own economic growth since the 1990s has significantly lessened the need for such a partnership. Still, Moscow and Delhi signed a friendship and cooperation treaty in 1993 and a joint declaration on creating a strategic partnership in 2003. Russia, of course, has signed such agreements with countries ranging from China to the U.S., and in practice, the depth of the partnership varies significantly.

Rhetoric aside, the relationship between India and Russia has suffered as China has become the major pole for Russia’s Asian policy while India and the United States have moved to overcome their own legacy of mistrust. Instead of aligning itself with a seemingly unreliable Russia, India has generally found itself competing with Pakistan for the affections of the United States. By moving closer to Washington (a process symbolized above all by the U.S. decision to provide India with nuclear fuel for its civilian reactors despite Delhi’s nuclear weapons tests and refusal to sign the Nonproliferation Treaty), India signaled its own desire for strategic independence. Both Russia and India, in other words, have found reason to focus their attention elsewhere for much of the past decade.

As a major emerging economy, India (which is, along with Russia and China, one of the so-called BRICs) represents yet another potential customer for Russian energy and another potential lever to use as a means of limiting Chinese power in the region. For Russia, India remains valuable as a buyer of weapons (fully 70 percent of India’s military equipment is Russian made) and India has provided firm support on Chechnya while keeping quiet about developments in Russian domestic politics that other democracies have criticized. Trade turnover has risen recently, to an annual value of $4 billion—albeit from a low base. In political terms, India joined the SCO as an observer in 2005 and has subsequently participated in a variety of the organization’s more substantive activities, including those of counterterrorism and counternarcotics, as well as the building of a transportation network linking Central and South Asia. Though it has so far declined full membership in the SCO, Indian prime minister Manmohan Singh and Putin issued a joint statement following their summit meeting in 2004 expressing support for multilateral approaches to international problems and rejecting unipolarity. Additionally, Russia has lobbied for Indian membership on the UN Security Council.

On the whole, Russian policy toward India appears designed to compensate for a long period of neglect, beginning in the 1990s, when the emphasis on East Asia allowed the old Soviet-Indian partnership to shrivel and opened the way for the United States to successfully court Delhi. Russia’s renewed attention to this relationship, however, cannot but complicate the task of deepening the strategic partnership with China, which itself has increasingly come to see in India a (democratic and increasingly pro-West-
ern) rival for leadership in Asia. Moscow's courtship of Delhi will in all probability remain at most a mirror on the state of Russo-Chinese relations.

CONCLUSION

Russia's rapprochement with China over the past two decades has in many ways reflected the larger evolution of Russian foreign policy since the end of the Cold War. Although Gorbachev began the process in the late 1980s, the real warming of ties has come in the decade-plus since the installation of Primakov as foreign minister. For Primakov as well as his successors, China was useful as an alternative to the emphasis on Russia's European/Western identity during the first post-Soviet years. In a larger sense, the Russo-Chinese rapprochement has fit in with Moscow's interest in returning to the world stage as an independent Great Power. Given that in many ways Russia itself is too weak and divided to represent a pole unto itself in a multipolar world, a true partnership with China allows Russia to pursue this preference more persistently. That calculation, indeed, seems to be one of the key principles underlying Primakov's and Putin's quest for better relations with Beijing. For pro-Western liberals, it is precisely because China represents an alternative model and pole of attraction for Russia that it is so dangerous a partner.

To be sure, there is a range of more mundane reasons why Russian leaders should seek good relations with a rapidly growing and developing China. Expanded trade offers the best chance to resurrect the economy of the Russian Far East. Reduced friction over border questions diminishes the likelihood of future clashes. Post-Soviet Russia has had similar incentives to pursue closer relations with many of its neighbors, including the EU and Japan. Yet relations with China have in many ways been better and more consistent than Russo-European or Russo-Japanese ties. Even though China's future path remains an issue of great concern in the Kremlin and in Russian academic circles, the fact remains that China has been a major foreign policy priority for more than a decade.

Indeed, if the real turning point in Russia's international behavior came around 1996 with the appointment of Primakov to the Foreign Ministry, it is tempting to see the signing of the Russo-Chinese strategic partnership and the subsequent development of that partnership as emblematic of this era in Russian foreign policy, the era in which the notion of Great Power and a concert model of international relations have predominated. The West may still be the top priority for Russian policy makers, but relations with China are in a sense the true touchstone for understanding where Russian foreign policy is heading. As China enters the twenty-first century apparently poised to become a new superpower, the onetime superpower
to its north will have little choice but to make China a priority in its own right, independent of Moscow's relationship with the West. China's emergence, then, is one of the principal forces driving Russia's adoption of a more Eurasian identity in the coming century.

