasingly apparent that Putin and his new Russia could actually make good on promises of cooperation, and with the global demand for oil and gas increasing, many found the overtures of the world’s largest resource holder increasingly difficult to resist.

Putin’s Pre-September 11 Approach to the CIS and Central Asia

Putin’s increased efforts to substantiate the multi-vectored foreign policy approach reinvigorated Russia’s policy toward the ‘near abroad’. For Putin, Moscow could hardly speak of a global policy without a stronger emphasis on relations with its former Soviet partners. Subsequently, from an early stage of Putin’s leadership, he devoted greater resources and attention towards the CIS generally, and towards Central Asia specifically. Of course, following the abandonment of the reformers’ Westernising approach and integration of more pragmatic nationalist elements into policy, reference to the CIS as a primary policy focus had been a consistent theme. Yet, as chapters four and five demonstrated, Russia’s policy had been complex. For a variety of reasons, including a lack of policy-making coordination, implementation

difficulties, and continued real indifference, little was really achieved in terms of translating rhetorical prioritisation into concrete outcomes. Instead, the CIS remained a nascent, uninstitutionalised, essentially ineffective body, while the countries of the ‘near abroad’ generally continued to drift further and further from Moscow’s ‘sphere of influence’. At the same time, other external actors, particularly Turkey, Iran, China and the US, continued to intensify their activities and were welcomed into all areas of the CIS, including Central Asia.

In order to address these challenging dynamics, the 2000 Foreign Policy Concept reaffirmed the CIS as a ‘priority area’. It emphasised “…the development of good-neighbourly relations and strategic partnership”, integration—both in the CIS as a whole and in narrower associations, “joint efforts toward settling conflicts in CIS member states”, and the “development of cooperation in the military-political area and in the sphere of security, particularly in combating international terrorism and extremism”. “Serious emphasis” was also to be given to the development of economic cooperation, “including the creation of a free trade zone and implementation of programs of joint rational use of natural resources”, specifically in the Caspian Sea region.\(^52\) Still, irrespective of such prioritisation, few were confident that much of this ‘wish-list’ would be achieved. Even within the document there appeared a tacit acknowledgement that it was perhaps overstating the importance of the CIS, given the fact that precise reference to the region remained minimal, and mostly very vague, and idealistic.\(^53\) Still, this was effectively Yeltsin’s document; more closely reflecting his administration’s policies, than those of Putin. Although Putin concurred with many of the strategy’s priorities, he indicated from an early stage he would use different measures to implement them, confounding many early criticisms of the strategy. While his rhetoric towards the CIS was less ambitious, the policies themselves were more substantive.\(^54\) In fact, Putin’s strategy towards the CIS


\(^{53}\) Of course, the entire document is pretty vague, and this has been a constant criticism of all policy doctrines. However, when comparing the CIS section with that of the following Europe and EU section, both in terms of absolute size and depth, it appears more undeveloped, less focused and less precise. See: *The Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation* (2000). Available at: [http://www.fas.org/nuke/guide/russia/doctrine/econcept.htm](http://www.fas.org/nuke/guide/russia/doctrine/econcept.htm) (Accessed 29 January 2011)

and Central Asia closely reflected the similar influences and goals as policy towards the ‘far abroad’.

Most clearly, Putin took a more measured approach to the CIS and in assessing risk. For example, he acknowledged that simultaneous CIS contacts or aid by outside countries and organisations were not necessarily a threat or ploy against Russian interests. It was no longer all or nothing for Moscow’s regional partners. Hence, even after his tough, domestically-directed rhetoric following the later ‘colour revolutions’, Putin worked to downplay differences and mend bridges with the new administrations. His approach was based on a more realistic reading of regional dynamics. Russia continued to lose its hegemonic position, as other powers continually intensified their activities in a very receptive region. Putin understood Moscow had to abandon the illusion that it could hope to retain a strong regional position merely on the basis of the past, its comparative size, or geographic proximity. It also had to recognise that its image in the post-Soviet space was not as favourable as had perhaps been assumed. Moscow would have to work to demonstrate how it could be a valuable partner and re-establish the trust of nations who had been on the receiving end of its alternating periods of imperialism, indifference, and hollow activist rhetoric. ‘Russia-fatigue’ existed here just as strongly as at a global level. Dealing with external powers also demanded a more realistic approach.

In the case of Iran, for example, Putin realised that Tehran remained focused primarily on economic cooperation, and specifically, with Turkmenistan. He did not believe Tehran presented a real threat to Russian interests given it was also willing to regulate its own actions in the region, in accordance with some tacit agreement with Moscow, underscored by arms sales and nuclear cooperation. The only area of tension was the Caspian, where Tehran’s stubbornness confounded Putin’s resolution efforts. Yet, the inflexibility also served Russian interests. It marginalised Iran from the most important Caspian producers, as Moscow, Azerbaijan, and Kazakhstan developed common positions on division, exploitation and cooperation. Moreover, though Tehran may have deepened cooperation with Ashghhabat, Moscow well knew

Turkmenbashi’s unpredictability. Ultimately, Iran was neutralising itself as a potential regional competitor, with minimal Russian interference. With Putin’s more cohesive, well-planned foreign policy path, Russia was only better placed to capitalise on such miscalculations.

Putin also looked for ways to benefit from the activities of other actors in the region. He recognised common interests with both Iran and China, for example, in limiting America’s advance in Central Asia, something Russia had limited capacity to achieve alone. It was in this context that many analysts identified joint Russian-Chinese efforts to use the newly formed SCO as a vehicle for an anti-Western front directed first and foremost against the US. Other saw efforts to use the China card to rein America in. However, engaging China within the Central Asian regional framework was also an effort to limit the strategic political and economic ramifications of China’s rapidly expanding regional economic clout. Moscow remained fearful that Chinese advances would eventually displace Russia, meaning China was ultimately as much a threat to Putin’s regional strategy as America. Territorial concessions, for example, were recognition of China’s growing strategic weight, and evidence of Central Asian efforts to ingratiate themselves with Beijing. Putin pragmatically realised that there was little Russia could do to counter growing Chinese influence or reverse the continually expanding comparative capacity, aside of moderating and benefiting from it as much as possible through cooperation. Engagement, rather than retaliation was the best course. And yet, while pragmatism may have deemed cooperation necessary, ignoring China’s potential was a massive strategic mistake Putin was unwilling to make. With a clear head and political control, he could see this only added to the importance of also remaining on constructive terms with Washington. Long-term this Washington-Beijing dynamic was going to be a complex balancing act, but one with inherent opportunities for Moscow.

57 Truscott, p. 274.
Putin’s approach to the CIS in practice was also ruthlessly realistic. While the geopolitical space of the CIS was a Russian priority, its organisational framework was not. Putin realised the CIS he inherited from Yeltsin was little more than a hollow shell, and he had no serious initiatives to try and revitalise what was essentially a dead organisation. He quickly made it clear that Moscow’s days of supporting a forum held captive by a few uncooperative partners were over. Putin would not entertain costly diversions in an overly sentimental approach. Keeping the CIS alive had already cost Moscow too much at the expense of its own interests. Simply, there was no point in wasting valuable resources in areas that would not deliver what Russia’s interests demanded, or where it could not compete. Moscow would approach the CIS in a far more hard-headed, self-interested manner.

Subsequently, the Ministry for CIS Affairs was abolished in 2000, and its responsibilities redistributed to the MFA and Security Council. While Putin stressed that Russia remained the nucleus of CIS integration processes and would continue “methodical work to stimulate further development of integration processes in the Commonwealth as a whole”, it was bilateralism and ‘limited multilateralism’ amongst cooperative partners with whom Russia sought to find effective instruments to institutionalise links, that gained his administration’s favour. Though this policy of differentiated efforts towards CIS partners had unofficially emerged under Primakov, Putin intensified these tendencies, acknowledged them more openly, and implemented them more cohesively and consistently. He effectively substantiated the Foreign Policy Concept’s principle that “in keeping with the concept that integration within the CIS takes place at various rates and on various levels, Russia will determine the parameters and nature of its interaction with the CIS member states”.

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60 Herspring and Rutland, p. 246. Demonstrating the problems of the CIS is the figure that out of the around 1200 documents signed by CIS members until this time, only 6% were in force, see: Ilya Tarasov (2002), ‘New Law on Citizenship-A Full Stop in the Breakup of the USSR’, [‘Novii Zakon o Grazhdanstve RF—Poslendnyaya Tochka v Razvale Sovetskogo Soyuza’], Pravda.ru, 5 March. Available at: http://pravda.ru/main/2002/03/05/37886.html (Accessed 3 May 2005).
61 Donaldson and Nogee, p. 208.
63 Sakwa (2004), p. 231. Most government heads and Foreign Ministers also appeared to agree that there was greater value in bilateral relations, even for pursuing multilateral initiatives: Anatoli Gordienko (2004), ‘Slipping Integration’ [‘Uskolzayushaya Integratsiya’], Nezavisimaya Gazeta, 24 December, p. 5.
At the same time as being more differentiated and pragmatic, this was a far more dynamic approach. In fact, even before becoming president, Putin had demonstrated greater activism towards the CIS and Central Asia. His first visits overseas as Prime Minister were to Tajikistan and Uzbekistan in November and December 1999.\(^\text{65}\) In an address to the Federation Council on 22 December 1999, Putin formalised this direction, signalling his intention to give a new emphasis to relations with Central Asia.\(^\text{66}\) Following his inauguration as president, he continued his efforts to travel widely throughout the CIS, and again visited Central Asia in May 2000, targeting Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, the two Central Asian states that had gone furthest in developing ties with the West, and perhaps Russia’s weakest links in the region. In Autumn 1999, joint military exercises were held on Russia’s initiative and under Russian command, which included not only the three Central Asian members of the Treaty of Collective Security, but also Uzbekistan.\(^\text{68}\) Throughout 2000 and 2001 a number of important documents were also signed. These included a June 2000 agreement to establish a joint CIS anti-terrorism centre in Moscow, an October agreement of the CIS Collective Security Council ‘On the Status of Forces and Means of Collective Security Systems’,\(^\text{69}\) the decision in May 2001 by member states of the CIS Collective Security Council\(^\text{70}\) to form a joint rapid reaction force, the formation of the Eurasian Economic Union in June 2001, and the establishment of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation in July 2001. It was no coincidence that Central Asian states were the backbone of these agreements.\(^\text{71}\) These moves reflected Moscow’s efforts to prioritise areas of economic and strategic value, and the region’s greater receptiveness than other parts of the ‘near abroad’. Moscow’s efforts also had direct bilateral benefits, too, with new agreements signed with Kyrgyzstan concerning security in June 2000, for example, a non-visa regime with Uzbekistan in November 2000, and an energy deal with Kazakhstan in November 2001. Most


\(^{67}\) Dannreuther, p. 246.

\(^{68}\) Jonson (2001), p. 106.


\(^{70}\) Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia and Tajikistan.

importantly, the general tenor of Moscow’s relations throughout the region significantly improved.

While Putin’s approach to Central Asia continued Yeltsin’s military-security focus, there was a new focus to this cooperation—terrorism. Moscow remained fearful that despite previous efforts in Chechnya and Tajikistan to stem the spread of Islamic fundamentalism, this movement would continue to grow and thus had the potential to destabilise the regions on Russia’s border, as well as spread further into Russia’s own Muslim areas. The Taliban’s advances in Afghanistan prior to 9/11 and the increased activism of extremists in Central Asia, including growing signs of instability in sensitive areas such as the Ferghana Valley, seemed to justify the prioritisation of security and terrorism issues in Moscow’s policies towards the region. Strengthening military and intelligence cooperation and Russian security leadership was at the core of addressing these negative dynamics. Subsequently, from an early stage of his presidency, Putin oversaw a change in personnel concerned with the region. Numerous senior officials with a security service or military background—the so-called siloviki—were assigned to tasks related to Central Asia during his first term. For example, First Deputy Foreign Minister Vyacheslav Trubnikov, former director of the Foreign Intelligence Service, became Putin’s special representative to the CIS states, as well as managing the Foreign Ministry’s agenda of combating terrorism with Deputy Foreign Minister Anatoly Safonov, former first deputy director of the FSB. FSB Army General Nikolai Bordyuzha became chair of the Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO) and SVR Lieutenant General Grigory Rapota came to preside over the Eurasian Economic Community, after these bodies were established. Clearly, Putin was unwilling to take any risks concerning the continued, unabated spread of terrorism on Russia’s periphery, and was placing allies from security backgrounds in key positions to secure a stronger policy line.

The prioritisation of security concerns also had other motivations, however. In a very real sense, military-security and anti-terror cooperation was one of the few areas Central Asia demonstrated any interest in, identifying this as one of the few where cooperation with Russia could deliver positive dividends. On coming to power, Putin astutely tailored his approach and targeted his rhetoric to what his audience would be most receptive. His key claim was that, as demonstrated in Chechnya, only Russia had the capacity and will to battle the threats of international terrorism and Islamic extremism that had become the dominant security concerns for the Central Asian governments.\textsuperscript{75} For the region’s leaders, the centrality of these issues had been brought into sharp relief in the second half of 1999 when the regional terrorist activity appeared to escalate, led mostly by the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), an organisation that worked closely with the Taliban in Afghanistan.\textsuperscript{76} In August 1999, for example, 21 militants entered Kyrgyzstan’s Batken region from Tajikistan and took four hostages. Just two weeks later a force of 150 militants launched an attack from Tajikistan that succeeded in capturing two villages and seven hostages. In August 2000 the violence continued: 36 soldiers and more than 70 militants were killed in fighting in Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan.\textsuperscript{77} In addition to these direct territorial incursions, several car bomb attacks occurred in Tashkent in February 1999 aimed at killing President Karimov.\textsuperscript{78} That these attacks appeared to coincide with increased attacks on Russian soil only added weight to Putin’s assertions that this was increasingly becoming a regional and international battle, making his offers of assistance and cooperation that much more attractive.

In addition, Putin knew his regional advantage lay in the fact his tough, reactive approaches to Russia’s own security problems were more likely to appeal to Central Asia’s authoritarian leaders than the more challenging, long-term approaches espoused by their more liberal partners. What also made Russian overtures more attractive was that other partners, such as NATO, appeared unwilling to assist the

\textsuperscript{75} Dannreuther, p. 246.
\textsuperscript{76} Cohen (2002), p. 558.
Central Asian states in a tangible way. The contrast between the NATO-PfP exercises held in the region in 1997 and 1998 and the Russian-led Commonwealth Shield 2000, for example, seemed to underscore Moscow’s increasing relevance in security terms. While the NATO exercises simulated UN-type peacekeeping operations, the Russian-directed exercise rehearsed an anti-terrorist operation in the mountains of Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, provided a clear indication to the Central Asian leaders that, as far as this increasingly probable scenario was concerned, Russia was the more committed and capable ally. Still, while Western failures provided a favourable context for Russia’s reassertion of its interests, it was the more deliberate and proactive elements in Putin’s strategy that capitalised on this context for extending Russian influence. While Moscow may have overplayed the terrorist threat somewhat, aiming to stir concern about the permeability of Central Asian borders and the republics’ vulnerability to terrorist attacks and drug trafficking, Putin was simply working within constraints to maximise Russia’s potential.

If this securitisation of relations was a fairly predictable development, Putin’s concurrent encouragement of expanded economic cooperation was less expected. Though certainly his efforts to increase the economic focus were neither as comprehensive as the ‘economisation’ of relations with the West, nor as intensive (or successful) as the securitisation with the region, Putin clearly substantiated long-standing rhetoric concerning increased economic cooperation. He believed that approached in the right way, targeted economic cooperation in the CIS had the potential to deliver significant benefits to Russia. Putin stressed that cooperation could allow the country, for one thing, to gain advantages on world markets through large-scale joint projects in infrastructure, transport and energy deliveries. At the same time, however, he was not unrealistic. Putin understood that Russia had to abandon Soviet nostalgia for a fully-integrated economic space and neo-imperialist thinking that guided irrational attempts to build or maintain unworkable economic partnerships. These both diverted attention and resources from the real tasks and

81 Dannreuther, pp. 251-2.
82 Vahidi, p. 228.
83 Xinhua News Agency (2002), Putin Urges Pragmatic Foreign Policy’, April 18.
opportunities at hand. Russia could not afford to, and was not going to, subsidise certain economies for the sake of geopolitical prestige. He also recognised the many constraints to expanding economic cooperation in the former Soviet space. He acknowledged that Russia had less to offer Central Asia than stronger external economies and that it could not compete head to head with China, the EU or the US. Realistically, too, economic complementarity was limited. It remained the fact that the economic resources needed for Russia’s own economic recovery—Putin’s dominant policy goal—were predominantly located outside the CIS. A selective economic approach was therefore favoured, a more consistently applied and planned version of the approach that had again begun emerging under Primakov. This approach targeted those states and economic areas in which cooperation beneficial to Russia, or to both partners, could be established, and those areas in which Russia was able, or could potentially, compete with other powers. Such areas of focus included the exploitation of Caspian resources, other oil, gas and energy cooperation, including transit routes, and efforts to create more limited free trade areas with compatible economies, such as the Eurasian Economic Community launched in June 2000. Thus, under Putin the government indicated its desire that economic bonds should link Russia to Central Asia in the future, even if substantial Russian commercial interest in the region was still a ways off.84

As elsewhere, Putin’s re-modelling of the political system facilitated developments in the economic sphere. Improved coordination and control of economic actors, in particular, allowed Putin to better focus activity on achieving national interests. This was true for both those state or semi-state companies and natural monopolies that represented ‘old business’ and the ‘new business’ represented by private companies.85 State and semi-state controlled companies had long been at the forefront of efforts to re-intensify economic links between the centre and the previous periphery. Gazprom, in particular, had long played a leading role in Russian foreign policy in the FSU, though not always in a constructive, cooperative way, as previous chapters have discussed. With renewed control over the mega-company facilitated by the installation of loyal allies and the Kremlin’s reacquisition of a

controlling share, Putin used it more effectively to make political and economic inroads that served state interests, as well as purely commercial interests. If control over state and semi-state actors was not enough, Putin was also able to improve the extent to which private business interests contributed to overall strategic goals. His informal deal concerning the division of power with the oligarchs improved the competitive, disjointed, ill-coordinated nature of relations between the government and private capital. Cooperation began to replace blatant antagonisms and rapprochement saw the two speaking a similar language of regional economic expansion. The major privatised Russian oil companies, in particular, represented an important lobby, with their significant financial resources, and had long worked hard to influence the government. However, in Putin’s Russia the oil executives were effectively pushing an open door: his economic policy recognised that domestic oil and gas companies operating abroad needed support at the government level. They would receive strong support, given the strongest opportunities for cooperation in the CIS centred in the hydrocarbon and resource sectors. Though this began as a mutually-beneficial relationship, companies like Yukos would later find just how far Putin wanted to take this reciprocity between the commercial and government sectors, and how hard he would crack down on any perceived divergences from their earlier informal agreement.

Over the first eighteen months of so of his leadership then, Putin oversaw a more active policy towards the CIS and Central Asia. While it would be overstating the case to claim it reversed Russia’s declining regional influence altogether, this new policy did halt the decline. Importantly, Putin made considerable advances in those areas he focused resources on, such as cooperation on terrorism and other security issues, and ensuring a continued strong Russian presence in the development and transit of hydrocarbon resources in the Caspian and throughout the FSU. His more targeted approach was popular amongst Russia’s former Soviet partners. A number of

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relationships were certainly revitalised, with increased diplomacy delivering a number of new bilateral agreements, securing key national interests such as access to resources, enhanced economic and military cooperation, and commitments to maintaining and enhancing the former Soviet pipeline network. The more controlled, focused forms of limited multilateral interaction that emerged, too, were also perceived as facilitating the more cohesive and potentially successful pursuit of national interests with like-minded partners. In these limited forums, integration was sought on strongly Russian terms, in a way that complimented other policies and on terms and speed dictated by Moscow. To achieve this, Putin clearly utilised his increased consolidation of power and advancing political restructuring. He strengthened his personal control of foreign policy, disempowered his potential critics and opponents, and offered better incentives for cooperation and ‘buy-in’ to his strategic thinking. Foreign policy, subsequently, became less politicised. Moreover, he remained sufficiently vague to avoid alienating any potential supporters, and charted a policy course whose successes appealed to a broad sector of the population. Both security and economically-focused interests could essentially find what they wanted in Putin’s ‘near abroad’ policy.

Putin’s post-September 11 approach to the CIS and Central Asia

Putin’s progress in Central Asia appeared under threat from both external and domestic sources immediately following September 11. Following targeting of the Taliban, the geopolitical importance of neighbouring former Soviet Central Asia to Washington, in particular, increased. Longer-term analysis also focused on Central Asia and other parts of the CIS as potential trouble spots, with a propensity not only to destabilising internal conflict, but also to becoming a potential spring of Islamic fundamentalism. Growing external interest in the region was thus given further impetus, as it exploded into the direct political and security—not solely economic—interests of the West. When Washington decided to elevate its level of regional military cooperation, requesting the right to fly its mountain regiments to Uzbekistan and to have bases in Tajikistan at its disposal, Putin was placed in a difficult situation. He had to decide whether to block the move on the basis of it undermining

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88 Derluguian, p. 6.
Russia’s regional position and miss the potential benefits of increased cooperation with the West, or to agree and be lampooned domestically for failing to protect Russia’s regional interests. Putin’s decision to acquiesce to American use of Central Asian bases as launch pads in operations against Afghanistan, however, demonstrated his commitment to make tough political decisions when necessary. He realised that there was more to be gained in cooperating with Washington in a new ‘war on terrorism’ than in opposing it. In effect, this was exactly the opportunity Putin had been waiting for to advance rapprochement. Moreover, Putin understood that there was little he could practically do to resist the American deployment, so Moscow was best to make a virtue out of necessity. Symbolically, the rapid, affirmative decision would have far greater positive ramifications than any perceived wavering or recalcitrance. Putin was smart enough to realise that by not backing Washington, Russia would risk further international alienation at a time of almost universal support in the struggle against terrorism.