NOTES


8. While Russia is cutting back its nuclear force in line with the START II accord with the U.S., China (which was not a party to the START negotiations) is rapidly modernizing and expanding its own nuclear forces and will likely reach parity with Russia within the next decade. Dmitri Trenin, *Russia's China Problem* (Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1999) 9–10, 27–31.

9. The Chinese National Petroleum Company won a tender in August 2005 to take control of Petrokazakhstan, the largest oil company in Kazakhstan, by paying far above market price, following a pattern of “overpaying for assets; it’s more of a security issue for them than the absolute price.” See Keith Bradsher and Christopher Pala, “China Ups the Ante in Its Bid for Oil,” *New York Times*, 22 Aug 2005: C1.


29. Lukin, “Russia’s Image.”
39. Garnett, “Challenges,” 44–46. The initiative for the treaty came from the Chinese side, which was eager for a resolution of its outstanding disputes with Russia. See V. Putin, “Zayavlenie dlya pressy i otvet na voprosy na sovremennoi presskonferentsii s Predsedatelem Kitaiskoi Narodnoi Respubliki Jiang Zemin,” 16


46. Kuchins, “État terrible.”

47. On the origins and substance of this consensus, see Joshua Cooper Ramo, The Beijing Consensus (London: The Foreign Policy Centre, 2004).


57. Lukin, “Russia’s Image.”


59. In this regard, Ariel Cohen’s concerns about the possibility of a secret codicil to the 2001 Russo-Chinese Treaty committing Moscow to assist Beijing in the event of a conflict in the Taiwan Strait seem quixotic at best. Cohen, “The Russia-China Friendship and Cooperation Treaty.”


66. Melikova, “Putin povazhuet chudo sveta.”


76. Blank, “The Eurasian Energy Triangle.”


78. Under pressure from environmental groups and the Ministry of Environment, the Russian cabinet agreed to move the starting point of the pipeline from Angarsk (due west of Lake Baikal) to Taishet, some 500 kilometers farther north. The Taishet-Nakhodka route would pass well north of the lake rather than skirting along its shores as foreseen in the initial plan. Eventually the pipeline’s endpoint was moved for environmental reasons as well, from Perevoznaya Bay to Kozmino Bay, several kilometers southeast of Nakhodka in Russia’s Maritime Province (Primorski Krai).


87. Chen Yun, “Kitai i Rossiya v sovremennom mire,” 49.


89. Pavel Felgenhauer, “Billions Down the Drain,” Moscow Times, 1 Jun 2004. Felgenhauer points out that because military research and development is tax exempt in Russia, firms have an incentive to claim to be doing military research without ever producing anything.


91. OSC Analysis, “Russia: Foreign Policy Thinkers Undaunted by Rising China.”
92. Part of the problem is that, like Yukos's advocacy of an oil pipeline to China, large defense contractors (rather than the Kremlin) have been the motor behind many arms deals. To be sure, this problem was more severe in the chaotic 1990s, when Sukhoi licensed production of the Su-27 to Beijing without seeking clearance from the Kremlin. While a similar scenario is all but unthinkable under Putin, in a sense, the damage has already been done. Rangsimaporn, “Russia’s Debate,” 479; Stephen J. Blank, “The Dynamics of Russian Weapons Sales to China,” U.S. Army War College Strategic Studies Institute, 1997, http://www.fas.org/nuke/guide/china/doctrine/ruswep.pdf.

93. On the other hand, Putin’s success in subordinating private economic interests to the state (via the arms export monopoly Rosoboronexport) has meant that such concerns are likely less relevant today than in earlier phases of Russia’s post-Soviet history. Putin has given Rosoboronexport control over export decisions by individual firms. See Rangsimaporn, “Russia’s Debate,” 482–83.


96. Analysts taking a particularly negative view of the SCO’s intentions include Ariel Cohen and William Odom. Others, including Daniel Kimmage, Martha Brill Olcott, Carlos Pascual, and Stephen Blank are more sanguine, arguing that the SCO’s focus is increasingly economic and that in any case, Russo-Chinese tensions remain too serious for the SCO to evolve into a real military-political bloc akin to NATO. For an overview, see Lionel Beehner, “The Rise of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization,” Council on Foreign Relations Backgrounder, 12 Jul 2006, http://www.cfr.org/publication/10883/.


103. Merry, “Moscow’s Retreat,” 25–26; Alexei Bogaturov, “International Rela-

104. “Here There Be Dragons.”