More positively, his decision also demonstrated a potential departure from the simple “you gain—we lose” thinking that had dominated Cold and post-Cold War politics. It reflected the idea that both the Washington and Moscow could benefit from the arrangement. Putin argued that past Russian-American rivalry had contributed to the problems in Afghanistan and that “if we want to get rid of this [fundamentalism], we should cast away former fears, raise confidence in one another and should act jointly, in common and efficiently”. Some analysts also believed Putin’s decision was based on a pragmatic calculation that Putin understood Moscow was in no condition to protect Central Asia from terrorism alone, and the realistic alternative was to allow Washington to assume some regional security responsibilities. Moreover, America’s security goals in Central Asia generally coincided with Russia’s, not only in terms of the immediate battle against terrorism, but also in halting China’s advance and frustrating Beijing’s longer-term

90 Truscott, p. 280.
93 Buszynski, pp. 20-21.
aspirations.\textsuperscript{94} If Moscow could use this short-term American deployment to both reduce the immediate burden and also ensure its long term national interests, then this was not something the pragmatic Putin was averse to doing. In this light too, Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov’s suggestion of an EU-Russian partnership to develop Central Asia reflected a recognition that problems like poverty were a breeding ground for terrorism,\textsuperscript{95} and that Moscow’s interests in stemming terrorism’s spread would be best served through cooperation. With Putin’s decision, official policy thus came to reflect the notion that following September 11, Russia and the West had a common interest in Central Asia.\textsuperscript{96} His positive response represented a victory for pragmatism over a zero-sum strategic mindset.\textsuperscript{97}

Putin’s post-September 11 actions also illustrated the depth of his consolidation of power and control over the political system, and over foreign policy more specifically. Until this time, domestic opponents had had little to say about policy towards the CIS and Central Asia. Not only was Putin popular, but his early engagement with the ‘near abroad’ satisfied one of the opposition’s long-held demands. While they may not have agreed with the increased focus towards the West, the fact that activism was being successfully pursued simultaneously in both directions, and was not redirecting resources from the ‘near abroad’, dulled any arguments they did have. Putin’s decision to allow American bases, however, was highly controversial. Despite the broad justifications, Putin was relatively isolated in his active support of the coalition’s actions in Afghanistan and allowing American troops to base in Russia’s ‘backyard’. Few critics were prepared to quietly accept Western penetration into areas they still considered Moscow’s sphere of influence. Nor, it appeared, could they understand the subtleties of his highly nuanced policy. Across the political spectrum only two minority factions spoke out in support of assisting the US in Afghanistan: the liberal groups headed by Yavlinskii and Nemstov. The rest argued for Soviet- or Chinese- style neutrality: an expression of

\textsuperscript{94} This type of thinking can be see in Roy Allison (2004a), ‘Regionalism, Regional Structures and Security Management in Central Asia’, \textit{International Affairs} 80 (3), p. 480. 
\textsuperscript{96} Polsky (2002), p. 156. 
sympathy but no tolerance for Washington’s presence in Central Asia.\textsuperscript{98} Unsurprisingly, the security establishment was most outspoken. However, even within Putin’s own government the initial response was far from unanimous. On one hand, Foreign Minister Ivanov said that the Central Asian republics would be free to make their own decisions when it came to aiding Washington.\textsuperscript{99} However, both Defence Minister Sergei Ivanov and Chief of General Staff, General Anatolii Kvashnin indicated that Russia would view moves to use Central Asian bases as a launch pad for the Afghan operation as intruding on Moscow’s “natural” ‘sphere of influence’.\textsuperscript{100} Defence Minister Ivanov ruled out “even a hypothetical possibility” of a NATO military presence in these former Soviet territories, while General Kvashnin stated that “Russia has not considered and is not planning to consider participation in a military operation against Afghanistan”, and reminded the Central Asian republics of “their relevant bilateral and other obligations” to Russia.\textsuperscript{101}

Following the Sochi CIS Security Council meeting of 22 September, 2001, and subsequent conversations with Central Asian leaders, however, it became clear that Putin would ignore the Russian political elite’s opposition. This was a significant rebuff to the ‘old thinking’ of the residual Soviet military establishment and a defeat to more conservative forces.\textsuperscript{102} Many senior officers were alienated by his decision. They feared that supporting Washington would lead to permanent American bases, or at a minimum, undercut Russia’s regional influence.\textsuperscript{103} When taken in conjunction with other emerging American strategies, such as NATO enlargement and missile defence plans, the US presence in Central Asia and the Caucasus was perceived as both a long-term and immediate threat to Russian security.\textsuperscript{104} When Putin met with military leaders and General Staff on October 17 that year, there was much criticism of his approach. Even within his own staff, concerns remained. Foreign Minister Ivanov voiced increasing apprehension, noting that “under the pretext of the operation in Afghanistan, [the US] could strengthen their military presence in Central

\textsuperscript{98} Jack, p. 258.
\textsuperscript{101} Zarakhovich (2001).
\textsuperscript{102} Jack, pp. 259-60.
\textsuperscript{103} Herspring, p. 171.
Asia”. He stressed his hope that “the American leadership will act on this issue in accordance with the promises made”. He also reiterated that their presence would only be tied to the anti-terrorist operation in Afghanistan and once this had been completed “the necessity of the US military presence in Central Asia will be no more”. However, by June 2002, he stressed that Russian tolerance was reaching its limits. He claimed Russia was seeking “maximum transparency of their [US] military activities in the region and time limits on their military presence”. A similar emphasis on Moscow’s approval of a ‘short-term’ anti-terror coalition deployment was publicly articulated by Security Council secretary, Vladimir Rushailo and the speaker of the lower house, Gennady Seleznyov. In fact, criticism across the political system increased throughout 2002, driven by perceptions that Russia had not obtained anything in return from the West. Criticism not only came from security quarters, however. Many political forces and commentators continued to question Putin’s decision. In January 2002, Vice President of the Institute of Geopolitics Leonid Ivashov lamented Washington’s role in Central Asia, claiming its intention was to displace Moscow from its traditional sphere of influence, and that a major error had been made for the sake of temporary advantages. His criticism voiced what much of the Russian political establishment believed; that the emerging pattern of Putin’s policy was again one of deference to the West, and one that failed to protect traditional Russian strategic interests.

Still, Putin’s ability to implement, and then sustain this policy line with relatively few interruptions or divergences, lacking the unconditional support of many important foreign policy actors, reiterated his political control. Putin had done the unthinkable, allowing the US to base in the region and effectively abandoned Moscow’s claim to predominance, a decision that would have been simply impossible to take or implement under Yeltsin. While domestic trust in Putin, the opposition’s inability to land decisive blows to his image, and the greater domestic

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108 Buszynski, p. 22.
stability were enabling factors, structural factors were key to this development. In simple terms, policy had become more isolated and potential opposition to Putin’s direction had been effectively disarmed. There were very few avenues through which opposition in any form could modify, block, or simply complicate this decision. That he could take this decision in spite of widespread political and social opposition, and maintain it with a minimum of diversion, demonstrated how centralised and non-pluralist foreign policy had again become. While the outcome may have been the best one for Russia long-term, the ramifications for democratisation were more concerning. Not only was this a policy decision out of touch with the electorate, and thus neither democratic, nor inherently stable and sustainable without Putin’s leadership dominance, but it was one that apparently demonstrated the lack of real development towards a democratic policy-making system.

Mindful of the increased potential for Russian marginalisation following Washington’s military mobilisation, however, Putin did subsequently intensify Moscow’s regional activism. Putin was aware that while increased cooperation with the US had potential long-term benefits, both generally, and in specific regional terms, Russia could not be complacent. By Spring-Summer 2002, Russian involvement in the CIS again ramped up, after an apparent lull following Washington’s initial penetration.\(^{110}\) Again focusing on areas where Russia could compete, and where the most direct external challenges existed, Putin demonstrated a determination to encourage his government to reinvigorate military-security relations in Central Asia. In doing so, Putin sought to differentiate Moscow’s efforts by stressing the longevity of Russia’s engagement over the more immediate nature of the West’s mobilisation. Expressions of this increased activity were not slow to emerge. In May 2002, for example, Russia formed the Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO) with Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Belarus, and Armenia. In creating this ambitious, limited multilateral organisation Moscow was clearly establishing a macroregional platform to support its standing as a ‘security

\(^{110}\) Some analysts have made more of this penetration being a shock to the government, with it taking time to again formulate cohesive responses, see for example: Jonson (2004), p. 98.
manager’ for Central Asia and to looked to confirm recognition for the CSTO as, at least, a coequal regional security actor with NATO.\footnote{BBC Monitoring (2003) Inside Central Asia, 23 November, pp. 10-11, cited by Allison (2004a), p. 471.}

Activism also took a more traditional line. Muscle flexing in the Caspian, for example, reversed the trend of the late 1990s when Russia advocated regional demilitarisation. In August 2002, Putin oversaw the largest Russian military exercises since the Soviet collapse—the so-called ‘Sea of Peace 2002 Anti-Terrorist Exercises’.\footnote{Sergei Blagov (2002), ‘Russia Makes Waves in the Caspian’, Asia Times Online, August 16. Available at: \url{http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Central_Asia/DH16Ag01.html} (Accessed 29 January 2011)} Officially, the aims of these naval exercises were the “maintenance of stability; the protection of national interests; the struggle against all forms of terrorism; the prevention and liquidation of ecological disasters; search-and-rescue operations at sea; and the fight against drug-trafficking”.\footnote{Igor Torbakov (2002), ‘Russia to Flex Military Muscle in the Caspian Sea with an Eye on Future Energy Exports’, Eurasianet.org, July 30. Available at: \url{http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/business/articles/eav073102.shtml} (Accessed 1 August 2004)} However, analysts also noted other motivations. For one, many saw the manoeuvres aimed at hastening the settlement of the lingering Caspian dispute by exerting pressure on Iran, in particular, and in establishing Russia as the dominant partner in any potential Caspian oil cartel.\footnote{ibid.} In addition to demonstrating continued traditional strength to its Caspian partners, such military manoeuvres had other external audiences, too. Moscow’s war games were a statement to the rest of the world of its continued military strength, growing confidence, and warning to the West not to get too comfortable in expanding into Russia’s backyard.

In 2003 Russian involvement deepened further. That Spring, the Russian leadership sought to temper domestic criticism of the American-led military campaign in Iraq, apparently hoping that the US administration’s preoccupation with the Middle East would allow Russia latitude to explore its own strategic relationships with Central Asian and other CIS states.\footnote{Allison (2004), p. 279.} In the changing global environment, Moscow wanted to pitch itself as a traditional, reliable partner to the quasi-autocratic
In April 2003, a Russian-Turkmen security agreement was signed, concerned with countering outside threats, coordinating foreign policy activities and broadening cooperation between special services. That October, after protracted negotiations, Moscow opened its first post-Soviet base outside Russia in Kant, Kyrgyzstan. While officially established to boost regional security “deterring terrorists and extremists of all kinds”, and as the base of the CIS Collective Security Treaty rapid reaction forces, this was just as clearly a statement that Moscow could match anything Washington could do. A broad Russian-Kyrgyz military cooperation agreement was signed simultaneously with the opening. Ongoing negotiations also continued with Tajikistan, where Russia sought to upgrade its presence to a full military base. At the December 2003 meeting of CIS defence ministers, Moscow sought to further strengthen its broader defence and security ties with CIS members. It offered continued free army training, the sale of weapons at domestic Russian prices, and to give its allies preferential treatment in arms supplies. Putin also made clear at this meeting that the goal for the following year was to develop ‘conceptual approaches to military cooperation (amongst CIS countries) until 2010’.

Putin’s intensification of efforts came against a backdrop of a continued growth of Western activities in the region. Whatever its long-term aspirations, Washington had revolutionised regional dynamics within just a few months and continued to do so over the following years. Broader regional developments, including the opening up of Afghanistan, potentially facilitating a more stable southern trade route through to American ally Pakistan, and the acquisition of a foothold in the Caucasus after easing the pro-Western Saakashvili leadership into power, only intensified Russian concerns over Washington’s ambitions. Analysts foresaw America facilitating the

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116 ibid.
122 S. Frederick Starr (2002), ‘Central Asia’s Sudden Prominence’, *World and I* 17 (4), April, p. 58.
rehabilitation of the so-called ‘Great Silk Route’, allowing it to determine the
direction, scale and methods for transporting Central Eurasia’s energy resources to
world markets, marginalising Russia in the process. American penetration also
inspired resurgent interest from other Western sources, including governments,
multilateral organisations, aid agencies and NGOs. At the forefront of this new
offensive were NATO and the OSCE. Long engaged, they now built on rapidly-
transforming dynamics to reinvigorate a presence compromised in the late 1990s by
the region’s patchy reform record and political unpredictability. Following individual
approaches after 2001, for example, at a June 2004 summit attended by the Kazakh,
Kyrgyz, and Tajik leaders, NATO expressed a desire to devote ‘special focus’ to
developing ties with the Caucasus and Central Asia and increasing its profile in these
‘strategically important’ regions. Russian responses ranged from demands to
increase military cooperation to more subtle calls for promoting democratic
development in order to strengthen Russia’s role as a “guarantor of stability and the
irreversibility of democratic processes”. Generally, however, the transformatory
social and political capacity stemming from the renewed attention of bodies like the
OSCE was seen less positively in Russia than in the West. Many were suspicious of
Western NGO motives throughout the CIS, believing it part of a process of
reorientation through the manufacture and support of change. Set against the
background the Georgian ‘revolution’ and NATO’s Istanbul declaration, Moscow
engineered a statement issued by the CSTO, Moldova, Ukraine and Uzbekistan in
early July 2004, harshly criticising the OSCE and calling for a fundamental
refocusing of its priorities and activities.

While Putin continued to officially refer to shared interests and remained focused
on cooperation, it was quite clear in the FSU these interests still diverged

123 Murat Laumulin (2002), ‘The Contemporary Situation in Central Asia: The Perspective from
Kazakhstan’, in Central Asia and South Caucasus Affairs: 2002, edited by Boris Rumer and Lau
124 Mevlut Katik (2004), ‘NATO Embraces Central Asia and the Caucasus at Istanbul Summit’,
125 Sergei Blagov (2004b), ‘In Central Asia, Russia Pushes Back Against NATO Influence’,
considerably. He also did not ignore longer-term threats. Although he was conscious of constraints to substantive US-Central Asia cooperation, given human rights issues, and suspicion of Washington following the Iraqi invasion and sponsored revolutions in the CIS, and using these concerns strategically, he was not apathetic, acting pre-emptively and positively to counter America, particularly where its actions threatened Russian economic interests. He also capitalised on every opportunity; using regional efforts to reinvigorate strategic competition between Moscow and Washington, as well as Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan’s efforts to counterbalance Uzbekistan’s revitalised hegemonic aspirations, to Russian ends. While it is important not to see Putin’s post 9/11 activism in Central Asia as solely a zero-sum response, denying Washington as much strategic leverage as possible was certainly a motivating factor. Yet this was just as much an effort to protect strategic national interests, as it was for image alone, as plagued his predecessor’s efforts.

Nevertheless, despite Putin’s efforts to stand fast and regain lost ground, the Western presence in the ‘near abroad’ remained controversial and featured highly in the December 2003 Duma elections. American basing agitated nationalist-inclined elements of the Russian political and security elites, and their voices were reinforced by the outcome of the elections. The ‘Rightist’ blocks of Yabloko and the Union of Rightist Forces—parties that consistently expounded ideas of Western-type democracy, liberal market economies, and promoted orientation of Russian foreign policy towards closer rapprochement and cooperation with the West—were soundly routed. Instead, only four parties crossed the five percent barrier: the consistently nationalist LDPR and Communists, Rodina, (the new supposedly Kremlin created, left-leaning party designed to bleed support from the communists), and the party of power, Unity. Suddenly, the last vestiges of Russian liberalism appeared expunged from the political system, with an apparent electoral demand for a more nationalist direction. And for the parties that did succeed in the elections, the theme of ‘Great Russia’ had been widely used during the campaign, not only by those parties

typically identified as nationalists, but also by all the pro-Putin forces. While the result apparently reinforced the degree to which Putin had diverged from common political and electoral sentiment in cooperating with the West, this did not mean Putin himself was displeased with attention to this theme. Here it was being expressed through what had become a relatively safe, unthreatening form of political competition, given his allies’ control of the legislature and the Duma’s minimal policy-making role. In reality, Putin could actually use the legislature and electoral competition to express dissent and explore political themes that he himself could not, in effect warning Washington of limits in how far it could push Russia. Putin could also point to such domestic dissatisfaction in taking a harder line against certain Western demands, affording him more wriggle room. Moreover, any more nationalist, assertive positions Putin subsequently took in the CIS or relations with the West would be ‘evidence’ of his response to electoral demands and his continued ‘democratic credentials’.

Russia’s renewed efforts in the CIS and Central Asia did draw some external concern and criticism, however. Many observers perceived Moscow’s activism as desperate efforts to stem the rapid erosion of Russia’s regional power and to guard the CIS and Central Asia as an exclusive sphere of influence. They questioned whether Putin was using the ‘war on terror’ cynically as a device to re-establish Russia’s hegemonic presence in Central Asia. They believed that such efforts demonstrated continuity in Russian policy, rather than change. The Kant air base, in particular, was seen to have more geopolitical purposes, than a coordinated multilateral anti-terror role. Not only was it in close proximity to the new coalition base at Manas, but as an airbase it was not well-suited to anti-terrorism, given regional terrorists’ tendency towards land-based attacks. International observers levelled similar criticisms at Russian efforts to establish a Tajik base. Again, it was perceived as a response to US interest in basing in Tajikistan, rather than as guarding against the regrouping of Islamic militants in Afghanistan or instability in Kyrgyzstan.

and Uzbekistan, as the authorities claimed. While no specific mention of the war in Iraq was given by Moscow in relation to its efforts to cement Russia’s regional presence, critics inferred that Putin’s concerns over the continuing expansion of America’s regional military presence and its apparent willingness to use force drove his regional policy. Efforts to transform the CST into a more substantive body were also labelled reactionary, and identified as having an antagonistic character. Underscoring this perception was the fact that Putin signed the papers transforming the CST into the Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO) on the very same day that a new partnership council with NATO was established. While the agreement with NATO was in itself a big step forward, the CSTO agreement did make some wonder just how much faith Putin had in Russia’s cooperation with the West. What these actions seemed to say was that Russia harboured a growing scepticism about regional political-security partnerships with non-regional states, beyond limited coordination over counter-terrorism. There was growing concern that Moscow’s measures fostered a dynamic of rivalry rather than synergy and cooperation with other external powers in the region.

International concerns over the potential for unilateral Russian military intervention were also raised when Sergei Ivanov unveiled an unofficial draft of a revised Military Doctrine in October 2003, in which Moscow reserved the right to carry out pre-emptive strikes anywhere in the world and to undertake military action in CIS states, if it felt under threat, citing ‘ethnic or political conflict’ and other dangers to Russia’s economic welfare as potential reasons for involvement. When taken in conjunction with Moscow’s obvious involvement in the elections in the Ukraine, Georgia, and other post-Soviet states or quasi-states like Abkhazia, as well as foot-dragging over the closure of its Georgian bases, these “concerning” tendencies were used as evidence by critics that Russia was still not the normalised, cooperative, transparent state Putin aimed to portray to the world.

136 Allison (20040, p. 277.
It is important, however, not to fall into the trap of negatively stereotyping Russian responses and attributing to these actions more overtly confrontational attitudes than truly existed. There was certainly a degree of credence in Moscow’s claims that a Western bias or double standard continued to affect analysis of Russian actions in trying to protect its political or military-security interests. Western attempts to advance interests in the CIS were characterised as inherently positive, in terms of ‘assistance’ or ‘security guarantees’, while Russian actions were conversely characterised negatively, as ‘interventionist’ or ‘imperialist’. As much as it may have cloaked them in liberal rhetoric, particularly under Bush, Washington was still advancing basic American national interests, and acting in a just as self-interested, realist fashion as Russia, though perhaps more subtly than Moscow. In reality, both powers were competing for influence, and whatever the cooperative rhetoric, both were pursuing their state’s interests first and foremost. Putin understood this. While many international observers saw Putin returning to an antagonistic policy, it could similarly be characterised as realistic; while cooperating in some areas, the two powers would butt heads in others, where their interests diverged. Russia would have to continue to vigorously defend its own national interests, but Putin believed this could still be done in such a way that did not damage the overall positive dynamics of Russia-US relations. It is also important not to view these efforts out of context. As this chapter has already shown, Putin sought to improve relations with the CIS and Central Asia from the very outset of his presidency. His efforts were sustained, and while they increased following September 11, this was as much a policy intensification in response to changing dynamics, as an opportunistic, reactive policy change.

Still, ignoring the existence of these characteristics entirely also underestimates the challenge of formulating policy in Putin’s Russia. Although Putin may have generally adhered to a more pragmatic, normalised, cooperative policy, freed of most imperialist elements, this is not to say the temptation or inclination to revert to past ‘principles’, such as competition and confrontation, did not exist, nor that they were completely purged from policy. According to Putin’s ‘personal operational code’, such tendencies tended to resurface when he felt his opponent was not playing by the
rules, an evaluation that would more likely breed an ‘all bets are off’ attitude.\textsuperscript{139} He thus struggled to maintain his depoliticised approach when he believed Washington was blatantly contravening its side of any perceived or real ‘deal’. Any re-emergence of ‘regressive’ attitudes or rhetoric was also motivated by domestic factors. Although Putin created a situation in which he could pretty much do as he pleased in foreign policy, constraints remained. Most importantly, Putin understood that his ability to implement his chosen strategy was facilitated by his popularity, both amongst a diverse range of political forces and society at large. Maintaining this support meant being seen to be an active defender of Russian interests, answering criticisms, and avoiding completely ostracising any influential domestic interest group, such as the military-security establishment. Delivering benefits to the military, such as the bases it desired in Central Asia was a means of shoring up military confidence in Putin’s performance—shaken somewhat by his decision to allow US troops to mobilise in Central Asia. It did not contradict his overall Central Asia strategy or cause irreparable damage in relations with the West, and freed his hand on matters of greater importance. At times then, placating key groups, who adhered to considerably different foreign policy mindsets, with the types of limited actions or rhetoric they demanded was a more effective strategy than ignoring their demands and compromising the overall balance of power. Even Roy Allison, highly critical of Putin’s post-2002 policy, entertained the possibility that ‘Ivanov doctrine’ of 2003 and its potentially “disturbing direction in security policy” may have been a form of posturing, calculated to appeal to Russian domestic \textit{derzhavniki}.\textsuperscript{140} Realistically, it is unlikely Putin expected many outside Russia to take this policy seriously, other than as a reminder of Russia’s Great Power aspirations. Again, these actions may also have had more indirect political purposes. They reiterated the continued divisions and diversity of opinion in Russia to the West and reminded those major powers who continued to act without respect for Russia or regard for its interests, of the challenging domestic situation Putin faced as the leader of a postcommunist, post-imperial nation. Ultimately, the fact that Putin’s increasingly active policy towards Central Asia was never so openly antagonistic to harm relations with the West, and that broader cooperative efforts outside the CIS remained in place, adds weight to the

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{139} Dyson, p. 344.
\item \textsuperscript{140} Allison (2004), p. 280. A ‘derzhavnik’ (pl. derzhavniki) is a proponent of a strong and powerful state, focused on maintaining order rather than upholding democratic freedoms or civil rights.
\end{itemize}
view that Putin was not reverting to old tactics, but instead exploring a more nuanced and subtle approach.

Putin’s efforts to intensify relations with the ‘near abroad’ were not confined to the military sphere either. Putin understood that while Russia could capitalise on its remaining strengths in the military sphere to improve short-term cooperation with CIS partners, the key to long-term improvement lay in improved economic cooperation. With America’s increased regional involvement, this was only becoming more obvious. If bullying tactics had limits to improving Russia’s regional position, Putin believed making Moscow a more attractive economic partner held greater potential. There were also mutual economic gains to be had. In his approach, however, Putin committed to his earlier principles concerning economic cooperation. In February 2003, for example, when the leaders of Russia, Kazakhstan, Belarus, and Ukraine (whose economies accounted for 94% of the GDP of the CIS and 82% of its foreign trade) agreed to create a ‘single economic space’, this not only signalled a major step forward for regional economic integration, but also confirmation of Putin’s preference for workable, limited multilateral agreements. Moreover, Putin further intensified the process of rationalising Russian regional economic interests—discontinuing unprofitable economic engagement for the sake of continued hegemony—whilst simultaneously encouraging the active pursuit of profitable sectors in order to sustain its regional presence. Obviously, the oil and gas sectors remained at the forefront of such moves, particularly in the Caspian region. Big business increasingly took the lead, with Gazprom spearheading the charge. New ten-year agreements concerning joint extraction and export were signed with Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan in 2002 and 2003, respectively. The KazRosGaz joint venture was formed with Kazakhstan’s KazMunayGaz for the purchase of Kazakh gas and its sale in the CIS and beyond. Gazprom then signed a comprehensive agreement with Ashgabat in April 2003, which some analysts believed created ‘a permanent Russian lock on Turkmenistan’s gas resources and exports’. Not to be left out, Lukoil also

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deepened its investment. It signed a 35-year deal with Uzbekistan in June 2004 concerning development of a major gas field, planning investment of some $1 billion. Overall, Russia’s oil and gas politics increased in focus and clarity, delivering more tangible economic outcomes. Trading Turkmen pipeline access for shares in gas developments, for example, saw Russia’s Zarubezhneft and Itera acquire some of United Arab Emirates’ Dragon Oil and Malaysia’s Petronas’ shares in offshore gas development projects. A new Russia-Kazakhstan-Turkmenistan agreement in 2007 to upgrade pipelines and construct a gas new pipeline from Turkmenistan through Kazakhstan and Russia to Europe, similarly sustained integrationist developments.

Outside the oil and gas sector increased Russian interest was also evident. In June 2004 the head of Russia’s United Energy Systems (EES) Anatolii Chubais discussed energy cooperation with Tajikistan’s President Rakhmanov, and in August signed a memorandum of understanding with Kyrgyz Prime Minister Nikolai Tanaev concerning completion of two hydroelectric power stations, a deal potentially worth $2 billion. After 2005, too, RusAl commenced multibillion-dollar investments in Tajikistan's power and aluminium industries. Importantly, such deals were just the tip of the iceberg, as the following chapter will discuss in greater detail. Suffice it to say, that after 2000, Russian outward direct investment expanded rapidly. Russian corporations increasingly challenged other multi-nationals. While centred in the oil, gas and metals sectors, and in the CIS, this investment was also spreading to other sectors and areas. What was most important, however, was not just growing


147 Victoria Panfilova (2004b), ‘Rakhmanov Will be Helped with Money’ [Rakhmanovy Pomogut Dengami], Nezavisimaya Gazeta, 10 June, p. 5.


regional investment, but the increased cooperation between business and government. Increasingly, specific economic deals came in tandem with other inter-governmental agreements, testimony to more coordinated foreign policy efforts to deliver important political and strategic, as well as economic, outcomes. The Rosneft-Gazprom-KazMunayGaz joint venture, which guaranteed Russia a dominant future role in the transit of oil and gas from Kazakhstan, for example, was negotiated alongside other key bilateral issues.\textsuperscript{150} When Putin and Niyazov inked their strategic energy accord, negotiated in conjunction with the Gazprom deal that finalised Turkmenistan’s supply of gas to Russia through to 2028, they also concluded a security agreement.\textsuperscript{151} While Putin may have claimed that the Lukoil and Gazprom deals to invest in Uzbekistan were “…not Russia investing in Uzbekistan, but Russian business investing”,\textsuperscript{152} they were signed simultaneously with Putin and Karimov’s conclusion of a treaty on strategic partnership in the political, economic, military-technical and trade spheres.\textsuperscript{153} This indicated there was actually a close linkage between the economic and political agreements. Similarly, Anatolii Chubais’ efforts in Dushanbe were precluded by an agreement Putin reached in Sochi with Rakhmanov that Russia would invest in major energy projects in Tajikistan.\textsuperscript{154}

While these trends reflected the growing role of private and public economic and business interests in Russian policy-making, it also demonstrated an increasing willingness to use economic levers and incentives in the pursuit of other political and strategic goals in the ‘near abroad’. When competition with Washington for influence in Tajikistan had arisen in 2004, for example, few rated Moscow’s ability to compete. However, Moscow was able to protect its strong relationship with Dushanbe, 


\textsuperscript{151} Victor Yasmann (2003i), ‘…And a Security Agreement as Well’, \textit{RFE/RL Newsline} 7 (70), 11 April.


\textsuperscript{153} Daniel Kimmage and Victor Yasmann (2004), ‘Russian President begins Tour of Central Asia’, \textit{RFE/RL Newsline} 8 (115), 18 June.

\textsuperscript{154} Panfilova (2004b), p. 5.
ostensibly by writing off Tajikistan’s debt. Importantly, this method, through a diplomatic formula called ‘investing in debt’—where the debt was written off for a portion of equity in the completed hydroelectric project Chubais and EES had penned agreement to—reinforced Russia’s stake in the Tajik economy. The successful negotiations also granted Moscow the rights to the Nurek space surveillance centre, and confirmed Russia’s rights to open a new military base. This clearly demonstrated Putin’s ability to achieve ambitious strategic ends with economic means. While some analysts identified this transformation as the re-packaging of geopolitics as *geoeconomics*, underscored by the country’s petrodollar wealth, a more positive analysis saw evidence of greater policy coordination in an approach that combined political and economic incentives in foreign policy as successfully as its most active, Western, great power counterparts. And as other external powers and the countries of the ‘near abroad’ showed greater caution in their relations in the later Putin period, such incentives positioned Moscow favourably. In effect, Putin smartly recast Russia as a dependable and undemanding provider of opportunities, rather than just threats. His administration’s reference to ‘sovereign democracy’ was similarly attractive to other authoritarian leaders feeling threatened by increasing Western political interference and the colour revolutions in the CIS. He successfully appealed to those in the ‘near abroad’ with misgivings about other foreign powers, pitching Russia as ‘better the devil you know’.

The overall impact of Putin’s transformed strategy for Russia’s position in Central Asia was significant. On one hand, an ever-widening range of powers continued to expand relations with key areas of the ‘near abroad’, displacing Russia as the sole

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159 See Lo (2003), pp. 65-70.


161 Discouraging issues included revolutions, dissatisfaction with the demands associated with strategic partnerships with the U.S. and lack of real benefits, as well as fears over the effects of the war in Afghanistan. This last point is raised in Charles William Maynes (2004), ‘Is Uzbekistan a Third Front in America’s War on Terror?’ *Khaleej Times*, Wednesday 7 April, p. 12.
hegemon. The advance of numerous Western nations, organisations and investors behind Washington, in particular, exacerbated pre-existing tendencies towards a multilateralisation of post-Soviet nations’ external relations. It also introduced a number of new regional dynamics. These changes strongly influenced the ‘revolutions’ in Georgia, Ukraine, and Kyrgyzstan, meaning even the more isolated sub-regions of the CIS such as Central Asia continued to be steadily freed “from the tenacious embrace of the Russian Federation”. At the same time, however, Putin’s revised approach towards the CIS and Central Asia meant Moscow’s position was increasingly more sustainable. The new policy saw Russia focusing its resources on the areas most central to its national interests, particularly in terms of security and the economy, and in those areas where cooperation was most likely to bear fruit. In maintaining a pragmatic, multifaceted approach following September 11, Putin ensured Russia was not entirely marginalised by the increased attention of the U.S and other powers to the region. Even after the externally influenced Kyrgyz revolution, Putin remained consistent and cooperative. Though he expressed concern over the means of change, he recognised there was little Russia could realistically do, and pragmatically pledged Moscow’s willingness to work with the new leadership.

Putin’s more measured and disciplined approach, in stark contrast to Yeltsin’s, stood Russia in good stead to weather such temporary storms and continue working to protecting and enhancing its regional influence. Though suspicions would long remain, Putin’s efforts helped the process of rehabilitating Russia’s regional image. It was now seen less as the unpredictable, potentially threatening power it was under Yeltsin, and was instead perceived as a more predictable, reliable and subsequently, more welcome partner.

Conclusion

From the outset, Putin pursued a policy in Central Asia that was geared to the clinical pursuit of Russia’s national interests in the region. His policy was strongly pragmatic and starkly realist in orientation. It also gave new priority to economic and security considerations. While drawing on aspects of both the Kozyrev and Primakov

162 Alexei Malashenko refers to a term used by Kazakh expert Umirserik Kasenov in 1998, in Malashenko (2005), p. 11.
strategies, the Putin administration conceptualised and applied them in a more refined, cohesive, and consistent manner. This improvement was greatly influenced by a more stable and tightly controlled domestic environment where pluralism and competition (and conflict) were more constrained, his opponents were more successfully disenfranchised, and potential sources of disruption were better managed. This meant that the foreign policy outcomes of the Yeltsin and Putin periods were quite different. Putin was better able to capitalise on changing regime factors like the significant powers of the superpresidential system and increased centralisation of state power within his executive, combined with political ‘advantages’ like increased domestic optimism, the opposition’s continued disorganisation, his widespread popularity and limited ‘accumulated baggage’ to carve out a new policy direction. When opposition to his policies did arise, in addition to the illiberal tools at his disposal, his accomplished political and economic management meant he could better incentivise or enforce compliance to maintain a generally more stable policy-making environment without having to resort to the threat of force as authoritarian leaders would typically have to. While under Yeltsin, such differences became destabilising factors, as transition dissolved the boundaries between the external and domestic spheres and undermined the government’s ability to take considered decisions based primarily on external dynamics, Putin had greater success in compartmentalising the two spheres. He better insulated responses to external stimuli from potentially disruptive domestic influences through his nurturing of a more tightly controlled and managed quasi-democratic regime, facilitating a better quality foreign policy and increased projection of Russian interests on the global sphere.

Nowhere could this transformation be seen better than in Russia’s approach to the CIS and Central Asia. From the very outset, Putin’s engagement and greater regional focus disarmed Russia’s nationalist forces, delivering the attention towards the ‘near abroad’ they had long demanded. At the same time, however, this re-engagement was on Putin’s terms. Stronger security ties were combined with an increased economic focus, and the approach generally was more targeted and differentiated. It was not motivated solely by some kind of neo-imperial mission, but by a more rational consideration of where specific ‘near abroad’ partners fit into Moscow’s overall
global strategy. No longer were the CIS and Central Asia considered just as some outlying remnant of empire. Under Putin, Moscow focused on the areas in which it could most successfully compete and with those partners most amenable to cooperation, but also on those areas closely associated with Russian national interests, as Putin interpreted them. Although domestic opponents sometimes disagreed with Putin’s conceptualisation of national interests and his means of pursuing them, they were mostly unable to challenge his policies. While it is important not to overstate the absolute coherence of policy, nor the complete abandonment of more traditional geopolitical ambitions, Putin moved beyond solely rhetorical methods of convincing the world of Russia’s Great Power status. Moscow now employed a more focussed, positive, and pragmatic policy to actually substantiate these claims. In doing so, Putin laid the basis in parts of the CIS like Central Asia for achieving more modern, constructive partnerships and claims to regional leadership. The following chapter will look more closely at the precise expressions of Putin’s policy and its outcomes in Central Asia.
Chapter eight
Taming the transition: Putin’s brand of ‘Realpolitik’ in Central Asia

Political and Economic Cooperation

As the last chapter outlined, although Putin’s government prioritised the post-Soviet region, it took a more hard-headed approach towards the CIS as an institution. Its inadequacies and, hitherto, unworkable nature, meant investing too much effort in the body would have negative repercussions for Russian interests. Instead, Putin preferred bilateral and limited multilateral forums to pursue his regional strategy, focused on economic or military goals. Essentially, hopes for some type of all-encompassing, comprehensive political cooperation were abandoned. It was for such reasons that Putin was not particularly phased when Turkmenistan withdrew from the CIS to take an associate membership in 2005. Putin understood that other links were potentially more meaningful than what practically remained a hollow body. While he was less antagonistic than his predecessor towards cooperating solely with Central Asian allies, too, he remained wary of integrating Russia too closely politically with the region, or any state. It was not, however, that Putin wanted to avoid association with authoritarian or non-European partners, but more that he wanted to avoid any interconnectedness and dilution of Russian dominance that constrained its ability to act unilaterally. Put simply, cooperation would be sought on Russian terms, at its pace, with little pretence of mutual benefit. As with elsewhere in the CIS, Putin’s political approach moved away from political instrumentalism or efforts aimed solely at increasing Russia’s prestige, to increasingly focus on serving specific goals.

An example of this new hard-headedness, was Russia’s 2000 withdrawal from the 1992 Bishkek agreement on visa-free CIS travel. Instead, Moscow announced that it

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1 Valentin Mite (2005), ‘CIS: Turkmenistan Reduces Ties to “Associate Member”’, RFE/RL, August 20. Available at: http://www.rferl.org/content/article/1061002.html (Accessed 03 February 2010)
would henceforth conclude agreements on a bilateral basis. This not only enabled closer Russian control of its border security, but also provided Moscow with a valuable bargaining tool, and a means of pressuring uncooperative partners, given many—particularly those in Central Asia—were motivated by economic necessity to maintain a liberal visa regime. The July 2002 adoption of stricter citizenship laws similarly signalled Putin’s unsentimental approach and more calculated use of the post-Soviet space. While Yeltsin had defined citizenship broadly, reflecting the fluidity and confusion that existed following the Soviet collapse as well as more cynical political calculations regarding the utility of Russian citizens abroad, Putin brought this ambiguous regime to an end. The new policy clearly identified the CIS as a source of labour for the Russian economy, but easy citizenship was ended for all those who had failed to claim it by that time. While Putin’s policy had to address the desperate need for immigrants, it had to balance this with domestic unemployment, security concerns, illegal migration, and the government’s limited capacity to assist migrants. Putin also had to consider social concerns, even xenophobia, given migrants were most likely to be Central Asian or Caucasian.

However, Putin soon began concluding bilateral agreements to clarify this migration policy and reward cooperative partners. During military basing negotiations, for example, Moscow and Dushanbe concluded a labour agreement under which Tajik citizens would be able to apply for legal residence and work permits in Russia, receive the same wages and benefits as local workers, equal access to public health services and education, and the same rights to old-age pensions for the time worked in Russia. In return, they were required to pay Russian taxes. While the agreement’s application remained plagued by problems, at least theoretically it demonstrated efforts to more effectively manage future migration, ensuring Russia got the full benefit of tapping into the relatively cheap, but ever expanding, Central Asian labour pool. Similarly, Putin’s September 2003 introduction of a bill allowing CIS citizens to serve in the Russian military and receive citizenship after three years

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2 Herspring and Rutland, p. 246.
4 Herspring and Rutland, p. 246.
of service,7 deemed the CIS and Central Asia potential pools for fulfilling Russia’s military manpower needs. The Russian General Staff believed that many would be enticed by the prospect of citizenship and by the comparatively high wages of Russian contract soldiers.8 By attracting foreign recruits willing to work in conditions many Russians would not, Moscow could partially offset its own shrinking draft and continued recruitment troubles. While some observers in the CIS responded negatively,9 characterising Moscow as a predator on its neighbours’ skilled populations and weakened armed forces, in Central Asia both Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan reacted positively.10 As states with growing populations and weak economies, Putin’s bill appeared mutually beneficial. It was also a clear demonstration of Putin’s targeted, tactical efforts to use the CIS and Central Asia to acquire the human resources Russia’s national interests demanded, and balanced earlier restrictions with an incentive-based system.

Such changes naturally impacted Russia’s diaspora/compatriots policy. Initial signals indicated a more active strategy. The National Security Blueprint published in January 2000, for example, included reference to protecting “…the lawful rights and interests of Russian citizens abroad, through the use of political, economic and other measures”.11 Similarly, the Foreign Policy Concept committed Russia to “protect the rights and interests of Russian citizens and compatriots abroad”, obtaining “adequate guarantees for the rights and freedoms of compatriots in states where they permanently reside” on the basis of both international law and bilateral agreements.12

8 ibid.
9 The bill conflicted with the legislation of many CIS countries, Ukraine and Georgia included: ibid.
Putin himself, in a January 2001 television interview, emphasised that “…we are clearly not doing enough to protect our diaspora, to protect culture and the Russian language”.

Sceptics, however, saw inconsistencies in Russia’s approach. They noted that while Moscow harshly criticised the Baltic states, it remained quieter about the larger scale abuses and much poorer living conditions for its citizens in the CIS. Moreover, real commitments increased little, perhaps unsurprising given Putin’s unwillingness to commit resources to apparently unprofitable endeavours. As a consequence, Putin copped early domestic criticism for his apparently contradictory approach, which seemed to perpetuate Yeltsin’s instrumentalist, politically motivated reference to protecting the diaspora, while actually doing very little. Konstantin Zatulin, a well-known nationalist politician, even argued that the OSCE and Western governments did more for Russian minorities in Central Asia than the Kremlin and MFA.

Deputy Chairman of the Duma’s Committee for CIS Affairs Anatoly Chekhoyev, too, noted that while Germany spent 969DM annually on its compatriots living abroad, Russia spent only 0.25 kopecks.

The declining situation of Russians in Turkmenistan appeared to confirm Putin’s expedient, questionable commitment to compatriots. Concerns arose after Niyazov unilaterally revoked the joint dual citizenship agreement on 22 April 2003, giving all dual citizens in Turkmenistan two months to decide which citizenship to retain. Although Putin and Niyazov had signed a protocol on ending dual citizenship earlier that month, Moscow claimed it had not expected such rapid implementation or the agreement’s retroactive application. The MFA went so far as to label the decision a “serious blow to the interests of our fellow citizens in Turkmenistan” and that it affected their ‘fundamental rights’. While Moscow did pursue official efforts to resolve the issue, including the formation of an intergovernmental commission, Putin drew heavy domestic criticism for his perceived willingness to sell out Russians

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14 Jack, p. 268.
16 Tarasov (2002).
in the first place and the lack of genuine efforts to convince Ashgabat to amend its decision. Critics claimed state-controlled television studiously ignored the news from Turkmenistan in some sort of cover up of the Kremlin’s actions, while stories of Russians being evicted from their apartments, losing their jobs, and queuing to leave the country abounded in the independent press. Many cynically argued that Putin’s agreement to end the protocol was the final price for the sought-after, long-term contract on the purchase of Turkmen gas that was signed at the same April meeting. Amongst widespread criticism, the Union of Rightist Forces (SPS) described the protocol as a violation of the rights of Russian citizens, criticising their abandonment to the mercy of the Turkmen authorities and the forfeiting of Russian strategic interests under what party leader Boris Nemtsov labelled a “gas-for-people” deal.

The Duma, too, expressed concerns. In June, the head of its International Affairs Committee, Dmitrii Rozogin, announced Turkmenistan was being placed on a list of countries Russians were advised not to visit, and that it was no longer safe for Russians to live there. The Duma issued a statement critical of Turkmenistan, which garnered 411 votes for and only two against. Its Committee for CIS Affairs also recommended sanctions. However, the fact that the Duma’s criticism was primarily targeted towards the Turkmen authorities, rather than Putin or his government, spoke volumes. Claims that “it is not a secret for anyone in Russia that Mr Rozogin never makes statements on his own initiative, and he always speaks with instructions from the Kremlin”, suggested that much of the criticism was not entirely spontaneous. It appeared that Putin was probably using the parliament to indirectly voice views or displeasure he preferred not to express officially. The Duma’s criticism likely reflected the Kremlin’s frustration over a multitude of issues including dual

citizenship and Caspian Sea delineation, and was a subtle effort to encourage Ashgabat to rethink its positions without placing official cooperation in jeopardy. It was also a way to give voice to domestic concerns without obligating the Kremlin to respond. This is not to say that the Kremlin remained completely silent. In December 2003, Foreign Minister Ivanov stated that Russia would seek resolution bilaterally and also through the UN, OSCE, and other international organisations. Moscow also supported the November 2003 UN General Assembly resolution on Turkmenistan. This was a turnaround from its abstention from the UN Commission on Human Rights resolution on Turkmenistan’s human rights record in April 2003. However, few critics saw these steps as contributing in any great measure to improving conditions for Russians in Turkmenistan. As a consequence, claims remained widespread in Russia that the hypothetical opportunity to share in the exploitation of Turkmen energy resources was more attractive for Putin’s government than protecting the rights of its own citizens.

While such criticism had some substance, Russian policy evolution also contributed to the limited response. Like the citizenship issue more generally, Putin had already moved towards a more defined, if somewhat unsentimental, classification of compatriot rights. Despite Russia’s need for migrants, Moscow was keen to ensure Slavic minorities remained in Central Asia given the burden on the federal budget and strain on the meagre resources of the immigration service their return would cause. The new citizenship law had not only made it more difficult for former citizens of the USSR, regardless of ethnicity, to apply for and acquire Russian citizenship, but also finally drew a line between who was and who was not a Russian citizen. The term sootechestvennik (compatriot) was to be used henceforth strictly to describe citizens living abroad and not to describe the great mass of ethnic

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Russians living in the FSU. While Putin could not get away with abandoning the nationalist demand to protect compatriots entirely, he could certainly narrow down who that was and circumscribe the parameters of Russian assistance. This was also a more blatantly realist approach. It reflected the view that essentially everyone who wanted to leave the countries of the CIS had already migrated, particularly in the case of Turkmenistan. Some felt that Russians had had the opportunity to leave Turkmenistan, but had previously benefited by staying, and in deciding to stay had taken a bet both ways. It was hardly the Russian government’s job to guarantee their rights. Academic research further supported this view. It found that few Russian speakers living outside Russia actually considered it their homeland or looked to the government in Moscow to defend their interests, recognising this as the responsibility of local authorities. Such findings underscored how much earlier politicisation had exaggerated the diaspora issue; a point Putin appeared to understand. While a vague, politically expedient definition of citizenship may have suited Yeltsin’s political strategy, even so far as to provide some legitimacy for Russia’s continued intrusions on its neighbours’ sovereignty, Putin understood the importance of a clearer definition. Not only did it absolve him of certain costly obligations, but it also contributed to his own nation-building efforts by establishing a clearer definition of what it meant to be Russian. It would also facilitate more trusting mutual relations with Russia’s partners by alleviating concerns of Russian compatriots as a potential fifth-column undermining their efforts at nation-building.