110. Both Beijing and Moscow had previously conducted maneuvers with the militaries from the Central Asian states (in the Russian case, under the auspices of the CSTO as well as the SCO). Previous exercises, however, were much smaller in scale and more focused on specifically local threats. In contrast, Peace Mission 2005 was held on China’s Shandong Peninsula and involved land, air, naval, and amphibious forces from both Russia and China. Though portrayed as providing operational training in antiterrorist tactics, the scale of the exercises and the use of heavy weaponry (including naval/amphibious forces and Russian Tu-22 strategic bombers) belied such claims.


125. Quoted in “Ugroza po sosedstvu: Pered rossiiskim Dal’ nem Vostokom vstaet real’nyaya ugroza ‘polzuchei’ kitaiskoi ekspansii,” Vzglyad, 4 Aug 2005, http://www.vzglyad.ru/politics/2005/8/42962.html. On the whole, there is little discussion, polemical or otherwise, in the Russian press regarding the immigration of non-Chinese East Asians. Trenin has called for Moscow to encourage the immigration of a range of ethnicities to populate the Far East (including Koreans, Thais, and other Southeast Asians) precisely as a way to ensure that the region does not pass under Chinese hegemony.


130. In 1955, Moscow offered to return the southernmost Kuriles (the two Habomai islets and Shikotan) in exchange for an explicit statement by Tokyo that its alliance with the U.S. was not directed at any third power (i.e., the Soviet Union). Japanese vacillation, backed by pressure from Washington, scuttled the agreement. A 1956 Russo-Japanese joint declaration affirmed that the southern islands would be returned to Japanese sovereignty when a formal peace treaty between Japan and the USSR was signed. Subsequent Soviet—and Russian—offers to negotiate the status of the southern islands have often appeared to be attempts to wrong-foot the Japanese. See Gregory Clark, “Northern Territories Dispute Highlights Flawed Diplomacy,” Japan Times, 24 Mar 2005.

131. Buszynski, “Oil and Territory,” 293.


Back on the Offensive?

The Former Soviet Union

Given the legacy of Soviet control and continued political, cultural, and economic linkages between Russia and its neighbors in the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS, Sodruzhestvo nezavisimykh gosudarstv, or SNG), Russia’s leadership has not consistently regarded its dealings with the CIS states as a branch of foreign policy. Moscow’s invasion of Georgia in the face of its pious declarations about the importance of international law and state sovereignty points to a certain disconnect in Russian thinking about the CIS. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, the CIS has increasingly turned into a contested zone between the major powers: Russia, the United States, Europe, and, increasingly, China. The struggle for influence in the former Soviet republics has often come as a surprise to Moscow, which long regarded the entire region as its exclusive preserve but was too weak for much of the 1990s to enforce its claim to exclusivity.

Of course, much of the outside world’s encroachment into this traditional sphere of Russian influence is a consequence of the larger process of globalization, for which Moscow’s attachment to a worldview based on the predominance of a handful of Great Powers has left it somewhat ill-prepared. Then again, the Kremlin and independent Russian observers often argue that outsiders’ involvement in the CIS—whether in supervising Ukrainian and Georgian elections or seeking energy deals with countries like Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan—is predicated on precisely the same kind of geopolitical view of the world adhered to by much of the Russian elite and is designed to promote anti-Russian groups on Russia’s borders.

As Russia’s power and reach have grown over the past decade, Moscow has sought to reassert itself as the pivotal player inside the CIS, and to
reverse the CIS states' drift from its orbit. The struggle for influence in the former Soviet Union provided a major test of Putin's generally pragmatic approach, since important constituencies in Russia (including much of the military and security services) continued to adhere to a kind of paternalistic view of Russia's relationship to its former dependencies. In some instances, Russia was able to maintain generally cooperative relations with foreign powers, as when it agreed to the stationing of U.S. forces in Central Asia following September 11, 2001. In other cases, the relationship took on more of a competitive, zero-sum dynamic, as in the multilateral struggle for control of Kazakhstan's energy resources, where Moscow, Beijing, and Washington all sought to advance their own interests at one another's expense. In a few instances, notably the political struggles in Georgia and Ukraine, the interactions among the major powers edged into downright hostility, with Russia's approach at times giving off a strong whiff of Eurasianist neo-imperialism.

The war in Georgia, which Western powers roundly condemned, appears to be something of a turning point in Russia's dealings with the CIS. After years of finding itself on the defensive as outside—principally Western— influence spread throughout the former USSR, Moscow decided on a sharp blow that would weaken or topple the West's most important outpost in the former Soviet Union and serve notice to others that they would have no choice but to reach some kind of accommodation with their former hegemon. While it remains too soon to assess the long-term consequences, it is clear that the relationship between Russia and the West in the borders between them will be much more competitive than in the past, and Western leaders will have to decide what risks they are willing to take to maintain their influence in the face of mounting Russian opposition.

Given the extent to which most of Russia's foreign policy attention is devoted to cultivating and balancing the Great Powers, its approach to the former Soviet Union—a region where there are no Great Powers (apart from Russia itself)—is in many ways sui generis. In general, Russia's leaders have seen the former USSR as an arena within which the complex interactions of the major powers play themselves out—as objects for diplomacy rather than subjects in their own right. For much of the post-1991 period, Russia's approach to dealing with its immediate neighbors was little more than an adjunct to its larger ambition of establishing itself as a major international player. Early in the 1990s, the non-Russian parts of the former Soviet Union (especially its Caucasian and Central Asian peripheries) were perceived as little better than dead weight, to be left behind as rapidly as possible so that Russia could rush ahead to join the developed West. During the Primakov interlude, Moscow began paying more attention to the republics of the CIS.
At first, this attention took the form of imperial nostalgia. Under Putin, Russian policy in the CIS became more nuanced. Competition among the Great Powers remained an important element. The expansion of Europe to the east, along with the deployment of American troops to Central Asia and the increasingly intense struggle for energy and the infrastructure to transport it, have combined to enhance the strategic significance of the former Soviet Union for all of the major powers. Russia has been active in protecting friendly regimes and establishing its predominance in the energy sector throughout the territory of the former USSR.

At the same time, though, Russian policy has often been constrained by outside powers’ renewed interest in the former Soviet states as well as Russia’s own desire to have generally cooperative relations with all the Great Powers while exerting a dominant influence within the CIS. The paradox has been that the more Moscow seeks regional hegemony through military or other means, the more difficult it becomes for Moscow to be seen as a responsible pillar of the international system. For this reason, Russian policy in the region has been at times an uncomfortable mixture of bluster and accommodation of outside interests, as the CIS has often served as a sidebar to Russia’s relations with the United States, Europe, and China. With its invasion of Georgia in the summer of 2008, Moscow demonstrated for the first time since the Soviet collapse that under some circumstances, it was willing to court real foreign opposition to assert what it perceived as its interests inside the CIS. Still wedded to a fairly traditional geopolitical view of international relations, the invasion was also about demonstrating Russia’s continuing relevance as a major power.

The instrumental nature of Russia’s approach to the former Soviet Union has resulted in variations over both time and space. The European republics (Belarus, Ukraine, and Moldova, plus the three Baltic states) have served as a buffer zone between Russia and the expanding Europe of the EU and NATO. The Caucasus and Central Asia, on the other hand, have been important to Moscow initially as a zone of instability and insecurity along Russia’s vulnerable southern frontier. Since September 11, 2001, these states have taken on an added importance as the location of a complex diplomatic and economic struggle between Russia and its onetime superpower rival, which found itself pulled into Central Asia as part of the broader war on terror. Early in the U.S.-led campaign against the Taliban, U.S. troops were deployed to Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan, initially with Russian approval. Russian troops, meanwhile, remained in Tajikistan as a result of their role in ending that country’s civil war, while Moscow deployed forces in Kyrgyzstan in 2003 in order to match the American presence and redeployed them to Georgia in 2008 in the course of an invasion largely designed to check the spread of Western influence.

Both the Caucasus and Central Asia have also been the object of outside
attention as a result of their contribution to global energy security. Azerbaijan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, and Kazakhstan are all major energy producers. Meanwhile, the strategic location of the Caucasian republics (Azerbaijan, Armenia, and Georgia), Belarus, and Ukraine has made them all important pawns in the pipeline diplomacy of the major powers. Given the importance of energy and pipelines in Russian foreign policy more generally, the Kremlin’s engagement with countries of the Caucasus and Central Asia has increasingly focused on the energy sector, with Russian companies (backed by the state) seeking to invest heavily in the production and transportation of energy reserves throughout the former Soviet Union.

In some ways, the growing focus on energy has come at the expense of other kinds of concerns. Russia’s decision to cut off gas supplies to Belarus—long its closest ally among the CIS states—in January 2007 signaled the effective end of attempts to construct a so-called union state combining the two countries into a single entity. The decision to embargo gas deliveries to Belarus caught most observers by surprise—both because Belarus had thitherto been reliably pro-Russian and because of the difficulties Moscow encountered a year previously when it had imposed a similar embargo on Ukraine. Yet the Belarusian imbroglio was perhaps the clearest example of Moscow choosing to prioritize narrowly national interests at the expense of a broader neo-imperial policy within the CIS. Put differently, Russian policy inside the CIS remains largely a stepping-stone in Moscow’s quest to be taken seriously as a world power, even if its actions within the CIS at times lead other states to question its readiness to play a responsible international role.