Thus, it was a combination of expediency, self-interest, pragmatism and realism that guided Putin’s approach towards the diaspora and the Turkmenistan issue specifically. Still, for all Putin’s perceived unwillingness to complicate bilateral relations by overtly intervening or harshly criticising Central Asia’s treatment of minorities, a number of more subtle efforts to ameliorate conditions for compatriots were undertaken. One important area, for example, was effort to sponsor the Russian

33 Interview with Stanislav Zhukov, Institute of World Economy and International Relations (IMEMO), Moscow, Monday 1 December, 2003.
language. Though its use remained widespread in Central Asia, gradual nationalisation of language requirements and moves by states like Turkmenistan to restrict Russian language media negatively impacted the Russian diaspora. Subsequently, as early as the June 2000 Moscow CIS summit, the Putin government set about strengthening the role of the Russian language in the FSU.\textsuperscript{35} Demonstrating more coordinated efforts to serve this end, Kyrgyzstan’s energy debts were written off in response to Akaev’s willingness to make Russian the second official language.\textsuperscript{36} At an international congress on the Russian language in the CIS in Bishkek, March 2004, Education Minister Vladimir Filippov declared that Moscow intended to increase funding for supporting the Russian language in the CIS, as well as increasing the quantity of Russian textbooks, manuals and students eligible to receive free higher education in Russia.\textsuperscript{37} These moves, of course sought more than assisting the diaspora. They were connected to a broader battle for hearts and minds in the region. The media was also an increasingly important component in this struggle. Catherine Fitzpatrick noted, for example, that Kremlin-controlled television, in particular, was becoming instrumental in promoting Putin’s regional policies, in maintaining hegemony over the CIS ‘information space’ and in securing Russian geopolitical objectives.\textsuperscript{38} The expansion of the state-run Voice of Russia (\textit{Golos Rossii}) to Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan in August 2004,\textsuperscript{39} was evidence of such efforts. The degree to which the media was connected with Russia’s political goals was cynically summarised by Fitzpatrick, who argued that “any subscriber to the top oil newsletters in the region following the status of various energy deals between Russia and the ‘near abroad’ could probably fairly accurately determine the temperature of coverage of this or that CIS state in that week’s news on Russian television”.\textsuperscript{40}

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\item The Economist (2000), ‘Russia’s Imperial Yearning’, June 24, p. 65.
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Shaping and framing information in the CIS was thus another method through which Russia hoped to influence regional developments, in which obviously language and compatriots were interwoven. Thus, although direct efforts to assist the diaspora remained little more developed than under Yeltsin, the diaspora moved from being simply a political pawn to become integrated into a more comprehensive political, social and cultural approach. While the approach remained flawed—particularly in terms of transparency—it still demonstrated the beginnings of more subtle efforts to facilitate the successful pursuit of Russia’s interests.

Putin’s response to the regional ‘revolutions’ starting in 2004, also demonstrated a more pragmatic approach. Certainly, the Georgian and Ukrainian revolutions were hardly something that pleased the Putin government, particularly as Moscow-friendly leaders were replaced with more pro-Western, even anti-Russian governments. Though openly expressing displeasure, Putin did not unnecessarily overstate conflict with the West. He also worked to turn the events into an opportunity for Russia. The Kremlin’s response to another potential ‘Orange Revolution’ was to tighten relations with dictators in Belarus and Central Asia, capitalising on their fear of political change. Putin reiterated previous key principles in Russia’s Central Asia approach: that political stability was of paramount importance and experiments with easing authoritarian rule were inherently dangerous; that the present generation of leaders, despite their quasi-feudal ways, were predictable secular authoritarians, Soviet-educated and Russian-speaking, making them preferable to possible fundamentalist Muslim leaders; and that human rights were a luxury where strong civil institutions remain underdeveloped. This was a language that appealed to the region’s leaders, as did the renewed material support. It built on their growing disillusionment and apprehension regarding what the West was trying to achieve in Central Asia. Consequently, Russia’s despatch of observers to Kyrgyzstan’s February 2005

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42 Trenin (2003), p. 128.

43 ibid.

elections was seen by cynics less as an effort to identify infringements, than to use their experience in electoral falsification.\textsuperscript{45}

This approach was not uniformly supported in Russia. Some critics interpreted Putin’s pragmatism as a ‘back-down’ that harmed Russia’s interests in former Soviet space. Some dissenting voices compared the Kremlin’s support for ex-communist rulers with its conservative policies in the 19\textsuperscript{th} century’s monarchist Holy Alliance, noting that such a path committed Russia to again supporting inherently unstable regimes apt to eventual collapse.\textsuperscript{46} Externally, too, observers believed this support had the potential to undermine long-term regional security, given the incumbent leaders’ questionable governance, obsessive focus on regime security, political control, and heavy-handed responses to moderate Islam.\textsuperscript{47} Moreover, rather than endearing itself to the new political generation in Central Asia by promoting greater openness, liberalism or even democracy, Moscow associated itself instead with the support of rotten, ‘anti-democratic’ forces, something no amount of post-revolutionary pragmatism could erase.\textsuperscript{48} Generally, however, most Russians believed that conservatism, lack of strong opposition, fears of destabilisation and political Islam, the administrative strength of the ruling ‘families’, and the West’s similar focus on stability,\textsuperscript{49} meant Central Asia was less vulnerable than other parts of the CIS. This confidence appeared misplaced when Akaev’s government in Kyrgyzstan was overthrown in a post-electoral uprising in March 2005, reminiscent of earlier revolutions. Again, Russian accusations of Western involvement surfaced. Duma Security Committee Deputy Chairman Mikhail Grishankov, for example, noted similarities in the Kyrgyz and Georgian events, claiming that he was “deeply convinced that the organizer of these two events should be sought in the same


\textsuperscript{47} Allison (2004), pp. 284-5.

\textsuperscript{48} Maksim Glikin, Viktoria Panfilova and Saken Salimov (2005), ‘The Revolution in Kyrgyzstan will be “Yellow”’ ['Revolyutsiya v Kirgizii Budet “Zheltoi”'], Nezavisimaya Gazeta, 14 January, p. 5.

\textsuperscript{49} Malashenko (2005), pp. 9-11.
place—the United States”.

Still, few could deny a domestic element in this political struggle. Even Putin had to admit the events were “the results of the weakness of the previous government and the accumulation of social and economic problems.” While he did express concern with the ‘unlawful’ means of political change, he stressed that Russia could work with the new leadership in Bishkek. Despite failing patience in Washington’s ‘interference’ in these events, then, he steeled himself, maintaining his pragmatic approach and focus on the greater strategic importance of cooperation. Still, this did not mean he was averse to the parliament and other figures venting anger with the US that he himself chose voice more diplomatically. His foreign policy dominance meant, however, that when he and the MFA said there would be no Russian intervention, this was the case, and no institutional actors seriously challenged this line.

Likewise, Putin moved to clarify the conflicting tendencies between asserting some sort of imperialist hegemony in Central Asia and upholding more economically rational approaches. Though never fully resolved, it was more often the rational approach that held sway. Russia increasingly focused on pursuing more self-interested economic integration and, given Putin’s strong accent on economic recovery, was even more loathe to devoting resources to endeavours with marginal returns or those that diverted it from this task. Putin also worked to reconcile the fact that the Russian and Central Asian economies continued to become more competitive than complementary, sharing the economic imperative to attract external investment and to secure markets in the global economy. He was undoubtedly assisted in both these tasks by Russia’s considerable hydrocarbon-driven economic growth, which easily outstripped its neighbours and increased the ability to sustain an active policy without compromising the reform trajectory. Putin’s more integrated view of the region’s role in facilitating Russia’s economic recovery was also important. In 2002 he stressed Russia could actually gain global advantages through large-scale joint projects in infrastructure, transport and energy deliveries within the CIS. With the

52 ibid.
implementation of these changes in focus and attitude, Putin’s government was able to expand cooperation in a manner that complemented broader economic efforts. Though certainly his government’s efforts increased after the US military mobilisation into the region, this represented more a continued intensification of previous activity than a re-focusing of efforts.

In terms of implementation, policy focused on bilateral and restricted multilateral efforts with a smaller number of partners. Moscow did not target any region-wide bodies.\(^55\) His efforts were focused on two economic organisations comprised of willing partners with common goals. The first of these was the Eurasian Economic Community (EurAsEC), formed in October 2000 from the 1995 Customs Union and 1999 treaty on the ‘Customs Union and the Common Economic Space’, signed by Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan.\(^56\) EurAsEc aspired to a full-scale customs union and common economic space, collaboration in WTO admission efforts, common border security guidelines, common transport and energy markets, joint socioeconomic development programmes, the harmonisation of law and expansion of trade.\(^57\) Putin described EurAsEC’s establishment as “just the first significant step” in stimulating CIS integration processes, adding that “we are ready to move forward in this direction”.\(^58\) While Putin may have been ready, very few multilateral advances were made towards these optimistic goals, lending weight to critics' claims its creation was politically- rather than economically- motivated. In 2004 the Kazakh Prime Minister noted with concern that fewer than half the forty-two cooperation agreements signed the previous year had been systematically implemented.\(^59\) Still, positive, incremental steps towards integration were achieved in

\(^{55}\) While Russia joined the CACO (Central Asia Cooperation Organisation 18 October 2004), its membership here was more symbolic and this was not a Russian-led initiative.

\(^{56}\) Note: this organisation is also known by the acronyms EEC and EAEC.


areas of most interest to Russia, such as energy cooperation. In October 2003, for example, the organisation’s Integration Committee approved financing for Kyrgyzstan’s Kambar-Ata 2 and Tajikistan’s Sangtuda-1 power stations, and a plan for a unified energy grid embracing all member states had already been drawn up.60

In Putin’s second term, EurAsEC strengthened further when the five CACO leaders announced their merger with the organisation in October 2005.61 Though neither organisation could boast many successes, this was symbolically significant, particularly because it brought strategically important Uzbekistan back within the fold. It consolidated Russia’s rapprochement with Tashkent that had strengthened after Karimov gave Washington six months to remove all its forces from the country.62 At the 2006 Sochi summit, positive trends continued. Members debated accelerating plans for a customs union while simultaneously managing relations with the WTO, formally extended membership to Uzbekistan, strengthened their ties with the CSTO, and discussed strengthening energy cooperation, particularly in the hydroelectric and nuclear spheres.64 This final point, in particular, offered further potential for Russia to expand its control over Central Asia’s energy resources, something that strongly aligned with Putin’s broader direction.

The other significant regional multilateral economic integration organisation, the Single Economic Space (SES), included only one Central Asian state: Kazakhstan.65 It professed similar goals to EurAsEC; pursuing a common Eurasian economic space, including customs union, free trade zone, common currency and policies, but it balanced the ‘Asiatic’ Kazakhstan with European Belarus and Ukraine. Perhaps recognising this initiative as the last chance to orient the favoured European post-Soviet space towards Russia, Moscow repeatedly offered Ukraine numerous

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61 CACO is comprised of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Russia.
65 This organisation is known by alternatively by the acronyms SES/UES Single or United Economic Space, or also as the Union of Four. Initiated by Russia and Kazakhstan at the beginning of 2003, it was later expanded to include Belarus and Ukraine.
concessions to participate. While Kiev did join, the multilateral political will for implementation again remained weak, and none of the members appeared sufficiently committed or flexible enough to bring about integration. At the 2004 Yalta summit, for example, though development of the body was discussed, no documents were signed. Putin vaguely noted 2005-2006 as a timeline for establishing an operational framework. The lack of mechanisms to ensure implementation of agreements only further hindered the body’s potential. Although it was still early days, the organisation’s limited potential only diminished following the ‘Orange Revolution’. Even without formally ending its association with the organisation, Kiev’s reorientation saw many in Moscow resign themselves to the fact it would never be realized as originally envisioned. On 1 July 2005 the preparation term of the documents creating the Single Economic Space (SES) expired, with the parties failing to agree upon protocols and other package documents. Though the shifting internal dynamics in Ukraine swinging between Yushchenko and Yanukovich offered periodic optimism, the organisation effectively had no future.

While pursuing these multilateral economic initiatives, Moscow still seized opportunities for fruitful smaller-scale multilateral or bilateral agreements when they arose. Following September 11, he revived his earlier idea of a gas alliance between Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Kazakhstan, proposing the Eurasian Alliance of Natural Gas Producers in January 2002. That March they agreed on a statement of intent on Cooperation in Energy Policy and Measures to Defend the Interests of

67 ibid.
Natural Gas Producers. At the 2007 EurAsEC meeting, too, Moscow signed a package of agreements with Belarus and Kazakhstan on the legal basis of the Customs Union, ensuring continued forward movement without becoming hamstrung by other, less motivated partners. However, the slow pace of any of these proposals and other multilateral failures merely strengthened Putin’s favoured bilateral approach. Bilateral efforts also centred on Russian strengths, primarily hydrocarbon development, underscoring better tailoring to opportunities and interests. Though the focus was primarily on the resource-rich Central Asian Caspian states and Uzbekistan, policy took a regional approach, seeking opportunities where they existed. Putin understood which resources and advantages would allow Russia to compete successfully with growing external interests in this profitable region, could he better coordinate them. Consequently, policy focused on three areas: firstly, insisting on the priority use of the existing Russian export infrastructure; secondly, promoting Russian oil and gas companies and helping them obtain the maximum shares possible in available projects; and thirdly, attempting to block projects that did not promote Russian interests.

In fact, the government’s ‘counter offensive’ in the Caspian and Central Asian energy sectors actually began as early as Fall 1999. Construction of the CPC pipeline began in November 1999 and, in order to improve the prospects of a major oil pipeline through the North Caucasus, construction of a bypass crossing Dagestan to Novorossiisk—avoiding Chechnya—was hurried. This became operational in April 2000. At an April 2000 Russian Security Council meeting, Putin requested greater engagement in the exploitation of Caspian energy resources and the coordination of policy between companies and ministries. By some accounts, Putin argued for Moscow to throw its full weight behind efforts to compete with Washington for control of the region’s resources. Putin’s problem was that although America identified broad regional interests, protecting energy interests had become an

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72 ibid.
75 The CPC pipeline runs across Russia from the Tengiz field to Novorossiisk on Russia’s Black Sea coast. It is Russia’s preferred option for transporting Caspian hydrocarbons.
77 ibid, p. 104
increasingly important component of its strategy. This was pursued most visibly through direct investment in oil and gas production and the establishment of control over transportation routes and the construction of pipelines. However, Russian analysts believed Washington’s Caspian policy was broader than oil and gas pipelines specifically. They argued its fundamental aim was to isolate Russia from the states of the region. Interwoven with this emerging focus on oil and gas was the tailoring of economic support to assist market reforms in key regional economies. In 1999, for example, almost half of Washington’s financial assistance ($21.2m of $46m) to Kazakhstan was directed toward restructuring industry, privatisation, legal and administrative reforms, technical assistance, training of personnel, and change in the business climate. After September 11, Washington’s economic relations with the region intensified. While growth occurred in a number of sectors, including strategic oil and gas projects, it was that growth centred on the ‘Northern Distribution Network (NDN)’ that had the most immediate impact. The NDN was established as a supply chain into Afghanistan, through Central Asia. However, the sheer mass of resources coming through the supply chain meant it also became an important economic driver in the Central Asian economies. Long term, too, observers believed that Washington and NATO had a strategic vision for the NDN, intending for it to displace the SCO as the engine of economic and security integration in Central Asia.

In 2010 US Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defence for Afghanistan, Pakistan and Central Asia, David Sedney, noted at a House of Representatives hearing on the growing importance of the US-Central Asia Partnership that “…by expanding trade linkages, the NDN has the potential to one day reconnect Central Asia to India, Pakistan, and other formerly closed markets, in a direct land route from the heart of

79 Murat Laumulin argues that there were traditionally eight principal thrusts to American policy in Central Asia; 1) a significant (and growing) aid program, 2) a presupposition of U.S. involvement in regional affairs and contacts with the leadership and political elites of the region, 3) an interest in democratisation and human rights, 4) support for market reforms, 5) efforts to reduce the potential of conflict and a struggle with potential threats, 6) cooperation in the security sphere, 7) global integration, and 8) the protection of the energy interests of the US. Murat Laumulin (2002), ‘The Contemporary Situation in Central Asia: The Perspective from Kazakhstan’, in Central Asia and South Caucasus Affairs: 2002, edited by Boris Rumer and Lau Sim Yee, Tokyo: Sasakawa Peace Foundation, pp. 19-22.


81 Laumulin, pp. 20-21.

Asia to the heart of Europe’. Clearly, then, the ongoing regional military mobilisation and war in Afghanistan was having significant economic repercussions in the region and for Russia.

Yet it was not just the US that was the problem. In the Caspian and Central Asia more broadly, Russia also had to deal with continued attention from Iran, Turkey, and China for the region’s resources. Though Iran’s activities remained limited in scope, it had signed a long-term supply agreement and opened the only non-Russian transit route for Turkmen gas in December 1997, ensuring it retained a regional economic foothold. Following the increased US military presence, it quickly moved to intensify its relations with the region, identifying Washington’s expansion as a direct threat. Tehran saw its future involvement in the transit of Central Asian and Caspian hydrocarbons threatened by reorientation away from non-Western development and transit opportunities. President Khatami visited Central Asia in April 2002. Mounting efforts throughout 2003 and 2004 aimed to maintain bilateral cooperation with Turkmenistan and Tajikistan, and initiate moves with Kyrgyzstan. Tehran also attempted to invigorate cooperation within the ECO framework, though these efforts were constrained by minimal interest in the organisation outside Iran. Concern only intensified after the Kyrgyz ‘revolution’, which Expediency Council Chairman Ayatollah Ali-Akbar argued could only be taken in the context of what was occurring in Iraq and Lebanon. He claimed that “we are faced with a creeping move designed by America aimed at dominating other countries and plundering their natural resources”. These shared suspicions and interest in restraining Washington meant although Putin had previously acted to minimise Iran’s influence, particularly in the

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85 Laumulin, p. 29.
Caspian, he saw growing strategic value in cooperation to advance this and other Russian interests, such as energy cooperation in Tajikistan.\(^{89}\)

Ankara’s economic focus, on the other hand, proved more successful than its earlier political aspirations. By the late 1990s, Turkey’s Ex-Im bank had provided more than $1 billion to the Turkish republics (including Azerbaijan) and more than 1,000 joint ventures had been formed between Turkish companies and Central Asian government and private sector entities.\(^{90}\) Turkey was increasingly positioning itself as the key entry point for the entire Turkic region.\(^{91}\) Its willingness to provide financial support for the Baku-Ceyhan pipeline in late 1999,\(^{92}\) and its signing of an Intergovernmental Declaration on a Trans-Caspian gas route running from Turkmenistan through Azerbaijan and Georgia to Turkey,\(^{93}\) clearly demonstrated its own growing ‘pipeline diplomacy’. Following September 11, Turkey further capitalised on the increased agenda to advance its own economic agenda. Turkish investment throughout the FSU jumped by $1.6 billion between January 2002 and the end of 2003 alone, with Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan remaining the largest beneficiaries.\(^{94}\) Advancement of the BTC pipeline construction, which finally opened in May 2005, moved Turkey closer to a consolidating its role as a staging post in the transit of Caspian resources Washington was hoping to gain control over. By 2007, Turkey was again outlining ambitious Central Asian plans. These were based predominantly on its becoming an indispensable anchor in European efforts to circumvent excessive dependence on Russian gas supplies by increasing access to Central Asia’s resources.\(^{95}\) Though its capacity seemed to decline as Turkey’s EU accession appeared increasingly stalled, Turkey’s potential remained troublesome for Russia.

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91 ibid.
94 Louisa Edgerly (2003), ‘A Retail Invasion from Turkey: It’s Betting Big on Consumer Goods and Services for Central Asia and Russia’, Business Week 3862, 15 December, p. 36.
China’s economic potential, in contrast, seemed unlimited and its focus in this area with Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan was bearing considerable fruit. In 1999 its trade with Kazakhstan totalled $1.1 billion, four-fifths of which was with Xinjiang.\textsuperscript{96} In 2000 Chinese exports amounted to $599 million and imports $958 million. Though these figures remained significantly lower than Russia’s, they constituted a significant percentage of Kazakhstan’s overall trade. In the same year, exports to Kyrgyzstan outstripped Russia’s ($110 million versus $103 million), while its imports were only marginally lower ($67 million versus $88.3 million).\textsuperscript{97} Official figures only told part of the story, however, and the inclusion of unofficial trade pushed these figures significantly higher.\textsuperscript{98} Moreover, this presence looked set to intensify, as an ambitious 10-year economic plan for China’s north-western periphery, including proposals to tap Central Asian resources, demonstrated.\textsuperscript{99}

China only continued to intensify its economic presence following September 11, reflecting an understanding that its long-term ascendency would ultimately be achieved through economic penetration. China’s renewed interest in a gas pipeline from Karachaganak to Xinjiang and a 3000km oil pipeline from Western Kazakhstan in 2003, while partly based on improved feasibility,\textsuperscript{100} was also stimulated by fears that other powers were securing long-term access to Central Asian resources. Subsequently, China signed deals with other Central Asian partners to secure up the deal.\textsuperscript{101} Construction of the Turkmen section began in August 2007, the Uzbek

section in June 2008 and the Kazakh section in July 2008,\textsuperscript{102} with the Chinese National Petroleum Company (CNPC) providing most of the finance for the pipeline. In 2005, too, it spent more than $4 billion acquiring an oil company with production assets in Kazakhstan.\textsuperscript{103} China was thus targeting exactly the same areas as Russia. Its active expansion policies only vindicated Putin’s long-held concerns, serving as a reminder that Russia could not afford to be complacent toward any external power, however cooperative they pretended to be. His subsequent intensification of activism was directed as much against Beijing as Washington. China’s significant advances, at Russia’s expense, in economic projects with long-term strategic potential at in particular, drove the move to focus in these areas.