The instrumental nature of Russia’s approach to the post-Soviet world has given Russia a degree of flexibility in the region, which it has used to manage relations with the other major powers that have established a presence there. No doubt, the relationship between Moscow, Beijing, and Washington (and Brussels) remains competitive throughout much of the former Soviet Union: Ukraine is still torn between East and West, Georgia was in a state of perpetual chaos even before Russian troops marched in, while much of Central Asia remains a vast playing field for the ambitions of the Great Powers. Yet with some exceptions (especially Georgia), Russian policy in the region has been fairly sophisticated, with Russia using its residual influence in neighboring states as a way to leverage its return to major power status through control of energy transport routes, forward military deployments, economic linkages, and other forms of soft power. As the invasion of Georgia showed, however, Russia retains hard power options in the CIS that it lacks elsewhere.

While Russia’s residual influence remains strong in many, though not all, of the former Soviet states, a persistent pattern of bartering such interests for the sake of promoting Russia’s global influence has been evident. Russia
Back on the Offensive?

retains many levers for exerting control in what many Russians still term the Near Abroad, including the presence of Russian troops in some neighboring countries (Moldova, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Georgia, and Armenia), encouragement of regional separatists in the context of the so-called frozen conflicts, and control of oil and gas supplies in many CIS states. In general, Moscow remains interested in preserving its influence in the former Soviet Union, ensuring access to the seas (especially the Baltic and Black) and transit rights for Russian gas and oil, and to a lesser degree protecting the rights of Russian speakers who found themselves living outside their homeland following the collapse of the USSR. A combination of these factors has driven Russia’s attempts to sustain the regimes of Aleksandr Lukashenko in Belarus (so far successful) and Askar Akayev in Kyrgyzstan (eventually failed), as well as Moscow’s continuing intervention in the frozen conflicts in Transdniestria, South Ossetia, Abkhazia, and Nagorno-Karabakh.

Russia’s usual willingness to seek accommodation with outside powers like the U.S. and China inside the boundaries of the CIS is both testament to Moscow’s emphasis on Great Power relations as the driving force in international affairs and a recognition that Russia’s national interests cannot be defined simplistically in terms of an imperial grab for territory. In strengthening the Russian Federation as an international actor and protecting its security interests, Moscow has largely accepted the fact that all politics is not zero sum.

Moscow’s offer to let the United States use the Russian radar station at Gabala in Azerbaijan as part of the planned U.S. missile defense program (despite the increasingly frosty tone of exchanges between Washington and Moscow in 2006–2007) is one recent example of this approach to foreign policy inside the CIS. Given Moscow’s general inclination to prioritize relations with the major powers (above all the U.S.), the decision to invite a U.S. presence in an area as strategically sensitive as the South Caucasus fits in with a pattern of seeing Russia’s presence in the CIS as a resource to be exploited in the service of the country’s broader foreign policy goals. The Georgian conflict fits this pattern as well: having failed to make outside powers take its interests seriously through other means, Moscow took advantage of its regional military preponderance to force the issue, all the while proclaiming its desire not to precipitate a break with the West—as long as the West proved willing to accept the fait accompli of its defeat in this conflict.

The United States’ increasingly assertive role inside the Commonwealth of Independent States (including the deployment of U.S. military forces in Central Asia) represents a fundamental challenge to Russian amour propre and self-image as a Great Power. Consequently, the generally cooperative relationship that prevailed between Moscow and Washington within the
CIS at least until August 2008 was quite significant. Although rhetorical clashes occurred, the overall pattern was long similar to the conflict over NATO enlargement—Russia exerted firm opposition to the deployment of U.S. troops in Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan, to Western “meddling” in Ukrainian presidential elections, and to criticism of Russia’s actions in Chechnya, but repeatedly backed down from the brink. The successful campaign to expel the U.S. from the Karshi-Khanabad base in Uzbekistan was an exception that proved the rule; only when relations between Washington and Tashkent were at their nadir (because of the Uzbek government’s massacre of demonstrators in the city of Andijon in May 2005) and only after Tashkent and Beijing had seized the initiative did Moscow step up its pressure on Washington to withdraw its forces. In Georgia, Moscow appears to have made a calculated gamble that the damage to its relationship with the West can be contained; for the most part, it seems to have gambled correctly. On the whole, in this most sensitive of regions, Russian foreign policy has again demonstrated Moscow’s geopolitical vision of the world and the concomitant recognition that managing relations with the Great Powers to promote Russia’s re-emergence remains the centerpiece of Russian foreign policy.

THE EUROPEAN CIS:
SHADOWBOXING OVER UKRAINE

Russia’s cautiously opportunistic approach to restoring its influence in the CIS has been on display throughout the former Soviet Union. In the European CIS states—Belarus, Ukraine, and Moldova—Russian policy has often seemed inconsistent. On the one hand, an interest in maintaining cooperative relations with the Western powers (including the EU, which now shares a border with the European members of the CIS) has meant that Moscow’s more aggressively imperial impulses have been fairly restrained. On the other hand, though, the very proximity of the West has raised the stakes in the contest to influence Minsk, Kyiv, and Chisinău.

Russian influence in all three European CIS member states remained strong after the fall of the Soviet Union. In Moldova, Russian sponsorship of the Transdniestrian separatist regime and the presence of Russian peacekeepers have served throughout the post-Soviet period to check Chisinău’s foreign policy autonomy. Belarus’s dictatorial ruler Aleksandr Lukashenko has been forced to rely on Russia for diplomatic and economic support as a result of the West’s hostility to his regime, even after the January 2007 spat over gas prices.

Ukraine is a more complicated case. Since the so-called Orange Revolution of 2004, Ukraine’s complex identity as a state on the border (the word "Ukraine" means "borderland") between Russia and Europe exacerbated the
split between Moscow and the West. Russia and the U.S./Europe backed different sides in the Orange Revolution, largely on the basis of the foreign policy visions articulated by the competing camps. The Orange Revolution highlighted a deep divide within Ukrainian society and also between Russia and its putative partners in the West. The new era in relations heralded by Putin’s decision to back the U.S. in Afghanistan appeared to end in the flurry of charges and countercharges hurled by Moscow and Washington during the Ukrainian standoff.

On one level, the struggle for Ukraine highlighted just how much circumstances had changed since the end of the Cold War. The very idea that Ukraine could turn its back on Russia, seeking integration with the European Union—and more importantly, NATO—reflected the degree to which Russian power had collapsed since 1991. By 2004, that collapse was ending, and Russia’s active participation in the struggle over Ukraine’s future was a sign of things to come. Moscow’s intent never appeared to be the reabsorption of Ukraine or the undermining of Ukrainian statehood—which it certainly had the capability to attempt, given Ukraine’s limited historical existence as a state and the presence of a significant number of Russian speakers in the country (most importantly in the Crimean Peninsula). Russian policy has surely borne a strong whiff of realpolitik, seeking to influence Kyiv’s choices in ways congenial to Russian interests through economic pressure, bluff, and interference in Ukraine’s domestic politics.

Before the Orange Revolution, Ukraine was for the most part content to balance between East and West. Participation in NATO’s Partnership for Peace and the GU(U)AM (i.e., Georgia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan, and Moldova, joined for a time by Uzbekistan) organization of ex-Soviet republics seeking distance from Moscow were balanced against membership in the CIS and a friendship and cooperation treaty with Russia ratified by the Verkhovna Rada (the Ukrainian parliament) in 1998. For the westward vector of Ukraine’s foreign policy, GU(U)AM was particularly important in that it united members of the CIS who were both seeking energy independence from Russia and had (apart from Ukraine itself) endured Russian military intervention. The formation of GU(U)AM was thus intimately linked to the construction of the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil pipeline, the construction of which would allow Ukraine to import oil by ship across the Black Sea from Ceyhan without relying on Russia. In this way, Ukraine would significantly reduce its dependence on Russian energy supplies and come into closer political alignment with Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Moldova, all of whom have sought to limit the reassertion of Russian influence in the CIS. Participation in GU(U)AM, however, could easily be interpreted in Moscow as an unfriendly act, and former Ukrainian president Leonid Kuchma’s government was unwilling to alienate Moscow entirely, especially as support
for Kuchma within Ukraine dwindled as his government became bogged down in a series of scandals.

Still, Kyiv’s stated interest in integration with the West continued for most of Kuchma’s term in office (1994–2004). By the eve of the Orange Revolution, however, corruption, the Kuchma government’s involvement in arms smuggling to Saddam Hussein’s Iraq, and its possible complicity in the murder of an investigative journalist had made it increasingly toxic to the West, deepening Ukraine’s reliance on Russia. The semi-rapprochement between Kyiv and Moscow in Putin’s first term was reflected in increasingly frequent attempts to coordinate the two countries’ integration into and participation in European structures such as the OSCE and the Council of Europe. This approach, termed in Ukraine as “returning to Europe with Russia,” was elaborated with the help of the Moscow-based Fund for Effective Politics (Fond Efektivnoi Politiki), headed by notorious Kremlin spin doctor Gleb Pavlovsky.