Putin’s response to economic challengers was more than reactive competition, however. His response to the growing Turkish challenge indicates the more integrated and strategic nature of his policies, and his ability to keep an eye on the ‘bigger picture’. In dealing with Turkey, while he worked to head off Ankara’s efforts to muscle in on gas and pipelines, Putin was also careful not to antagonise an increasingly important trade partner. The growing Turkish gas market, with its consumption predicted to quadruple in the next 20 years,\textsuperscript{104} held immense potential for producers like Gazprom. In balancing these competing demands, economic pragmatism appeared to triumph. Putin abandoned the previous ‘Yeltsinite’ confrontation in favour of increasing cooperation seen, for example, in growing support for the Blue Stream pipeline,\textsuperscript{105} enabling larger natural gas deliveries to Turkey. This was an astute evaluation of the best way to advance long-term interests. By establishing itself as the dominant supplier of the Turkish market, Russia could weaken Turkish-Central Asian cooperation, undermining the immediate demand for the region’s gas, while the costs of tapping into this supply in the long-term would ultimately make cooperation less attractive. At the same time, Russia’s growing control over regional gas production and transit would ensure it could still supply Turkey in the future, through its pipelines and to its benefit. Ultimately, then, Putin

\begin{footnotes}
\footnotetext[103]{Daniel Kimmage (2005e), ‘Petrokazakhstan Shareholders Approve Chinese Buyout Bid’, RFE/RL Newsline 9 (194), October 19.}
\footnotetext[104]{Ozturk and Hepbasli, p. 28.}
\footnotetext[105]{Freedman (2002), pp. 519-20.}
\end{footnotes}
identified cooperation as more beneficial than fighting what was a relatively containable threat. With both political institutions and economic forces under his control, such ambitious strategies were quite realistic.

In terms of Putin’s motivations for renewed Russian external economic efforts after September 11, he had a clear understanding of just how important expanding Russia’s control over the region’s resources was. The Caspian, in particular, offered huge economic opportunities and Putin meant business. In May 2002, he established a Special Representative on the Caspian, Victor Kaluzhny, to improve policy coordination—a Deputy Foreign Minister in rank but situated outside the MFA, reporting directly to the presidential administration. Moscow subsequently moved quickly to engage and pick off those partners it could, to shore up access, supply, and transportation. Though multilateral efforts to resolve Caspian delineation were not abandoned entirely, bilateral agreements facilitated development while the impasse remained. Following April 2002’s unsuccessful Turkmen summit, Russia finalised delimitation agreements with Kazakhstan and Azerbaijan. In May Putin and Nazerbayev agreed to divide the northern Caspian and jointly exploit the three hydrocarbon fields Kurmangazy, Central and Khvalynskoye. In October Putin and Azeri President Aliyev signed the ‘Agreement on the Delimitation of the Contiguous Areas of the Caspian Sea Floor’. Iran was livid. This willingness to clash, albeit mildly, with its primary Middle Eastern ally simply underscored Moscow’s increasing focus on financial issues, as it sought a legally unfettered way of developing the hydrocarbon deposits in its sector of the Caspian. If a more forceful approach was required, Putin was also not averse to using it. The aforementioned

107 This agreement divided the seabed between the countries and governed the development of three disputed offshore oilfields - Kurmangazy, Tsentralnoye and Khvalynskoye, all of which were split on a 50:50 basis. Under the terms of the agreement, the Kurmangazy oilfield belonged to Kazakhstan but Russian companies had the right to develop 50% of the field. Khvalynskoye was to be owned by Russia, and Kazakhstani companies had rights to 50% of it. The two states also agreed to an equal split of the Tsentralnoye field, see: Charles Coe (2002), ‘Russia-Kazakh Deal to Divide North Caspian Gains U.S. Approval’, Alexander’s Gas and Oil Connections 7 (12), 13 June. Available at: http://www.gasandoil.com/goc/news/ntc22446.htm (Accessed 20 June 2002); See also: Sergei Blagov (2003b), ‘Caspian: Agreeing not to Agree’, Asia Times Online, July 26. Available at: http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Central_Asia/EG26Ag02.html (Accessed 1 August 2003)
Caspian naval exercises of August 2002, for example, showcased Russia’s growing confidence. Moscow clearly intended to use the demonstration of force to pressure uncooperative partners, particularly Iran. The Russian press’s notable criticism of Iran’s hardline position and aggressive behaviour in the lead up to the Ashghabat summit,\(^{110}\) clearly indicated shifting Russian attitudes and Moscow’s determination to move towards settlement, with or without all participants. Following another unsuccessful round of multilateral negotiations in Almaty in May 2003, Russia, Kazakhstan, and Azerbaijan agreed on trilateral demarcation of the seabed, whereby Kazakhstan received a 29% share, and Russia and Azerbaijan 19% each.\(^{111}\) These agreements obviously intended to increase pressure on Turkmenistan and Iran, lest they risk complete marginalisation in the development of the sea’s resources.\(^{112}\)

Putin also engaged Turkmenistan outside the Caspian framework, and enjoyed success in doing so. Turkmenistan ultimately delivered one of Russia’s biggest regional coups: Gazprom’s aforementioned controversial 25-year Turkmen agreement.\(^{113}\) This guaranteed the purchase of 2 trillion cubic metres of gas and established Russia as the dominant purchaser of Turkmen gas after years of struggling to ensure consistent deliveries.\(^{114}\) Although external criticism of the agreement overstated the extent of Russia’s control, the agreement was an important symbolic step in Moscow’s efforts to position itself dominantly in regional hydrocarbon development and to secure up its stranglehold on European supply at the strategic level. Moscow’s overtures were timely, capitalising on the frustration of Turkmenistan’s other external partners and Turkmen disillusionment with the West.


\(^{113}\) In one analysis this agreement was characterised as perpetuating perpetuated Russia’s ‘rent-seeking and colonialist exploitation of Turkmenistan’. See: Alexander’s Gas and Oil Connections, News and Trends: Central Asia 8 (15) (2003), ‘The Twists of a Russia-Turkmenistan Gas Deal’, 8 August.

In 2003 Royal Dutch/Shell Group announced its intention to close its Turkmen offices owing to the lack of prospects for participating in realistic oil and gas projects in the country. ExxonMobil cited similar limited prospects when it closed its Turkmen operations in 2001.\textsuperscript{115} Such abandonment simply opened the door for Moscow, whose tolerance for working with dictatorial regimes was somewhat greater.

Still, working with Turkmenbashi remained challenging, even for Moscow. The Turkmen leader’s unpredictability and tendency to break political commitments made Putin wary of becoming overly reliant on Turkmenistan. As if to underline these concerns, Turkmenistan announced a unilateral price rise to $60 per 1000m\textsuperscript{3} in December 2004,\textsuperscript{116} disregarding an existing Russian contract for 7 billion cubic meters of natural gas at $44 per 1000m\textsuperscript{3}, half paid in cash, half in kind.\textsuperscript{117} When the disagreement could not be resolved, Ashgabat announced the cessation of supply to Russia and Ukraine.\textsuperscript{118} After protracted negotiations Gazprom head Alexei Miller announced a compromise in April 2005. Russia would pay with hard currency, but leave the price unchanged.\textsuperscript{119} Yet this was not the end of problems. A comprehensive Ukrainian-Turkmen gas deal in March 2005 called into question Russia’s standing agreement, and so, too, Moscow’s aspirations to dominate the European gas market, given Turkmenistan’s reserves were critical to this end.\textsuperscript{120} However, Russia’s control of the pipelines required to realise this deal, its ability to cut deliveries to Ukraine (as it did in 2005/2006), and Putin’s increasing ability in using Gazprom in complex, multifaceted negotiations convinced Kiev to abandon efforts to gazump Russia, and further consolidated Gazprom’s role in both gas markets.\textsuperscript{121} Niayzov’s death in

\textsuperscript{117} Daniel Kimmage (2005a), ‘Gazprom Head Meets With Turkmen President Over Price Tiff’, \textit{RFE/RL Newsline} 9 (29), 11 February.
\textsuperscript{118} Inozemtsev, p. 12.
\textsuperscript{119} Reported by ITAR-TASS (2005) 15 April, cited by Daniel Kimmage (2005c), ‘Russia, Turkmenistan Reach Accord on Gas Shipments’, \textit{RFE/RL Newsline} 9 (72), 18 April.
December 2006 added further uncertainty. Western energy companies were buoyed by leadership change, given Niyazov’s perceived ‘susceptibility’ to Russian overtures. Putin was quick to try to secure up Russia’s position, however. He secured new terms for the purchase of Turkmen gas in September 2007, and signed an agreement with Niyazov’s successor Gurbanguly Berdymukhammedov and Kazakhstan’s Nazarbayev concerning construction of a gas pipeline along the Caspian coast that December. Moscow certainly hoped this agreement would bury the proposed TransCaspian project long touted by Western companies to bypass Russia. Though Berdymukhammedov discounted such thinking, claiming transit route diversification remained a priority, Putin could at least draw some comfort from knowing Russia was the first cab off the rank. Moreover, the new Russian-Kazakh-Turkmen pipeline would secure supply through the 2028 agreement, outside which Ashghabat would struggle to supply any additional demand. Buying up all the Central Asian gas was at least one avenue for Russia to slow the Western advance.

Putin also avoided becoming overly reliant on any one country or part of the region by diversifying Moscow’s bilateral efforts. In May 2002 a ‘strategic’ agreement was signed with Uzbekistan concerning gas cooperation, and at the SES meeting in April 2003 a four-year strategy document was adopted which focused heavily on energy cooperation. Moscow was keen to head off growing external interest in the region, including revival of a planned pipeline from Turkmenistan across Afghanistan to Pakistan. Unlike Yeltsin, Putin was able to use the support of Russian companies to substantiate this push. Between 2002 and 2004 in addition to the substantial Turkmen deal, Gazprom signed agreements with Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, and Kazakhstan concerning joint development projects. In May 2003 it

126 ibid, p. 102.
also signed an agreement on exploring and developing the Rangon and Saragazon gas fields in Tajikistan, and though only for Tajikistan’s domestic use, Gazprom linked this agreement to upgrading the Central Asia pipeline system, connecting the region’s infrastructure with Russia. These efforts to integrate gas infrastructure ultimately hoped to unify export systems and, if possible, to control all gas exports from the region. Gazprom expanded further during Putin’s second term. Medium-term agreements were signed with Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan in September and November 2005 respectively, concerning transportation, a declaration between Putin and Nazarbaev in July 2006 on development of the Karachaganak field, and a subsequent Kazakh joint venture in June 2007. An agreement regarding exploration and extraction in Uzbekistan’s Ustyurt region was also signed in 2006. Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan were not left out of the equation, either. A memorandum of intentions to establish a joint Russian-Kyrgyz oil and gas venture was signed in January 2006, and exploration agreements were concluded in May 2007. The Russian energy giant also signed a memorandum with Tajikistan on the creation of an oil and gas joint venture in March 2006, while its subsidiary Zarubezhneftegaz received a license to carry out further geological exploration in Tajikistan later that year. Clearly, Gazprom was being skilfully used to consolidate Moscow’s influence.

Gazprom was not alone, however. Substantive deals in Kazakhstan for other Russian energy giants followed Putin and Nazarbayev’s Caspian division. These

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included a 2002 agreement on joint development of the Kurmangazy field, under which Russian companies Rosneft and ZarubezhNeft were each assigned 25 percent. In 2004 Lukoil signed a joint deal to develop the Tyub-Karagan and Atash off-shore sectors of the Dostyk project in which its projected investments could reach $3 billion. The following March Lukoil also agreed to establish a joint venture to tap Khvolynskoye, a project requiring $1 billion in investment. And in January 2005, the Russian and Kazakh leaders agreed to evenly split and develop the disputed Imashevskoye oil field, under an agreement similar to the one signed on Kurmangazy. Successes with Uzbekistan were also evident, despite Tashkent’s relationship with Washington. In March 2002 Lukoil and Itera signed a deal to develop new Uzbek gas fields. In 2004 Lukoil signed a 35-year deal with Uzbekneftgaz to develop the Kandym-Khauzak-Shady fields, promising to invest up to $1 billion to further develop Uzbekistan’s gas fields. At the time of this signing, Putin also signalled Gazprom’s intention to invest over $1 billion and expressed a desire to purchase a significant share of the gas transit monopoly Uzbektransgas. Though Uzbekistan had lower reserves than Turkmenistan, it was better integrated into the pipeline network and was perceived as easier to work with. Like Gazprom, Lukoil further strengthened its position as the decade advanced. In 2006 it formed a consortium with China National Petroleum Corporation, Petronas of Malaysia and the Korea National Oil Company to explore natural gas deposits beneath the dry Aral

Sea bed. In 2007 its Khauzak field opened, signalling to the West just how successful Moscow’s energy politics had become, and how much more adept it was at sustaining relationships with the Central Asian regimes.

Sticking to Putin’s rules and becoming more business-like was profitable for big business. Congenial official relations increasingly improved investment opportunities and Central Asia was of strategic economic value for the energy sector. Lukoil and Gazprom, for example, were also motivated to expand their regional investments by the fear of an inability to meet rising European demand from Russia’s own more technically challenging gas fields. In a signal of growing market maturity, the two signed an agreement on strategic partnership in November 2002, setting up, for one, the TsentrKaspneftegaz joint venture to develop the Caspian Tsentralnaya field in cooperation with Kazakhstan's KazMunaiGaz. In March 2005, Gazprom chairman Miller and LUKoil president Vagit Alekperov renewed this agreement for the 2005-2014 period, committing both partners to cooperation in numerous areas, including the Russian sector of the Caspian and Uzbekistan. Having coordinated their own activities, it is hardly surprising they were receptive to closer cooperation with the government. For the government, the economic value of expediting the external success of these economic powerhouses was obvious, as it helped grow the Russian economy. However, growing state-business cooperation was also part of a broader realisation that the government could use the growing strength of its business sector to its political advantage. Putin’s intensification of public-private cooperation and coordination of key economic actors laid the basis for this tactical approach. On one hand, coordination concerned the pursuit of specific goals, whereby cooperation with the public and private business sector assisted official efforts to secure state-level agreements. Russia’s use of financial incentives to finalise military cooperation deals, discussed later, clearly demonstrates this. On the other hand, it also represented a realisation that more comprehensive, long-term national interests could be realised through economic means—the so-called ‘geoeconomic’ approach. Put simply,
investment and economic penetration could constitute the driving force of softer, subtler Russian hegemony. This approach would not only appear less imperialistic than previous threat based approaches, but was also a far more sustainable and profitable form of hegemony. Russia could not only work towards re-establishing its Central Asian sphere of influence, if this goal remained, but profit from its efforts in the meantime.

Though the oil and gas sectors were at the forefront of economic penetration, they were not alone. Another increasingly active regional participant was RAO EES under Anatolii Chubais, himself a strong advocate of expanding Russia’s external economic influence. In 2003 he stated that “liberal imperialism should become Russia’s ideology and building up a liberal empire Russia’s mission”, arguing that a combination of market economic practices and economic and political expansion with CIS countries was essential if Russia was to preserve its own territorial integrity and resources and occupy its natural place alongside the US, EU and Japan. Even before this, however, EES had commenced expansive moves. In October 2002 it signed an agreement with Kyrgyzstan to upgrade five major power stations. In August 2003 an agreement to invest $350 million in Kyrgyzstan’s Kambar-Ata 2 hydroelectric station and to develop a larger investment package for the larger Kambar-Ata 1 station by 2007, was concluded, in conjunction with EurAsEc. That same month EES played a key role in forming a consortium to finance the completion of Tajikistan’s Vakhsh power stations. In September 2004 it concluded a deal to take a 50 percent equity share in Kazakhstan’s Ekibastuz power plant. Then, that October, EES gained the controlling stake in Tajikistan’s Sangtuda hydropower plant after Industry and Energy Minister Viktor Khristenko, Finance Minister Alexei Kudrin and Tajik officials signed an agreement on construction and financing, including the redirection of $50 million of Tajik debt into the project, estimated to

149 ibid.
cost some $870 million in total.\textsuperscript{150} Again, these deals demonstrated growing Kremlin coordination efforts. It experimented with new financial instruments, such as taking direct equity in power and transportation enterprises, offering guaranteed loans and credits, and to exchange sovereign debt for equity in enterprises, to complement its strengths in the energy and power sectors with the financial resources required to underwrite expansion.\textsuperscript{151}

Table 4: Russian Foreign Direct Investment in Central Asia, 1998-2008

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<td>342,067</td>
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Private companies too, substantially increased their holdings, expanding Russian investment (see: table 4). In May 2004, for example, RusAl announced a memorandum with Kazakhstan’s Eurasian Financial-Industrial Company to build two new facilities, with investment totalling some $3 billion.\textsuperscript{152} In late 2004 it positioned itself to take over the Tajik Aluminum Plant, by far Tajikistan’s largest productive asset, and committed itself to the construction of a new $600 million plant.\textsuperscript{153} It also

\textsuperscript{150} Socor (2004).

\textsuperscript{151} Gleason (2004).


\textsuperscript{153} Socor (2004).
planned to invest $560 million to complete the first stage of the Roghun hydropower plant and acquire the controlling stake, securing the power supply for its plant.\textsuperscript{154} Significant investments were also made in telecommunications, food processing and production, and manufacturing.\textsuperscript{155} The concentration of investment in vital sectors of Central Asian economies, and the fact Russia often gained control of key infrastructure, meant Moscow was not only increasing its immediate economic presence, but also acquiring potential levers of political influence. While the long-term outcomes would remain to be seen, the immediate impact was clear, as the statistics below demonstrate. Though it was only after 2003 that trade recovered to the levels of 1997 (see: \textbf{table 5}), after this time the figures grew very strongly.

\begin{table}[h]
\centering
\caption{Russia’s trade with Central Asia, 1998-2008 ($US million)}
\begin{tabular}{|c|c|c|c|c|c|c|c|c|c|c|}
\hline
\hline
Kaz & Export & 1880 & 1221 & 2246 & 2544 & 2411 & 3269 & 4647 & 6528 & 8970 & 11934 & 13344 \\
& Import & 1877 & 1391 & 2197 & 1834 & 1943 & 2661 & 3457 & 3210 & 4621 & 6368 & \\
& Total & 3757 & 2613 & 4443 & 4378 & 4355 & 5931 & 8105 & 9738 & 12794 & 16555 & 19712 \\
\hline
Kyr & Export & 131 & 84 & 102 & 82 & 103 & 159 & 265 & 397 & 560 & 878 & 1310 \\
& Import & 128 & 94 & 88 & 61 & 73 & 103 & 149 & 145 & 193 & 290 & 488 \\
& Total & 260 & 179 & 191 & 143 & 177 & 262 & 415 & 542 & 754 & 1169 & 1799 \\
\hline
Uzb & Export & 484 & 240 & 274 & 363 & 453 & 503 & 766 & 860 & 1086 & 1729 & 2089 \\
& Import & 521 & 465 & 662 & 579 & 341 & 480 & 611 & 901 & 1289 & 1463 & 1308 \\
& Total & 1005 & 705 & 936 & 943 & 794 & 983 & 1378 & 1762 & 2375 & 3192 & 3397 \\
\hline
Taj & Export & 76 & 66 & 55 & 68 & 67 & 127 & 182 & 240 & 377 & 607 & 794 \\
& Import & 59 & 111 & 237 & 128 & 64 & 67 & 75 & 94 & 125 & 162 & 210 \\
& Total & 136 & 177 & 293 & 197 & 132 & 195 & 258 & 335 & 502 & 769 & 1004 \\
\hline
Tur & Export & 93 & 60 & 130 & 139 & 142 & 220 & 242 & 224 & 228 & 384 & 810 \\
& Import & 43 & 76 & 472 & 39 & 32 & 28 & 43 & 76 & 78 & 69 & 100 \\
\hline
CA total & 5159 & 3675 & 5863 & 5661 & 5458 & 7371 & 10156 & 12377 & 16425 & 21685 & 25912 \\
\hline
\end{tabular}
\footnotesize{Source: International Monetary Fund: Direction of Trade Statistics}
\end{table}

The military-security equation

Putin’s repackaged military-security approach also developed in a more rational direction. Moscow all but abandoned comprehensive multilateral military cooperation efforts outside of regular CIS Security Council Meetings and unified CIS air-defence system exercises. However, even the latter increasingly centred upon a

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{154} ibid.}
\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{155} Albion (2004a).}
narrower group of participants. Putin’s main ‘restricted’ multilateral security focus was the Shanghai-Five/SCO, formed in conjunction with China and the states of Central Asia. In nurturing this organisation, Putin had apparently learnt from the Yeltsin period that advancing military cooperation by force was less sustainable than becoming a partner on a more constructive basis. Instead, his government focused on targeting those security issues of primary importance to participants, rather than blatantly forcing cooperation. It manipulated the levers Russia retained over certain states to keep cooperation alive more subtly. Consequently, while it shared an interest with China in expanding the organisation, using it as a ‘macregional balancing mechanism’ to forestall the growing American presence, neither Moscow nor Beijing were willing to compromise relations with Washington by casting their cooperative efforts in a vehemently anti-American light. Instead, they hoped to gain bilateral leverage and extract concessions on Central Asian and global issues. Nor would such a stance have endeared Moscow regionally. For all those involved, the priority remained cooperative, multi-faceted efforts to improve regional security, with a growing emphasis on countering extremism and terrorism. This theme was stressed by then-Chinese president Jiang Zemin. He hailed the SCO’s establishment as a turning point for joint efforts to “crackdown on terrorism, separatism and extremism”. Russian Defence Minister Ivanov echoed these sentiments, stressing the imperative of military cooperation for the containment of international terrorism in Central and South Asia, at the first Defence Ministers’ meeting. The adapted Russian approach facilitated significant success for the organisation. It helped draw Uzbekistan into the SCO in July 2001, something also assisted by Tashkent’s


157 As did the Central Asian nations, in their efforts to balance Russia and China: Allison (2004a), p. 468.


declining security situation.¹⁶² This was an important development, given the centrality of Uzbekistan’s participation in any viable multilateral initiative.

Still, the slow progress of multilateral organisations meant that the focus remained in the bilateral sphere.¹⁶³ Significant bilateral advances were also made in this sphere with Uzbekistan. Putin’s transformed approach and successful manipulation of fears regarding changing regional security dynamics reversed the deterioration of relations that had occurred under Yeltsin. In May 2000 and 2001 meetings, for example, regional security and combating terrorism were high on the agenda.¹⁶⁴ In Tashkent in 2001, Putin noted that “…attempts are underway to carve up the post-Soviet lands along criminal lines with the aid of religious extremism and international terrorism”, that “…an arc of instability has emerged in the republics on Russia’s doorstep”, and that Russia supported Uzbekistan’s efforts to promote regional security.¹⁶⁵ He signalled that cooperation could even extend as far as taking preventative measures.¹⁶⁶ A number of bilateral agreements on military and military-technical cooperation were signed alongside other areas of cooperation, leading Putin to describe relations as a ‘strategic partnership’.¹⁶⁷ Karimov also expressed confidence in warming relations. He stated that “…large centres of international terrorism are at work against us. We seek and find help in Russia, especially with the advent of Putin, who can formulate goals and find ways to achieve them, and whom I trust completely”.¹⁶⁸

However, Putin was not the only leader capitalising on the growing fear of terrorism to expand military relations, or focusing particular energies on Uzbekistan. Turkey made significant efforts to mend bridges with Uzbekistan in 2000, strained after claims of Turkish involvement in the assassination attempt on Karimov.¹⁶⁹ Its active diplomacy included visits by new president Ahmet Sezer to Uzbekistan,

¹⁶³ Interview with Irina D. Zviagelskaya, Institute of Oriental Studies, Moscow, 10 December 2003.
¹⁶⁶ ibid.
Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, and Turkmenistan, and the dispatch of two planeloads of arms and ammunition to assist Uzbekistan’s fight against Islamic insurgents.\(^{170}\) Such assistance directly conflicted with Russia’s efforts to use the fundamentalist threat to consolidate its influence.\(^{171}\) All Moscow needed was for another state to capitalise on this opportunity better than it could. The US also appeared to be consolidating a similar military-security prioritisation to Russia. In the late 1990s, security commitments to the Caspian region increased.\(^{172}\) Here, like Russia, American efforts moved increasingly towards bilateral security cooperation,\(^{173}\) and in Central Asia, a similar focus on Uzbekistan emerged.\(^{174}\) Democracy and human rights were not absent from the equation, but they were used more as methods for gaining political influence and as instruments for exerting pressure,\(^{175}\) rather than as a basis for cooperation. This American economic-security prioritisation appeared to set it on a collision course with Russia. As if to underscore this, Washington dispatched a series of senior government officials, including CIA head George Tenet, FBI director Luis Freeh, and Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, to Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan to discuss regional security and democracy immediately following Putin’s election. Each was offered $3 million to combat the growing flow of cross-border weapons, drugs and terrorists.\(^{176}\)

This situation transformed overnight, however, with the events of 11 September 2001. After deciding to invade Afghanistan, Washington requested Central Asian assistance. Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan responded most positively. However, all ultimately provided some cooperation, even if only an air corridor for over-flights in Turkmenistan’s case.\(^{177}\) By mid-October Washington and Tashkent had negotiated “extended” use of Khanabad airfield.\(^{178}\) In December 1,500 American troops were deployed in Uzbekistan, and agreements granting landing rights in Tajikistan and

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\(^{171}\) ibid.


\(^{173}\) Laumulin, p. 21.


\(^{175}\) Laumulin, p. 20.


\(^{177}\) Buszynski, p. 21.

Kyrgyzstan had also been concluded.\textsuperscript{179} Worryingly for Russia, Secretary of State Colin Powell also announced the same month that America did not intend to withdraw quickly.\textsuperscript{180} In January 2002, the US expanded its Kyrgyz presence, negotiating basing rights at Manas. Recognising growing Russian concerns, National Security Adviser Condoleezza Rice claimed the US did not intend pushing Russia out of Central Asia.\textsuperscript{181} The US-Russia Working Group on Afghanistan reiterated the same sentiment in February 2002, assuring Moscow that Washington would not establish permanent regional military bases.\textsuperscript{182} However, while Washington continued to stress its deployment’s temporary nature, it was also sure to clarify that its forces would remain for as long as it took to eliminate the terrorist threat.\textsuperscript{183} This open-ended, noncommittal timeframe suggested the high-level Russian military scepticism regarding America’s commitment to withdraw may not have been misplaced after all.\textsuperscript{184}

Similarly, the call for maintaining military outposts in the Bush administration’s new security doctrine implied that Washington was unlikely to reduce its presence in the near future.\textsuperscript{185} Its significant expenditure modernising Uzbekistan’s Khanabad and Kokaidy air bases, Dushanbe and Kuliab in Tajikistan, and Manas in Kyrgyzstan,\textsuperscript{186} added weight to such arguments, as did increased spending on upgrading regional border security and improving narcotics interdiction.\textsuperscript{187} ‘Aid’ included the donation of more than $5.3 million worth of equipment to the Uzbek border and customs service after 2000, $1.8 million of this in August 2003 alone.\textsuperscript{188} Moreover, the March 2002 Declaration on Strategic Partnership and Cooperation—in which Washington stated that it would regard any external threat to Uzbekistan’s national security and territory

\textsuperscript{179} Herspring and Rutland, p. 240.
\textsuperscript{180} S. Frederick Starr (2002), ‘Central Asia’s Sudden Prominence’, \textit{World and I} 17 (4), April, p. 58.
\textsuperscript{181} Azizian, p. 153.
\textsuperscript{182} ibid p. 153-4.
\textsuperscript{187} Olcott (2003), p. 5.
with grave concern—also appeared to demonstrate a desire to carve out a more permanent security role. Worryingly, too, the region’s leaders responded enthusiastically to US overtures, hoping a closer relationship would pay significant dividends, particularly in terms of reducing dependence on Moscow. Though Uzbekistan was the primary beneficiary, American financial assistance increased region-wide, doubling between 2001 and 2002.

Though Washington’s regional penetration after September 11 certainly presented a challenge for Russia, it also provided opportunities and incentives for deepening regional military-security cooperation. Russia continued pitching the SCO as a relevant regional security organisation, targeting and intensifying attention on the issues brought clearly into relief by September 11 and the Afghan invasion. Symbolic of the shift from resolving border conflicts and enhancing economic cooperation to addressing the common problem of Islamic militancy, plans for a regional anti-terrorist centre in Kyrgyzstan were unveiled in 2002. Putin also understood that regional leaders viewed cooperation with Washington as a double-edged sword. The invasion of Iraq only deepened suspicions of American intentions, particularly given their own questionable democratic credentials. Intensifying cooperation with ‘similar’ regimes, more accepting of authoritarianism, could balance such concerns and potential pressures. Central Asian leaders also identified opportunities from strategic competition between the three large powers: America, China and Russia. ‘Constructive opportunism’ saw Putin take advantage of these dynamics, offering Moscow-led or joint Moscow-Beijing led organisations like the SCO as the balance Central Asian leaders were looking for, cleverly finding an alternative avenue through which to pursue Russian interests.

Bohr, p. 492.

Charles Willian Maynes (2003), ‘America Discovers Central Asia’, Foreign Affairs 82 (2) April-May, pp. 122-3, cited by S. Neil MacFarlane (2004), ‘The United States and Regionalism in Central Asia’, International Affairs 80 (3), p. 454-5. Between 1992 and 1998 the total amount of American aid to CA amounted to 1.3 billion dollars. Kazakhstan been the leading recipient. ($35.5m in 1997, $40.5m in 1998, $44.2m in 1999, $53.5m in 2000, $71.5m in 2001, and projected $81.6m in 2002.) However, the structure of US assistance to Central Asia underwent a sharp change in 2002; Uzbekistan became the primary focus ($161.8m in 2002, compared to just $55.9m in 2001), followed by Tajikistan ($85.3m in 2002, compared to just $56.4m in 2001). See Laumulin, p. 19.

Russia was able to rely on China’s support in its efforts to slow Washington’s progress. China interpreted the Uzbek and Kyrgyz bases as American efforts to bolster regional influence at its expense, and part of a broader encirclement strategy. Beijing had concerns that Washington would have sufficient clout to dissuade Central Asia taking Beijing’s side in the event of conflict, and that growing American economic interests would harm China’s own goals. In response, it intensified its own activities. It signed friendship and border treaties with Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan in 2002 and expanded security cooperation with Tajikistan and Turkmenistan, through potential joint border control to combat terrorism and drug trafficking with the former, and military training and weapons supply in the latter. While such activities were useful in keeping the Central Asian states engaged with non-Western partners, they also increased China’s long-term strategic threat to Russian interests. As a result, Putin was keen to keep Beijing’s activity in check and within an organised framework like the SCO. In fact, both parties’ efforts were directed as much at managing each other a complex regional balancing act, as they were constraining the US. Ultimately, one of Beijing’s longer-term goals for SCO participation was replacing Russia as the key regional actor. It was just as vigilant toward Moscow’s renewed strategic vigour as Russia was of it, and they both were of Washington. Although their mutual mistrust would ultimately limit the potential scope of their bilateral efforts to build a multilateral organisation, for now, both Moscow and Beijing continued to dedicate considerable effort to ensuring the SCO remained actively engaged in Central Asia.

This persistence was rewarded with expanding cooperation, particularly after the initial excitement of US mobilisation had subsided. In October 2002, for example, China and Kyrgyzstan conducted bilateral military counter-terrorism manoeuvres in their border zone—described by Chinese specialists as the “formal start-up of the

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192 See: Chung (2003), p. 58 and Laumulin, p. 27.
SCO anti-terror mission”.  

In May 2003, the heads of member states gave the organisation a fresh stimulus by establishing a permanent secretariat in Beijing. Moving the anti-terrorist centre from Bishkek to Tashkent was also proposed, a relocation Moscow supported as a means of binding Tashkent to the organisation and intensifying cooperation while it remained positively predisposed. The following August the inaugural joint SCO anti-terrorist exercises—Cooperation 2003—took place in eastern Kazakhstan and Xinjiang, though Uzbekistan was notably absent, instead choosing to participate in the GUUAM command-staff exercises staged a week earlier. Still, the unpredictability of certain states notwithstanding, Moscow continued to successfully nurture the SCO. In June 2004, for example, the Tashkent declaration, discussing “a new stage of cooperation” was signed. Simultaneously, the Regional Antiterrorism Structure (RATS) opened in Tashkent. In April 2005, a memorandum of cooperation was signed between the CIS and the SCO, in an effort to deepen mutual cooperation on issues like fighting crime, terrorism, drug trafficking, and illegal migration. A similar agreement with the CSTO was concluded in October 2007, which proposed joint action plans in 2008. It was not only for coordination in the military sphere, however, that Putin hoped to use the SCO as a vehicle. From 2004, Russia made increased overtures through the SCO for

200 ibid
203 ibid, p. 499.
205 Daniel Kimmage (2004g), ‘…And Opens Antiterrorism Structure’, RFE/RL Newsline 8 (115), 18 June.
206 ITAR-TASS (2005), 13 April, cited by Robert Coalson (2005), ‘Moscow Pleased with CIS, SCO Ties’, RFE/RL Newsline 9 (70), 14 April.
its favoured topic of increased energy cooperation, moving beyond energy security to the control of supply routes. Such developments only underscored Putin’s more consistent, integrated approach and the decline of the solely instrumental purposes in sponsoring multilateral initiatives. These were now more clearly tied to Russia’s own long-term needs.

Moscow also sponsored the creation of the Collective Security Treaty Organisation in May 2002. This included Central Asian partners Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, in addition to Belarus and Armenia. The agreement aimed to pour some operational content into what had previously been largely a theoretical political body; the 1992 Collective Security Treaty. Putin’s efforts were assisted by the refusal of Georgia, Azerbaijan and Uzbekistan to renew the treaty in 1998, removing impediments to more substantive cooperation and allowing Moscow to steer this organisation towards a more institutionalized format amongst fewer members. When the CSTO was officially launched in April 2003, it was under a tripartite structure, with a political cooperation directorate to foster common foreign policy positions and coordinate international activities, a military cooperation directorate, and a directorate to tackle common challenges and threats. The most progressive development, however, was the establishment of a multilateral rapid reaction force. Russian military leaders considered this as the core of potential

212 28 April 2003 in Dushanbe: Adam Albion (2003b), ‘Busy Days in Dushanbe: Putin’s Visit, EEC, CSTO’, RFERL Central Asia Report 3 (16), 1 May. The CSTO can also be known by its Russia acronym ODBK (Organizatsiya Dogovora o Kollektivnoi Bezopasnosti)
214 Comprised of a Kazakh shock battalion, Kyrgyz mountain rifle battalion, Russian tactical group and a separate communications battalion, and Tajik assault-shock battalion.
broader Russian-Central Asian armed forces integration. While initially operating in Central Asia, a future expansion of jurisdiction was also not excluded. Reflecting the desire to expand the body beyond rhetoric, Putin pushed through organisational and financial decisions at the founding summit. These included the nomination of General Nikolai Bordyuzha, former Security Council head, as secretary. Such a move also signalled efforts to subordinate the body to clear Russian leadership, given Bordyuzha’s reputation as a strong gosudarstvennik.

Critics, however, noted the absence of Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, a lack of member confidence regarding the effectiveness and impartiality of Russian military intervention, the continued importance of expanding Western military ties, and a lack of significant resource commitments to transform the organisation beyond a blueprint stage. The dedication of the Kant air base as a component of rapid reaction forces was also discounted as an afterthought, intended to lend an air of effectiveness to otherwise weak implementation. However, advances in cooperation and maintaining a viable regional security dialogue did occur. At the November 2003 Bishkek meeting, in addition to the Afghan situation, efforts to work cooperatively with NATO were discussed. This culminated in the passage of a document in June 2004, concerning establishing ways and means of cooperation between the CSTO and NATO. It was also decided to establish a mechanism for UN-mandated collective peacekeeping operations. Moreover, certain members indicated an increasing willingness to entertain a more assertive role for the CSTO and Russia, more

216 Laumulin, p. 16.
223 ibid.
specifically. In September 2004, for example, Kyrgyzstan’s Akaev supported the notion of pre-emptive Russian strikes and suggested CSTO rapid reaction forces as a suitable mechanism for such strikes in Central Asia.224

Of even greater importance to increasing cooperative capacity were joint military exercises. These included August 2004’s command drill in Kazakhstan and the ‘Rubezh’ counterinsurgency tactical training in northern Kyrgyzstan, attended by 2000 troops from Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, and Tajikistan and observers from the CIS and SCO,225 and 2005’s three-stage Rubezh operation in Tajikistan.226 Rubezh thereafter became an annual, multi-stage event. When combined with the provision of discounted arms under the CSTO’s charter, these exercises demonstrated Russian efforts to deepen military integration. They increased not only the interoperability of weapons systems, but also of command and control structures. The organisation’s potential importance to its authoritarian members also intensified following the region’s ‘revolutions’, given the Treaty’s Article 2 provided a handy mechanism for ‘stabilizing’ member states in the event of unrest.227 The 2007 formalisation of plans for UN-mandated joint peacekeeping forces,228 and aforementioned joint SCO-CSTO accord, demonstrated this eagerness to continue intensifying integration. While the CSTO remained but one of a patchwork of military-security organisations in Central Asia and may not have quickly lived up to its own ambitious aspirations, with the SCO it demonstrated the Putin government’s sustained efforts to establish relevant Russian-led multilateral regional organisations. Although influenced by the US

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224 Daniel Kimmage (2004m), ‘…And Kyrgyz President Supports Pre-emptive Strikes’, RFE/RL Newsline 8 (178), 17 September.
226 RIA-Novosti (2005), ‘Kyrgyz Stage of CSTO Exercise to be Held in Tajikistan’, 25 March. Daniel Kimmage (2005b), ‘Military Exercises Begin in Tajikistan’, RFE/RL Newsline 9 (62), 4 April. These exercises were held in three stages. The first included operative deployment of the Command and the Headquarters of the Collective Rapid Deployment Forces of the Central Asian region. The second planned the use of collective forces in a joint operation and the third included tactical exercises with live firing at a test range, during which command of forces and means of the collective security system, units of power ministries and departments were practiced: RIA-Novosti (2005), ‘CSTO Exercises Start in Tajikistan’, 2 April.
mobilisation, these bodies were not solely competitive responses to it, but were underscored by real Russian and regional security needs.

Bilaterally, too, Putin’s patience and persistence following the US mobilisation paid eventual dividends, if initially the post-September 11 environment appeared to reverse Putin’s early successes. Repeating consistent tendencies to pursue any non-Russian alternatives presented to it, Tashkent refocused its security priorities toward Washington following September 11. Russian-Uzbek relations subsequently entered a cooling phase. The March 2002 ‘Declaration of Strategic Partnership and Cooperation between Uzbekistan and the US’, which confirmed each party’s determination to “continue dynamic military and military-technical cooperation”, looked to be a major setback for Russia. Irrespective, Putin remained committed to deepening cooperation with Tashkent. He recognised limits to the US-Uzbek rapprochement, specifically Karimov’s authoritarianism and American expedience in choosing its partners. His willingness to ride out this interlude appeared justified in 2002 when mutual relations, with their ‘inherent cyclicity’, again began to improve. While Washington became increasingly critical of Uzbekistan’s human rights, Moscow’s position that these issues were internal politics and inconsequential for partnership improved Karimov’s disposition toward Russia. The March-April 2004 terror attacks in Uzbekistan raised further questions as to whether the stationing of American forces in the country was weakening terrorism or exacerbating it, as many Russian analysts claimed. Karimov himself exhibited

229 Laumulin, p. 24.
230 ibid.
231 Alexei Malashenko talking to Izvestiya on 15 April, cited by Victor Yasmann (2004), ‘Putin Discusses Terrorism with Uzbek President’, RFE/RL Newsline 8 (71), 16 April.
233 Alexei Malashenko of the Moscow Carnegie Centre, for example, told Kommersant daily that ‘Uzbekistan has suffered because of its alliance with America,’ while Viktor Korgun, a scholar at the Institute of Oriental Studies at the Russian Academy of Sciences claimed that the terrorist acts were the revenge of Islamist terrorists for the Uzbek government’s provision of support to the antiterrorist operation [in Afghanistan].’ in an interview with Tribuna, see: Igor Torbakov (2004), ‘Uzbekistan Set to Diversify its Security Options in Wake of Recent Militant Attacks’, Eurasianet.org, 19 April. Available at: http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/insight/articles/eav041904.shtml (Accessed 19 September 2004).
growing concern over potential Western interference in Uzbekistan’s domestic politics. Unlike Western sources, few Russian analysts identified the sources of growing domestic unrest in governance issues. Nor was this explanation pursued officially, something Karimov obviously welcomed. During Karimov’s April 2004 visit to Moscow, Putin assured him that “in your struggle against these acts, you can count on Russia’s full and unconditional support”. Putin positively differentiated Russia by offering cooperation on issues most critical to Uzbekistan and an enduring partnership free of preconditions. His reward was the June 16 2004 Strategic Partnership Treaty. The agreement included mutual rights to the use of Uzbek military facilities, enhanced military cooperation, the purchase of Russian military equipment, and Russian training of Uzbek officers. While it was premature to claim Putin had won the battle for Uzbekistan, his approach certainly contributed to Tashkent’s foreign policy diversification.

‘Understating’ domestic affairs also improved security cooperation with Turkmenistan, the other state that had demonstrated a strong determination to distance itself from Russia. Though Turkmenistan remained unwilling to abandon its neutrality, fears of American unilateral deposition of autocratic leaders created an environment in which well-tailored Russian overtures became increasingly attractive. Consequently, in April 2003, Putin and Niyazov signed a military cooperation agreement. It pledged both parties to counter outside threats, coordinate foreign policy activities and broaden cooperation between special services. It also included commitments to cooperate in combating international terrorism and provisions for the mutual extradition of ‘terrorist’ suspects. Given Ashghabat’s broad definition of terrorism, labelling all opposition, principled or otherwise, as terrorists in order to

235 Citing RTR and OTR, Yasmann (2004).
neutralize them. Moscow appeared to have agreed to unconditionally back the Turkmen regime and expediently ignore its human rights record. In this vein, Nezavisimaya Gazeta reported on 10 April 2003 that Moscow would support a vulnerable Niyazov following the fall of Iraq in return for Ashgabat’s signing of the strategic gas agreement. Strana.ru echoed these sentiments, claiming “Russia will protect Turkmenistan from the United States for $300 billion”—the value of the aforementioned gas deal. Ultimately, the potential of any such fruition depended greatly on the erratic conduct of the autocratic Niyazov, who only a few years later withdrew Turkmenistan from the CIS. Still, the increasingly isolated country had few other options, nor ones so patient or forgiving as Russia. And such patience on Putin’s part certainly paid off, as Russia remained a key plank in Turkmenistan’s essentially dependent security equation, even after Niyazov’s death.

A more significant advance was the establishment of the Kant air base in October 2003. For many western observers, this was merely a cynical and opportunist reaction to the American presence at Manas. Others claimed Russian interest had only been prompted after Kyrgyz parliamentarians proposed offering the base to the US military. Moscow refuted such accusations. Putin claimed that this was the first step in augmenting Russia’s presence in the interest of maintaining regional stability, and underlined the importance of Central Asia to Russia. Defence Minister Ivanov also stressed this longer-term perspective, stating that “by enhancing Kyrgyz defence capabilities we reinforce Russia’s sovereignty”, while it was also thought the base would defuse growing intraregional tensions. Putin also sought to dispel concerns about Great Power competition. He noted that this base was linked to

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241 Those involved in the unsuccessful assassination attempt on Niyazov were labelled terrorists for example, see Albion (2003c), and Bess Brown (2003o), ‘Turkmen Foreign Ministry Demands Handover of Exiles’, RFE/RL Newsline 7, (233), 12 December.
245 Gazetasng.ru as reported by Bess Brown (2003n), ‘Agreement on Russia Air Base in Kyrgyzstan Finalised’, RFE/RL Newsline 7 (121), 27 June.
246 As reported by ORT, Victor Yasmann (2003m), ‘…As Putin Stresses Importance of Central Asia’, RFE/RL Newsline 7 (181), 23 September.
the permanent, regionally defined commitment of the multilateral CST rapid reaction forces to deter ‘terrorists and extremists’, which clearly differentiated it from the more limited purpose and timeframe of the Manas base.248 In doing so, Putin attempted to shift blame for any competition onto Washington, implying that as long as America respected its limited mandate there was no potential clash of interests with Russia, who now had a more comprehensive, long-term mandate. His political calculations extended further, however. While Kant appeared more nationalist domestic forces in ‘checking’ American influence, Putin was able to stress its non-confrontational character internationally, and continue cooperation with the West less encumbered by domestic criticism of a perceived continual Russian defeat.

The energetic response to the American presence at Manas also demonstrated Putin’s ability to turn challenge into virtue; establishing Kant was an opening used to advance broader security cooperation. Russia subsequently came to play an increased role in bolstering Kyrgyzstan’s internal security, with its advisers helping to sure up the capacity of the Kyrgyz internal security forces.249 The response also highlighted the revamped nature of Russian foreign policy-making under Putin. Moscow successfully used incentives, such as the rescheduling of Bishkek’s debt, in return for the permanent stationing of Russian aircraft at Kant.250 The week the base officially opened, the significant material inducements presented to convince Kyrgyzstan to accede to the large Russian military presence became public.251 When Russia announced intentions to significantly expand its presence at Kant in 2004,252 it further demonstrated coordinated, tactical efforts to lay the basis for long-term strategic partnership, this time through expanded military-industrial cooperation. That April, state-owned Russian arms exporter Rosoboronexport gave Kyrgyzstan nearly $2.3 million worth of military equipment for the Kyrgyz rapid-reaction forces under the

249 Olcott (2003), pp. 6-7.
252 As outlined by Lieutenant-General Yevgenii Yurev, commander of Russia’s fifth Air and Air Defense Army cited by Bess Brown (2004a), ‘Number of Service Personnel at Russian Airbase in Kant to Quadruple’, RFE/RL Newsline 8 (34), 23 February; and Daniel Kimmage (2004n), ‘Russia to up Personnel Levels at Kyrgyz Base’, RFE/RL Newsline 8 (191), 7 October.
Although a gift, it also represented an effort to ensure continued Russian-Kyrgyz military interoperability and Kyrgyz purchasing loyalty. Moreover, rather than claiming four military production plants as payment of Kyrgyz debt, the Joint Russian-Kyrgyz Commission on Military-Technical Cooperation agreed, instead, on joint production and purchase of future military equipment.