Beset by scandal and increasingly unpopular, Kuchma sought to engineer with Russian help a transition to a reliable successor in 2004. The controlled transition got out of hand when manipulation by Kuchma and his allies in Moscow became too blatant to ignore. The fall of Kuchma and the contested succession that brought to power the pro-Western Viktor Yushchenko revealed deep underlying tensions among the Ukrainian political elites and opened Ukraine to the competing geopolitical ambitions of both Russia and the Western powers. For Moscow, the specter of a Yushchenko presidency was to be avoided at all cost. Russia’s leaders had an opportunity to familiarize themselves with Yushchenko during his term as prime minister from 1999 to 2001. During this time, Yushchenko concentrated on reforming the Ukrainian economy, weakening the hold of oligarchs with close connections to Russia. In addition, Yushchenko—whose wife held American citizenship—spoke of possible Ukrainian membership in NATO and was supported by various groups of Ukrainian nationalists whose activities have historically been perceived in Moscow as anti-Russian.

A series of underhanded maneuvers was undertaken to prevent Yushchenko from winning the 2004 Ukrainian presidential elections. These included at least two attempts to assassinate Yushchenko—including one that left him disfigured from severe dioxin poisoning, the employment of agents provocateurs who attempted to tar the Yushchenko campaign by associating it with neo-Nazi organizations (a maneuver not as bizarre as it might seem, given the existence of a vocal neo-Nazi fringe within the Ukrainian nationalist movement), and massive violations of campaign finance regulations. While much about the lead-up to the 2004 election remains murky, it is certain that Moscow was at least cognizant of many of the dirty
tricks being employed, some at the behest of Pavlovsky and other Russian political technologists with good Kremlin connections.\textsuperscript{16}

Apart from such attempts to sabotage the Yushchenko campaign before the election, the Russian government pushed hard in the November 21, 2004, runoff vote for its favored candidate, the former transportation manager (whose past also included jail time for robbery and assault) Viktor Yanukovych, to assume office despite widespread allegations of fraud in the conduct of the election.\textsuperscript{17} Exit polls showed Yushchenko ahead by a comfortable margin (52 percent versus 43 percent for Yanukovych), but the official results gave Yanukovych a narrow victory, thanks to suspiciously high voter turnout levels in the Russian-speaking eastern part of Ukraine.

Moscow and Putin himself had been open in their support for Yanukovych during the campaign (making joint public appearances with the Ukrainian premier throughout the campaign), while the Kremlin openly helped Russian businesses channel money to the Yanukovych campaign.\textsuperscript{18} The Kremlin, along with the Kuchma government, which was hoping for an orderly transition of power and protection against potential prosecution after leaving office, was also complicit in the activities of figures like Pavlovsky, who were responsible for devising and implementing various techniques to ensure a Yanukovych victory. Once the votes were in, moreover, the Kremlin urged international acceptance of Yanukovych’s supposed victory, ignoring outside observers’ conclusion that the results had been falsified.

Putin immediately declared the vote fair and strongly criticized both the Ukrainian opposition (led by Yushchenko) for its failure to accept the “results” of the election and, apparently unaware of the irony, outside powers for their willingness to intervene in Ukraine’s internal affairs.\textsuperscript{19} U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell meanwhile declared unambiguously that because of widespread fraud and manipulation “we cannot accept this result as legitimate.”\textsuperscript{20} Many Ukrainians also rejected the results, and major protests soon broke out in Kyiv and cities in western Ukraine with heavy concentrations of Yushchenko voters. Even as the protests by orange-clad Yushchenko backers mounted, Russian leaders refused to back down from their support of Yanukovych until the Ukrainian Supreme Court stepped in and ordered the runoff between Yushchenko and Yanukovych to be held again. The whole process resulted in Yushchenko’s eventual victory—and a Russian realization that continued resistance was jeopardizing both its influence in Kyiv and its relationship with the West.\textsuperscript{21} Yushchenko was sworn in as Ukraine’s new president on January 23, 2005.

The Kremlin had clearly botched its handling of the crisis that followed the Ukrainian presidential election and contributed directly to the outbreak of the Orange Revolution shortly thereafter. Moscow’s overt support for Yanukovych during the campaign offended many Ukrainians, who saw it
as a display of Russian paternalism (or worse). Repeated attempts to gain recognition for Yanukovych as president also damaged Russia’s standing with the Western powers, which saw Russian intervention in Ukraine’s politics as a form of renewed Russian imperialism. Russian leaders largely perceived the events in Ukraine through the lens of geopolitics, and hence interpreted the West’s condemnation of the election as part of a broader campaign to undermine Russian influence across the former Soviet Union and contain Russia—a charge Moscow has leveled at a range of Western democracy promotion activities in the former Soviet Union and elsewhere.