The use of such inducements was also demonstrated in Putin’s efforts to overcome Rakhmanov’s foot-dragging on a permanent Russian base in Tajikistan. The two countries’ Finance Ministries agreed to erase $242 million of Tajik debt in return for full Russian ownership of the Nurek installation. Yet this was only one small component of Russia’s efforts. Moscow also announced deals promising more than $2 billion worth of investment over a five-year period. These included EES’s $200 million investment in the Sangtuda hydropower station, RusAl’s $560 million investment in the Rogun hydropower plant and further investments in the existing aluminum plant, Gazprom’s planned $1 billion investment in the Ustyurt region and $15 million to extend the life of the Shakhpakhty field, and Lukoil’s $995 million for natural gas extraction in the Bukhara-Khiva region. Importantly, such financial incentives drew on the contributions of numerous state institutions—economic, political and military—as well as private business, to successfully expand military-security cooperation. Ultimately, the investments worked not only in Tajikistan or Kyrgyzstan’s favour; Russia strengthened its position in the economies of these


states, advancing not only specific security interests, but also economic and potentially larger strategic goals.

The comprehensive Tajik agreement demonstrated the success of Putin’s approach. Moscow gained control over significant military-security infrastructure including a number of installations in and near Dushanbe, in the Kulob area to the south, the Aini airfield to the north, and the Nurek space surveillance centre to the southeast of the capital.\(^{258}\) As part of the deal, Russia also agreed to defray the costs of training Tajik officers in Russian military schools,\(^{259}\) another step entrenching longer-term cooperation through continued interoperability, shared values and operating cultures. Still, compromise was evident. In order to appease Tajik opposition, the international community, and even Rakhmonov himself, of concerns Tajikistan was becoming a Russian protectorate, Moscow agreed to transfer control of the Tajik-Afghan border to Tajik jurisdiction.\(^{260}\) The first section was successfully transferred on December 2, 2004.\(^{261}\) At the same time, however, the establishment of an Operational Group to assist Tajik border troops with training and intelligence gathering,\(^{262}\) ensured Moscow retained a hand in border security. The inauguration of the base on 17 October 2004 also demonstrated further success in regional security policy. Putin noted the Russian forces would “create conditions for neutralizing terrorist and extremist attacks”,\(^{263}\) and that “this base, along with the air base at Kant, Kyrgyzstan, will be an important part of the united system of collective security for the region”.\(^{264}\) The combined significance of the two bases and other bilateral efforts demonstrated the existence of a continued overarching goal—a regional security network—towards which Moscow was working more cohesively.

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258 Socor (2004a).
259 ibid.
260 The Intergovernmental Agreements on Cooperation on Border Protection and On Procedures for the Transfer of Border Units and their Property.
261 On December 2, 2004 Abdurahmon Azimov, head of Tajikistan's Border Protection Committee, and Vladimir Pronichev, head of Russia's Federal Border Service, concluded the handover of the first stage of the Tajik-Afghan border, the 881-kilometer Pamir section, to Tajik jurisdiction, while the Panj and Moscow detachments were slated to be transferred to Tajik jurisdiction in 2005. Avesta, cited by Daniel Kimmage (2004p), ‘Russia, Tajikistan Seal Pamir Border Handover’, RFE/RL Newsline 8 (231), 10 December.
262 Socor (2004a).
Putin’s approach was not without problems, however. There remained questions, for example, regarding Moscow’s ability to continue to reconcile the diverging interests of the military and political establishments and maintain this tenuous, evolving balance. Sustainability also had an economic element—the maintenance of the Kyrgyz base alone was estimated at 130 million rubles annually and its re-equipment 219 million rubles.\(^{265}\) Although the Russian economy had improved significantly, it remained questionable whether it could execute existing projects, let alone intensify activities. Moreover, although cooperation in fighting religious extremism and international terrorism provided a temporary impetus to cooperation, it was hardly conducive to long-term integration, particularly given Russia’s limited capacity for assisting Central Asia in the most important factor for internal security—economic development.\(^{266}\) While able to support the military aspects of this struggle, experience in Chechnya demonstrated that such an approach often inspired a further escalation of violence, rather than defeating terrorism. Finally, Moscow’s reliance on unpredictable, opportunistic authoritarian leaders meant receptiveness to Russian overtures often proved merely rhetorical, and official agreements meant little. This made Russian advances highly contingent on the contemporary disposition of the leader in question and their other opportunities. Rumours that Kazakhstan refused to purchase Russian air defence systems and instead awarded the contract to British Aerospace, contradicting the spirit of the CIS United Air Defence Agreement and cooperation with Russia, clearly demonstrated this danger.\(^{267}\) Nevertheless, policy making improvements and the establishment of a vast range of potential levers meant, positively, that Moscow was in a far stronger position than it was under Yeltsin to successfully deal with these unreliable partners.

Conclusion

Overall, Putin’s foreign policy transformation significantly impacted relations with Central Asia. The changes outlined in the previous chapters concerning the constraining of pluralism and reversal of many ‘democratic gains’, greater stability, increased centralisation, personalisation, and the consolidation of institutions and


\(^{266}\) Jonson (2001), p. 119.

procedures resulted in a generally more coherent, consistent policy freed from the hyper-politicisation that previously plagued policy. Activity was less motivated by the need to dull domestic criticism or for political gain in domestic political struggles, as some type of compensatory strategy for policy failures elsewhere, or as an attempt to warn other powers away from Russia’s ‘backyard’. Instead, from the time he came to power, Putin signalled his intention to place a greater emphasis on Central Asia and throughout his rule the region consistently occupied a higher priority than previously. His clearer definition of Russia’s national interests and how Central Asia fitted within his strategy for national recovery meant it was a more focused, planned approach that appeared to hold sway. Importantly, Russia’s transforming political and economic domestic environment also meant that a more active policy did not remain solely theoretical, but actually became reality. Increasingly greater coordination amongst a diverse range of foreign policy actors under central direction and growing resources saw external activities intensify and more comprehensive, strategic successes result. Importantly, this approach laid a potential basis for a much more significant future Russian presence. Economic penetration, in particular, effectively worked towards more traditional geopolitical ends that although officially abandoned, undoubtedly remained influential.

These factors also meant that policy towards the region remained surprisingly consistent before and after the US regional military mobilisation. Often criticised for a reactive strategy in Central Asia following September 11, in fact, there was little change in Putin’s policy. For sure, he stepped up Russia’s activity after 2001, but this intensification was underscored as much by Russia’s growing economic capacity and political-institutional capability, as it was sheer competition. Clearly, while Putin tried to restrict the impact of changing regional dynamics and growing external involvement on Russian interests, he did not rail against the inevitable, nor unrealistically seek to halt external penetration altogether. Instead, he remained focused on the bigger picture, identifying how Russia could benefit from cooperation and even from the growing interest of other powers in the region. As elsewhere, realism and pragmatism remained important influences. With his better ‘big picture view’ in mind, Putin was unwilling to jeopardise Russia’s relations with key external powers through unwarranted competition solely for the sake of prestige. Where
important interests were at stake they were protected robustly, but not in a fashion that would impair other Russian goals, nor if such battles were ultimately unwinnable. Accordingly, Putin also focused resources to areas where Russia retained the greatest potential for success: security (the fight against terrorism) and economic cooperation (energy development)—areas of advantage and strategic priority for the future. In focusing in areas of strength and necessity, Putin demonstrated what could be termed ‘constructive opportunism’. Here, he certainly leapt at—and in some cases actively created—opportunities for expanding Russian influence, but to which he also ensured Moscow was always well-positioned to respond constructively and capitalise on change to the greatest degree possible. In many respects then, Putin ultimately worked more consistently towards goals Yeltsin had espoused in his pragmatic nationalist approach, but failed to implement. Putin did so in a more subtle and acceptable manner, using a more predictable, professional policy to advance Russia’s regional position. This change in the quality of policy should not be underestimated, even if ultimately it was driven more by re-authoritarianisation than it was liberalisation or democratisation.
Conclusion

The impact of regime transition on Russian foreign policy-making towards Central Asia and beyond

This thesis has traced the impact of Russia’s regime transition on its foreign policy, focusing on the area of relations with Central Asia. The original research question posed by the thesis concerned understanding more clearly the impacts of regime transition on foreign policy making and implementation, and whether these impacts could explain changes in Russia’s relationship with Central Asia. The thesis sought to investigate the range of changes and influences resulting from the process of regime change, particularly focusing on liberalisation and democratisation, and how these impact foreign policy processes and outcomes. However, because democratisation is seldom a linear, unidirectional process, democratic stalling and reversal were also considered as part of the regime transition equation in this study. In Russia, such dynamics were particularly significant, given the evolving nature of its transition, which ebbed and flowed between more liberal and illiberal elements, but gradually moved further and further away from its initial democratic gains, but without substantively consolidating any one, permanent regime type. The thesis has focused specifically on the way in which the tumultuous domestic environment brought about by regime transition affected Russia’s external policy toward Central Asia, and how this evolving policy was intricately linked to changes in the nature and contours of domestic transition through the Yeltsin and Putin periods. It has attempted to bridge the gap between research concerning Russia’s regime transition and that focused on its foreign policy, demonstrating the strong links between the two, and exploring in greater detail how the domestic changes and upheavals shaped the tone, nature, direction and quality of policy, as well as specific policies.

What is certainly clear from this study is that regime transition has the potential to have significant negative foreign policy ramifications. The more protracted and
tumultuous the transition, the greater these potential impacts are likely to be. In Russia, the worst consequences of regime transition on foreign policy were seen during the Yeltsin period. During this period, Russia’s efforts to transit from communism to democracy stalled in a protracted stalemate in some type of uncomfortable transitional middle ground between authoritarianism and democracy. Having lost momentum, Russia became mired in an uncertain transitional limbo with no clear progression towards democracy. In foreign policy terms, this situation was characterised by a lack of strategic thinking, improvised decision-making, a lack of consistency and focus, the pursuit of contradictory policies, significant policy entrepreneurship, major swings in policy, a lack of real commitment to implementation, and a growing perception both internationally and domestically that Moscow was really failing to achieve anything of substance towards its stated, but ever shifting goals.

Under Putin the worst political, economic and social excesses and upheavals of the Yeltsin period were brought to an end, as he worked to create a more stable, robust and functional political system. A sense of conclusion to transition began to emerge. Some sense of ‘normality’ looked to be returning to politics and a functioning post-Soviet political system appeared to be emerging. However, the means Putin employed to establish this stability and normality had little to do with promoting further democratic political reform or advancing the consolidation of a substantive, liberal democracy. Rather, Putin’s solution to ending the transitional limbo, damaging levels of competition, conflict and fluidity and bringing about political stabilisation, was the circumscribing of democratisation, the centralisation of power within an increasing strong state apparatus and the broad reversal of political liberalisation, particularly in terms of pluralism and civil society freedoms. Putin’s vision of Russian democracy, at least in the short term, was of a far more managed variant, something more akin to illiberal or delegative democracy at best, but demonstrating increasing similarities to other more personalised, authoritarian ‘petro-states’ at worst. Still, concurrent to these reversals and the de-intensification of transition, and to a great deal because of it, significant changes in Moscow’s political outputs occurred. As the Russian political environment moved from an overwhelming focus on transitional politics and competition and conflict, to an increasing focus on real foreign political issues, foreign policy activity on the ground increased. Russia began to reassert itself on the regional
and global stage with a coordinated, substantiated and considerably more effective foreign policy. Of all the factors that contributed to this improvement, economic recovery and the defusing of institutional conflict and fluidity appear to have had the greatest positive impact. These actions insulated policy from the previous transitional upheaval, depoliticising and stabilising Russia’s relations with Central Asia and beyond.

Transitional scholars have long debated the impact of the economy on democratisation. Many have noted the potential for economic unrest to have negative effects on democratic consolidation. In terms of foreign policy, economic factors certainly had a huge impact during regime transition, though this impact changed over time. Overall, however, it is clear that the Russian case certainly supports the argument that economic conditions can significantly impact the course of transition and its potential success or failure. Russia’s massive economic decline clearly had a negative impact on democratisation. More specifically, however, the economy-transitional foreign policy equation was also very strong. Under Yeltsin, the economy affected foreign policy in two main ways: directly, by constraining the resources for implementation and; indirectly, where the prolonged economic collapse contributed to the widespread politicisation of all aspects of policy, as the government came under sustained attack for its inability to mitigate the impacts of economic reform. The lack of real economic growth throughout the 1990s ensured that the economy remained a continual constraint and destabilising influence on foreign policy.

For relations with Central Asia, economic constraints were most clearly demonstrated in the massive decline of trade and Russian direct investment in the region. Moscow’s importance as a partner and its strategic reach into the states declined as a result. Yeltsin’s consistent inability to fully acknowledge the financial constraints on Russia or his ignorance of these constraints for reasons of political competition and prestige, also meant that Moscow was continually unable to deliver on the substantial political, military and economic commitments it made to Central Asia throughout the 1990s. Over time, the lack of resources to back these treaties and strategic commitments led to continual disappointment with Moscow, undermined its credibility, and made Russia less relevant to the region. The Central Asian leaders
became more cautious in their dealings with Russia and increasingly looked elsewhere to other partners with the resources to substantiate their promises and provide the assistance the region required. Outside of Central Asia, Yeltsin’s inability to bridge the gulf between his stated external goals and Russia’s ability to deliver only increased domestic disappointment in his governments as Russia’s international humiliation grew, drove further political conflict and upheaval as those unhappy with his approach employed any means they could to move him from power, as well as damaging international perceptions of Russia and convincing other nations that Russia was a ‘washed up superpower’.

Under Putin, this situation changed dramatically. The rapid turn around of the Russian economy, underpinned by booming oil and gas prices, defused financial management as a political issue and contributed to the depoliticisation of policy. So long as Putin delivered improving material well-being many were willing to allow him substantial political autonomy, both in terms of his domestic and his foreign policy strategies. It also gave Putin’s government significant resources upon which to revitalise Russian foreign policy with a far more active approach. Under Putin, Moscow could substantiate what Yeltsin had long promised in Central Asia and elsewhere. Particularly after the transformation of regional dynamics brought about by September 11, the ability to substantiate political and economic promises became an important component in Russia’s ability to remain a relevant regional power and to compete for influence with the increased presence of other external actors. However, this was not solely competition for competition’s sake or for prestige alone. Putin had a clearer idea of how Central Asia could contribute to Russia’s expanding economy and was active in facilitating and securing access to the region’s resources to this end. Over time, as changes in the institutional environment occurred (discussed below) and power was centralised within a strong state apparatus Putin invested a great deal of energy into coordinating state and private economic interests to Russia’s strategic benefit. Often the line between the use of public and private resources became very blurred. State and private overtures to the Central Asian states more often occurred in tandem, with official military-security and political agreements underscored by massive state, semi-state and private capital investment in the economies of the country. This not only made the deals and Moscow more attractive as a partner, but it
also increased Russia’s strategic importance within the states. By the mid-2000s, Russian firms were investing heavily in core infrastructure in Central Asia, assisted by government incentives and coordination as well as the booming economy. Reversing earlier declines in trade and returning Russia to role of investor in the Central Asian economies provided Moscow with much more important potential levers of strategic influence than any of the hollow ‘strategic’ agreements promulgated by Yeltsin for reasons of political prestige and regional competition. Under Putin, then, the economy moved from being a constraint and destabilising foreign policy influence to become a key component in coordinated efforts to revive Russia’s strategic role in Central Asia.

This is not to say, however, that the earlier economic decline had doomed Russia to foreign policy instability and conflict, or that economic growth necessarily guaranteed a successful and stable foreign policy strategy. While a strong economy undoubtedly helped Russia under Putin, other factors were also at play. The negative impacts of the economy on foreign policy under Yeltsin were actually compounded by Yeltin’s tendency to link his economic strategy (and its success or failure), with other aspects of reform and policy-making. From the outset, Yeltsin appeared obsessed with encapsulating his economic and political strategies within some form of ‘big idea’ or grand scheme to replace communism. This was perhaps hardly surprising for someone from the former communist political class accustomed to the infiltration of ideology into every aspect of life. Whether the initial ‘Westernising’ approach or his ‘consensual’ Russian exceptionalism, which tried to define a distinct economic, political and social path for Russia, Yeltsin integrated the various threads of reform together into an encompassing ideological statement. For example, in the initial Westernising or Atlanticist approach a focus on neo-liberal market reforms and global economic integration was accompanied by a focus on political integration with the West and adoption of its liberal political thinking, in a radical departure from Russia’s political past. In this approach, Central Asia was effectively abandoned. Not only did sustaining relations with states of questionable democratic legitimacy not fit with a more liberal foreign policy direction, but a strong regional role for Russia in the CIS could also easily be associated with the imperialism Yeltsin and his allies were keen to demonstrate Moscow had left behind. Yeltsin was determined to show that a comprehensive break with the past was being made and that Russia had a new
political, economic, and social direction to move into the future with. In trying to
define such an all-encompassing concept, however, Yeltsin linked support for political
liberalisation too closely with the success of economic reform. When the economic
shock therapy failed, the backlash was not confined to the neoliberal economic
component. The association of the neoliberal economic reforms with the external focus
on integration with the West de-legitimised the liberal foreign policy approach
amongst a large sector of the population. It also had negative consequences on public
perceptions of democracy and the value of political and social liberalisation. As a
consequence, Yeltsin found it difficult to moderate the economic elements of his
concept while retaining the liberal political and foreign policy elements, at least in
official policy. When he did try to resuscitate aspects of his liberal approach, such as
he did after 1996, the increased focus on economic cooperation with the West seemed
at odds with 1993’s ‘consensual’ approach. This direction had come to focus on the
CIS and maintained a staunch position that Russia was not part of the West, so when
policies aimed again enhancing cooperation with the US and other Western nations
were again pursued, they only added to the perception of confusion and foreign policy
incoherence.

Putin, on the other hand, was less reliant on ideology to explain his economic or
political strategies. In fact, Putin appeared to eschew association with any specific
ideology. While commentators, supporters, allies and opponents drew periodically on
statist, nationalist, liberal, authoritarian, Eurasian, pro-Western, and anti-Western
labels to categorise him, ultimately only one description consistently fit: pragmatic.
Such pragmatism freed him up to pursue whatever economic or political strategy he
saw fit, without having to explain its alignment or divergence with a narrow
ideological concept. He was able to pursue a closer economic relationship with the
states of Central Asia whilst simultaneously courting Western leaders, for example, or
pursue liberal economic reforms at the international level, whilst pursuing an illiberal
domestic political strategy. His pragmatic approach could not really contradict any
ideological position, as there simply was not one. Putin instead focused on broad goals
like security, growing Russia’s economy, and improving its international status, for
which practically any action could be justified as method.¹ Subsequently, such pragmatism meant that Putin could react quickly to changing external dynamics like the aftermath of September 11, establishing a ‘partnership’ with the US and ‘allowing’ the American mobilisation in Central Asia, on the basis that it aligned with his broad goals of economic recovery, security, and an enhanced international position for Russia. He could also jump on any event, such as terrorism or later regional disenchantment with the US, without the need for time-consuming consensus building on areas of political deviation amongst elites or efforts to ‘take the public with him’, and turn this into an opportunity to expand Moscow’s role by tailoring Russia’s approach to exactly what the regional leaders were looking for. His lack of ideological constraints reduced the potential for politicising his foreign policy decisions where seemingly unforeseen actions were undertaken, re-establishing some separation between the domestic economic, political and social environment and foreign policy making that had been eroded during the Yeltsin period.

In terms of the mechanics of foreign policy, the fundamental transitional struggle that impacted foreign policy was in the area of institutional change, particularly in the environment of sustained economic and ideological upheavals detailed above. Probably even more than is traditionally attributed to institutional change, perhaps due to its ‘hyperinstitutionalised’ past and the massive change demanded by extrication of the Communist Party, Russia’s constitutional and institutional environment seriously influenced the contours of its transition and foreign policy during this period. The degree of state-building required in post Soviet Russia, compared to its postcommunist contemporaries in Europe and other authoritarian regimes elsewhere, was substantially greater. As a consequence the transitional impact of this area on all aspects of policy was also exacerbated. The institutional equation during the Yeltsin period was tumultuous, destabilising and prolonged. The loosening of previous political controls, extrication of the Communist Party and initiation of change resulted in a large amount of both vertical and horizontal fluidity. Changing resource allocations, access to power and reform within institutions impacted institutions in a differentiated manner, creating winners and losers, as well as driving intense conflict. These battles became an ongoing characteristic in Russian politics. At the highest levels this competition was

evidenced in the struggle between the executive and legislature for decision-making power and the direction of reform. However, it could also be seen in the struggle for the control of specific areas of policy, such as that of foreign policy making between the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Defence, Security Council, and a number of other pretenders. What made this situation even more damaging was the degree to which Yeltsin not only struggled to extinguish institutional conflict and upheaval, but the degree to which he actually sustained and encouraged it as part of his own political strategy. Whether through his promulgation of a new constitutional order, his unwillingness to compromise and cooperate with the opposition, his continual restructurings and establishment of institutions with competing foreign policy responsibilities, or his complex political style of perpetually playing factions off against one another to maintain his own political power, Yeltsin prevented the institutional system from consolidating in any stable form. Although he may have consistently held challengers to the legitimacy of the democratic system at bay, with no stability and certainty, no consistent procedures could be established, and no constructive behavioural changes could occur to provide a basis for the types of cooperation and compromise that democratic policy-making requires. Instead, Russian politics remained very much ruled by the old maxim of ‘kto-kogo’: who will win over whom?

This conflict-riven, competitive, unstable and fluid institutional environment had significant impacts on relations with Central Asia. For example, the absence of robust, consensual foreign policy processes and institutional discipline led to a lack of clarity over who was directing policy toward the region. Prior to 1995, the MoD appeared to gain in influence at the expense of the MFA, and the army, in particular, with its units on the ground, pursued its own interventionist policy in states like Tajikistan. These policies appeared well at odds with the official policy coming out of the MFA, which initially focused on insulating Russia from the Central Asia and managing the process of dissolution of the USSR. As the more nationalistic positions held by the MoD gained traction with other politicians and in institutions like the legislature, they fed further political conflict. While these nationalist positions were eventually coopted by Yeltsin and his government, contributing to evolution of the official policy towards Central Asia, for some time it appeared Russia was actually pursuing multiple,
inconsistent foreign policies in the region. Even after the MoD’s decline made it a less potent competitor, its role as challenger to the MFA was replaced by a relatively constant stream of alternative contenders. Bodies like the Security Council, Presidential Council, and Defence Council, established primarily due to Yeltsin’s inability to create a workable political consensus, contributed to fragmentation in the approach to Central Asia, with each body advocating for different approaches, often pursued simultaneously. These institutional actors were also joined by a range of other actors with foreign policy interests empowered by political liberalisation. These included state-owned and private business interests and, to a lesser extent, other civil society groups. Without strong central coordination and robust procedures in place for moderating, mediating and managing their demands, they only added further to the confusion and inconsistency in policy toward Central Asia. The contradictory approach to Caspian Sea delimitation and hydrocarbon development pursued simultaneously by the MFA and state-owned and private oil and gas giants, whose position eventually won out, was only another example of such tendencies.

Again, Putin dramatically transformed this situation. He moved quickly to shut down the institutional conflict that plagued the political system. He used the centralised, super-presidential system in the way that perhaps Yeltsin and his allies had hoped for, but had never been able to achieve due to Yeltsin’s health, inability to focus consistently, and his penchant for gamesmanship and rhetoric over substance and consistency. Through his constraining of transitional fluidity and the reversal of earlier liberalisation and pluralisation of politics, Putin ‘de-cluttered’ foreign policy, reducing the number of actors involved and restricting opportunities for other actors and institutions to access policy processes. He clarified political roles, such as those of the oligarchs and big business, pushing back on unwanted interference and clearly established the appropriate political role for institutions like the military. He further constrained the role of the legislature, already much constrained under Yeltsin, seeing it as another potentially destabilising influence on policy, rather than as an institution with something to add to policy-making process. He rolled back certain liberal political reforms, took control of key media institutions and insulated key policy-making institutions from excessive influence from outside government. This further reduced opportunities for civil society actors to interact with policy-making actors or
procedures, given the perception of their prior tendency to complicate rather than contribute positively to policy. He succeeded in his democratic rollbacks by capitalising on the public’s political and transitional fatigue, focusing instead on economic well-being and delivering continual economic gains to offset the loss of political freedoms, in some type of unwritten contract with the public.\(^2\) Real policy-making power was further appropriated to within the presidential apparatus and his trusted cadre of allies. Unlike Yeltsin, who had similarly tried to centralise power to improve efficiency and dull politicisation, Putin was less tempted to divert from the process in order to buy off institutions or reward political allies. As a less contested political figure Putin simply had less need to do so. When his public popularity grew to unprecedented levels, it also caused institutions to fall in behind his leadership, keen to be associated with his successes rather than be marginalised or experience the wrath of his displeasure. His increasing control over the media and information in Russia also heightened the sense of coordination and political success, even where niggling uncertainty may have remained. It also allowed him to manage and manipulate politics far more successfully. Now, where institutional or political dissent was expressed it more often became a political strategy on Putin’s part to express views or displeasure that he himself did not want to officially state, but wanted external partners to be quite clear did exist. His greater political acumen, energy and focus brought an end to the institutional fluidity. He defused the hyper-politicised environment and created a more disciplined institutional system that more reliably implemented what Putin directed it to do so.

The positive results of addressing the transitional institutional environment on Russia’s relations with Central Asia cannot be understated. Taking control of foreign policy, Putin substantially reduced the earlier continual conflict over priorities, contradictory approaches from different institutions, policy ‘freelancing’, inconsistent implementation, inertia and politicisation. There was now more clearly one approach to Central Asia, the government’s, and this approach was more consistently adhered to. Most importantly, this approach was also part of a bigger picture; Putin more clearly identified how Central Asia and the CIS could contribute to his goals of economic

recovery, security and Russia’s increased international standing. Economic relations focused on bilateral and targeted multilateral initiatives around the exploitation and transit of oil and gas, the extraction of raw resources, and in the development of infrastructure and industry—all areas central to the recovery of the Russian economy. Military-security relations with the region targeted the threat of terrorism, a topic of significant interest to the region’s leaders, but also one of central concern to Russia’s own security.

However, changes in Russia’s turbulent institutional environment went beyond just an improvement in consistency. The quality and long-term strategic focus of policy also increased. Increasingly, linkages were forged between policy areas and the public and private sectors to serve quite complex policy ends and implement strategically focused projects intertwining political, economic and military goals. The earlier examples of increased coordination between state and private interests to effect comprehensive agreements in the region, is just one example of this improvement. Others included the re-establishment or expansion of Russian military bases in Central Asia under the guise of collective security agreements aimed at countering terrorism, comprehensive military cooperation and financial agreements aimed at maintaining regional interoperability and a reliance on Russian arms manufacturers, and policies offering citizenship by way of Russian military service to offset Russia’s declining draft. Moscow’s increasingly astute pipeline diplomacy, massive investments and political incentives aimed at protecting Russia’s preeminent role in the hydrocarbon transit from Central Asia, as well as its willingness to employ innovative means such as ‘investing in debt’ to gain equity and ownership in strategic infrastructure in Central Asia, also demonstrate this more coordinated, long-term focus. Such moves ultimately placed Russia in a better position to robustly protect its interests and compete with the growing interest of other external powers over the longer-term, particularly the US and China.

An area discussed at length during the theoretical chapter as a significant transitional change and potential source of upheaval for foreign policy, that did not have as great an impact as would have initially been expected was the democratisation of foreign policy influence. However, this is likely due to a set of circumstances quite
particular to the Russian example. Certainly, in the initial stages of transition, there appeared to be potential for the growing franchise and political mobilisation to impact foreign policy quite strongly. However, the massive economic decline, social chaos and dislocation, and political institutional changes worked with the legacies of the past pretensions to totalitarian political control to mostly discourage the exponential (and potentially destabilising) growth of civil society and demands for political participation that have been commonly identified as challenges for the democratisation of foreign policy. While increased liberalisation of political participation were part of the mix of challenges in transitional foreign policy making and implementation, the greatest destabilisation remained the conflict driven at the level of political elites, institutions, and bureaucrats rather than society more broadly. The upheavals in the policy environment were primarily driven by elite struggles for power and influence, rather than the expanding political franchise, as may have been expected. Moreover, as Putin moved the country towards a more delegative form of democracy, causing early liberalisation to give way to democratic stalling and reversal, any theoretical growth in society’s influence on foreign policy, through the legislature, elections, parties, civil society interests and the like, was further constrained and effectively reversed. Early economic struggles, totalitarianian legacies, unreformed institutions and unresponsive bureaucratic culture now gave way to the return of centralisation and overt restrictions on independent political activity as barriers to the real ability to influence policy-making. Although some non-governmental groups carved out a foreign policy influence, particularly big business and the oligarchs, for the most part foreign policy remained an elitist domain.

Of course, the other side to this continued foreign policy elitism was that Russia failed to enjoy the potential longer-term benefits of increased public influence on foreign policy. Scholars have noted that one of the positive impacts of increased societal input and accountability in foreign policy is its tendency to contribute to longer-term policy stability, as policy reflects more closely the average voter’s desires and is less likely to change dramatically. Because foreign policy remained restricted and strongly elite driven in Russia, this in itself contributed to both actual and potential foreign policy instability, where the empowerment of different groups or the departure of policy entrepreneurs provided the potential for swings in policy towards areas like
Central Asia and no underlying broad social consensus on interests could provide a moderating influence. Instead, the supposed mass opinion that came to influence policy tended instead to be elite interpretations of public opinion. These were most often somewhat distorted from what real societal attitudes on specific issues were. While this distorted view clearly led to the hardening of policy and a more nationalistic approach during the Yeltsin period, it did not escalate to the type of conflict envisaged in Mansfield and Snyder’s war-prone democratising states. In Russia, the elite situation was sufficiently fragmented that although the groups with a traditional interest in war and more aggressive policies may have had success in capturing certain foreign policy areas (such as relations with the ‘near abroad’), they were unable to translate this into broader political control. The elite situation remained sufficiently divided that no one faction was able to dominate the political system—something with its own damaging policy ramifications. Ultimately, then, although Yeltsin’s constant shifts between elite factions may have had negative repercussions for foreign policy stability, he may also have kept certain elites from leading Russia down an even more damaging and dangerous path.

Over time, as the range of interests influencing policy became increasingly limited under Putin, it became clear that the dominant non-governmental interests in policy towards Central Asia were those of the resource lobby, most concerned with facilitating access to the region’s resources. The interests and preferences of other non-governmental groups towards the region were much harder to identify. While the legislature, nationalist parties and politicians had a great deal to say about the need to robustly protect Russia’s interests and maintain its leadership role throughout the Yeltsin period and again when the US mobilised its troops in the region in 2001, these demands reflected elite interpretations of public opinion and their relationship to the public’s actual views was somewhat more complex. When the public did appear to take an interest in the situation of Russian speakers in Turkmenistan during the ‘gas-for-people’ controversy, Putin was easily able to ignore media criticism and demands for action from a range of political actors. The tightened controls on political freedoms and limited avenues to pursue the issue meant that opposition to the official position could not be easily sustained and the issue slipped from public view. By this time, it was also unclear whether the roots of the issue’s public profile were actually even in
the efforts of civil society interests and public opinion to influence policy. A convincing argument was raised that this was a actually a more cynical, political use of key political figures by the president to voice concerns he was not willing to raise officially in relations with Turkmenistan, rather than any evidence of societal interest in foreign policy issues pertaining to Central Asia. Exactly what the public thought of policy towards Central Asia and what priorities it identified was unclear and provided no real basis to the growing policy stability. This is something that could have significant impacts on the longer-term sustainability of this policy stability itself, as is discussed later.

Ultimately, the Russian example also supports the position held by many transitional scholars that the simultaneous combination of economic, political and ideological change is especially challenging. Negotiating a successful and consistent foreign policy path during such a period of major domestic upheaval is an immensely difficult task. This struggle can be immensely detrimental to the state concerned, impacting its ability to successfully achieve its international goals, as the Yeltsin period clearly showed. Moreover, where such major political conflict emerges as part of the transitional equation, democratisation and liberalisation can make it even more difficult to implement and maintain a cohesive foreign policy line, as previous modes of establishing consensus and enforcing compliance are eroded and new democratic systems and behaviours are not yet established and embedded. This was exactly the challenge in Russia, where the fluidity of the political system and the scope and contested nature of the direction of political change, meant the replacement of the past policy making framework and political culture was impeded and prolonged. The lack of traction towards continued transitional development and consolidation was a challenge that the two Russian leaders of the period in question responded to in quite different ways.

Effectively, throughout his term, Yeltsin attempted to broadly work within the democratising framework to reduce the negative impacts of transition on policy. Although his first attempt to overcome problems of political inertia and conflict was the installation of a new constitutional system that theoretically centralised greater power in a superpresidential system, this at least remained a democratic political
system. When this system failed to defuse the political environment sufficiently to stabilise the policy environment, Yeltsin instead moved increasingly to a reliance on gamesmanship and manipulating a complex web of political relationships to shore up political support through a series of temporary alliances and allegiances. Unfortunately, this meant that rather than rising above the domestic conflict to mediate it and provide a steady hand for transition to ensure the state was able to ‘drive while democratising’, Yeltsin instead became entrenched in political battles and added further to the confusion of transition. The ongoing political battles and excessive, time-consuming politicking involved in even the most simple areas of policy, barely kept the political system functioning at times, let alone developing in any positive sense towards a more stable, mature polity. The reliance on the super-presidential system and complex set of personal ties also meant that when his health made him incapable of playing a consistent role in politics, both the transition and constructive political life atrophied. Even though the initial motivations for many of his behaviours may have been valiant—aimed at staunchly protecting the democratic transition from those forces that wanted to erase all liberal gains—he increasingly appeared more motivated by the desperate need for power irrespective of the damage it was causing, than anything else and his individual actions diverged further and further from what would typically be expected of a democratic leader. As he consistently promised more than he could achieve, Yeltsin also gradually disappointed all of his domestic ‘allies’ and ostracised practically all of his supporters. In the end, even the oligarchs, who seemed to be one of the only groups benefiting from the Yeltsin administration by the late 1990s, identified him as more of a political liability than an asset. His administration’s foreign policy was simply derivative of his leadership—unfocussed, often irrational, inconsistent, prone to prioritising style over substance and politics over policy, and ultimately achieving very little. Yeltsin never set Russia on either a clear transitional or foreign policy course and the results of this were all too clear to see in Central Asia.

Putin, on the other hand, appeared to believe that bringing transition to an end was central to rehabilitating Russia domestically and internationally. To do so, Putin decided that the short-term pursuit of a liberal, Western-style democracy would be abandoned and a more managed, delegative style of political system would instead be implemented based specifically on strong leadership and the re-centralisation of
political power. He took full advantage of the illiberal, authoritarian elements of Yeltsin’s super-presidential regime and advanced further political reforms to centralise power in his own hands and those of his trusted political associates. The consequence of these reforms and adaptations was that Putin’s ability to effect policy changes and remain in power did not rely on ever-shifting alliances and temporary political alignments. As has been shown throughout the latter half of this study, by instituting a more managed, constrained form of political regime Putin reduced the scope for transition and the multitude of interests inherent in Yeltsin’s chaotic, more liberal regime to impact policy. The subsequent impact of this divorcing of policy from politicking on policy stability cannot be understated.

At the same time, Putin’s success in establishing a more stable political system and policy environment did not solely rely on the illiberal elements of his regime or the increasingly authoritarian mechanisms at his hands. Putin was also a leader in the positive sense of the word. Even if the advantages of his increasingly delegative regime meant his support became somewhat overstated, it is clear that Putin enjoyed high levels of public support throughout his presidency. Putin was an integrating figure. He appealed to the broadest range of political forces and gave Russians a sense of pride that had long been lacking. His political culture relied on decisive leadership, certainty and resolute decision-making at the presidential level. He constructed and maintained the image of a strong leader with control over all aspects of the state. There did not seem to be any issue that the president did not have a view on, and was not in some way involved in. This leadership style was broadly respected and appreciated by many Russians, partly because of its historical familiarity and partly because its contrast with the preceding decade or more could not have been greater. Ultimately, this combination of popular, vital leadership with the adroit manipulation of the unwieldy superpresidential constitutional system in order to fully utilise and enhance its underlying delegative attributes was a potent mixture. It pulled other institutional actors and political forces into line and created a unity of institutional and political purpose that had never existed under Yeltsin. With few mistakes or misjudgements to capitalise on and a shrinking range of outlets through which to express their frustration, the opposition became increasingly marginalised. Even the majority of parties actually
came to support Putin or his approach in some way. Putin was power and access to the
president or aligning with him became a far better political strategy than opposing him.

Putin’s stronger leadership presence also contributed further to foreign policy
stabilisation. The fact that he had a strong interest in international affairs meant that
foreign policy benefited in a double measure: Putin not only wanted a stable, effective
political system to improve Russia’s economic, political and social situation, but saw
an efficient, active, foreign policy coordinated at the highest levels as a key component
in achieving this. He took a personal interest in ensuring foreign policy was at the
forefront of Russia’s recovery and stabilisation. He remained consistently engaged, a
linchpin in both policy process and in coordinating foreign policy integration with
other areas of state activity. He maximised the agency of his government by being
pragmatic and demonstrating strong leadership in a way that made historical sense to
many Russians. Importantly, Putin pursued a foreign policy that drew on enough
elements of the past, such as continued integration with the ‘near abroad’ and a
leadership role in Central Asia, with newer policies of global economic integration that
would assist the goal of economic regeneration. His policies were not the
revolutionary, radical departure from the past that Yeltsin’s initial policy had been, or
the isolationist, exceptionalist attitudes Yeltsin later appealed to. Instead, they were a
‘half-way house’ that combined elements of old and new. This allowed Putin to
convince the majority of Russians (and particularly the elites) that his foreign policy
would serve Russian national interests and not those of the West. His policies and
strong, consistent leadership backing of them, balanced competing demands to be
coherent, defensible domestically and credible internationally.

As a consequence, the study also shows that the degree to which regime transition
can be successfully negotiated and to which it impacts policy is also greatly impacted
by the nature of leadership within any constitutional framework. A fundamental
difference in the impact of transition on foreign policy in the Yeltsin and Putin periods,
both in Central Asia and beyond, stemmed from differences in the quality and actions
of leadership. In the transitional environment it is hardly surprising that leaders
potentially attain an integral, even exaggerated importance. During times of upheaval,
disorienting change, fluidity and conflict, leaders have the potential to act as either
integrating or disintegrating factors. Society and other political actors all look to leaders for a sense of certainty and confidence, as driving forces in maintaining the momentum of transition, for modelling appropriate behaviours that will become the basis of political culture, for keeping the state functioning while change occurs, and for reassurances that the upheaval will ultimately lead to a more successful and comfortable future. As has been demonstrated throughout this thesis, the difference between the first two transitional leaders in Russia could not have been more stark. While Yeltsin likely had positive intentions for Russia and was an integral actor in bringing an end to communism and initiating regime transition, his personal operational code, political persona, and health meant he became increasingly unable to provide the type of leadership that could overcome the transitional challenges to provide a workable policy environment, or to push the country towards consolidation of a more stable regime. Putin’s leadership, while clearly to the detriment of democratisation, certainly moved the state and its foreign policy towards enhanced stability, building the weakened capacity of the state, and bringing the country back from the perceived brink of collapse. Putin demonstrated that particularly within the post-Soviet Russian context, a key to effective leadership was the ability combine a certain degree of continuity with change, in both foreign and domestic policy. The revolutionary break with the past that may have assisted other states in their transitions was simply too disorienting for Russia, for whom communism was not just an ideology imposed from the outside, but something that had a more complex relationship with Russian identity and nationalism.

Given the significant positive impact of Putin’s leadership changes and his moves towards a more delegative, constrained political system on the stability and coherence of foreign policy outputs in the short-term, understanding the longer-term impacts and sustainability of these changes is a key area for further research. What these changes mean for the long-term survival of the democratisation project and whether for the sake of short-term stability Putin has irreversibly pushed Russia too far in an authoritarian direction is also an area to examine further, given the importance of the nature of the regime on foreign policy demonstrated in this thesis. Initial indications on these matters would appear to demonstrate that although the short-term result of Putin’s political roll-back was definitely greater political stability and improved policy
making and implementation, the fact that improvements did not stem from permanent institutional reforms or tangible changes in behaviours and political culture calls in to question how much Putin actually contributed to the consolidation of stable, predictable processes in the long term. Effectively, foreign policy under Putin operated along essentially horizontal lines, whereby the president sat atop exercising overall strategic control and coordination. Below him, institutional actors undertook their functions according to directives from above, but without reference to any third party or mediating mechanisms. Although the constituent parts of the policy-making system had to work together, they did not do so independently, but through what Lo labelled the common denominator or ‘transmission belt’ of the president. While autonomous from each other, their autonomy was circumscribed by the need to refer all major decisions and actions back to the president, meaning individual foreign policy actors were atomized and there remained personalisation rather than any real structure. Unfortunately, this personalisation meant that while Putin brought significant changes to policy-making, the process remained inherently unstable, and excessively dependent on one actor. It appeared a pragmatic, partial, interim acquiescence, rather than an unconditional, consensual commitment to the new rules of the game; a tenuous stability where differences remained dormant rather than extinct. Consequently, this remained a veneer of a stable, consensual, predictable political system. Essentially, the fundamental contradiction between the need for strong leadership to establish a system where strong leadership was no longer required, remained unresolved. Simply insulating policy-making from pluralist influences such as societal interests, lobby groups, parties, and diverse governmental institutions may have stabilised the process in the short-term, but it ultimately did little to ensure long-term stability, let alone increase the democratic credentials of the process. This was elitist policy-making that remained divorced from much of the general population and political society, a fact that certainly called into question its longevity, as well as the sustainability of its outputs.

Although outside the scope of this thesis, the changes that occurred after the completion of Putin’s second term and the election of Dmitri Medvedev as president

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4 ibid, p. 163.
indicate a recognition of the lack of substantive consolidation and the excessive dependence on Putin for political stability, a personalisation that is often established in illiberal forms of governance and one that presents significant challenges for succession and regime maintenance. As Putin’s term neared an end, debate raged as to whether he would in fact step aside, or whether constitutional changes would occur to allow presidents to serve more than two consecutive terms. While he chose not to pursue this constitutional route, instead anointing a successor as Yeltsin had successfully done before him, he did also begin a subtle shifting power towards the Prime Minister’s office he clearly planned to occupy after departing the presidency.

Following Medvedev’s election and Putin’s nomination as Prime Minister, the profile, significance and activity of the Prime Minister far exceeded any previously in that position. In fact, in the first few years of Medvedev’s presidency, Putin continued to overshadow the president. It was still Putin fronting much foreign policy activity in areas like Central Asia. There was no perceptible change in foreign policy, or any other area of policy for that matter. In effect, Putin actually still appeared to be ruling the country. Subsequently, there was hardly surprise when Putin announced he would again run for office once Medvedev’s first term was completed with a likely return of power back to the presidency and disempowerment of the position of Prime Minister.

However, the fact that this occurred demonstrated that political elites and the public continued to see Putin personally as key to stability and that the delegative, managed regime he had put in place was actually still inherently shallow, rather than a greater level of trust in political institutions and systems to moderate political conflict and guarantee a stable system having been consolidated. Effectively, stability and confidence in the political system remained shallow. Questions remained over exactly what would happen once either Putin left the political system or when the system he had established was no longer effective at defusing conflict or delivering the political goods his supporters required. Given Putin’s age and continued passion for politics, it would appear the latter situation was the much more likely scenario for seeing any challenge or change. Specifically, the nexus between delivering economic benefits and the political compromise was one that all authoritarian or illiberal leaders struggle to maintain in the longer-term. The drop in Putin’s approval ratings, growing criticism
and jockeying for political positions as the economy encountered problems during the global financial meltdown of 2009, only demonstrated just how tenuous the stability in Russia might actually be. While Putin’s strategy of effectively stalling the political aspects of the transition, reversing some of the liberal gains, centralising policy making and reducing the influence of other political actors through the installation of a delegative, illiberal form of democracy may have stabilised foreign policy, there is no long-term replacement for the consolidation of a substantive democracy, with predictable processes that provide for bounded uncertainty, broad, inclusive political involvement, widely accepted rules of the political game, and a moderate political culture based on compromise and mutual second-best outcomes. As long as these characteristics remain lacking from the Russian political environment, political conflict and instability continue to bubble just beneath the surface, and the threat of a return to the contested, fractious and unpredictable foreign policy of the Yeltsin period remains.
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Lectures and podcasts


Interviews

Interview with Vyacheslav Amirov, Institute of World Economy and International Relations (IMEMO), Moscow, Thursday 27 November 2003.

Interview with Stanislav Zhukov, Institute of World Economy and International Relations (IMEMO), Moscow, Monday 1 December, 2003.

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Interview with Bobo Lo, Moscow Carnegie Centre, Moscow, 27 April 2004.