Western officials, of course, denied trying to pull Ukraine out of Russia’s sphere of influence. Instead, they generally portrayed their rejection of Yanukovych’s victory as a consequence of insisting that democratic procedures be respected. \footnote{22} The United States did have something of a stake in the Ukrainian elections, since a wide range of official and semiofficial organizations (from USAID to the National Democratic Institute and International Republican Institute to George Soros’s Open Society Foundation) provided money and expertise to the democratic opposition. Although this aid was designed to ensure a fair electoral process and was not given directly to any Ukrainian party or candidate, supporters of the Kuchma-Yanukovych regime objected, not without some justification, that U.S. policies favored Yushchenko in practice. \footnote{23}

Because Yanukovych’s campaign emphasized deepening ties between Ukraine and Russia while Yushchenko’s focused on integration with the West, the geopolitical implications of the election could not be ignored. The events surrounding the Orange Revolution fed worries of a new Cold War between Russia and the West (worries that have been renewed with each succeeding crisis on Russia’s periphery). Yet precisely because of the potential geopolitical consequences, Moscow’s subsequent handling of relations with Ukraine was somewhat more nuanced, shaped around its broader relationship with the United States and Europe. Its handling of Russo-Ukrainian relations since Yushchenko’s eventual election has provided one fairly significant example of how Moscow was willing to endure what Trenin termed a “painful and humiliating” diplomatic defeat in order to avoid a full-blown diplomatic showdown with the United States, even in a country like Ukraine that it considers vital to its national interests, at least as long as it felt that the consolidation of power at home was not complete. \footnote{24}

The confrontation between Russia and the United States did not advance beyond the level of hostile rhetoric (U.S.-Russian cooperation in Afghanistan, for instance, continued largely unimpeded by the standoff in Ukraine). \footnote{25} Given Russia’s still considerable leverage over Ukraine and the very real danger that a hostile Ukraine would pose to Russian interests, the most surprising aspect of Russia’s response to the Orange Revolution was
its restraint, a restraint that appears to be fraying in the aftermath of the Georgia conflict, with reports of Russian attempts to stir up nationalist passions in the Crimea. Furthermore, as the depth of the crisis in Ukraine as well as the U.S. and European commitment to upholding the rule of law became clear in Moscow, Putin took the lead in seeking a graceful exit based on Russian ambassador to Ukraine Viktor Chernomyrdin’s recognition that “anybody who becomes Ukrainian president will be compelled to develop good-neighborly relations with Russia,” and that future elections would provide new opportunities to influence Ukrainian politics.26 Yushchenko’s own attempts to mollify Russian concerns played an important role in the gradual Russian climb-down. The new president went out of his way to reassure Moscow of his good intentions, including holding a face-to-face meeting with Putin shortly after his inauguration.

While Ukraine’s political scene has remained sharply divided since the Orange Revolution, with deep splits in particular between the largely industrial, Russian-speaking east (as well as the Crimea) and the more agrarian, Ukrainian-speaking west, for the most part Russia and the Western powers who opposed it in late 2004 achieved a kind of modus vivendi. In part, this reconciliation was driven by the mutual recognition that the tug-of-war over Ukraine that broke out in 2004–2005 was politically damaging and destabilizing. Russia’s reported decision to issue passports to Russian-speaking inhabitants of the Crimea in late 2008 was a reminder that, if pressed, Moscow retains the ability to sow chaos in Ukraine.

Even Pavlovsky, the architect of the Kremlin plan to impose a managed transition from Kuchma to Yanukovych, recognized that Russian policy had gone too far and risked too much. In a frank review of Russian policy toward Ukraine and his own role in the disputed election, Pavlovsky suggested that in the future, Moscow would seek to exert influence on countries in the post-Soviet space, regardless of the composition of their governments and whether they were ultimately to join either the EU or NATO.27 In this way, he argued, Russia would be able to move beyond the zero-sum mentality that characterized the Kremlin’s role in the 2004 Ukrainian election and not risk a complete diplomatic defeat should pro-Western parties come to power elsewhere in the CIS. One high-ranking Kremlin official described the goal of Russia’s post-Orange Revolution approach to the CIS as “impacting a civilized character to Moscow’s relations with Washington and European structures on the territory of the former USSR.”28

Putin’s September 2005 visit to Western Europe, which focused primarily on energy, also laid the groundwork for a kind of détente over Ukraine, in part by focusing Western attention on the potentially destabilizing effects of continued polarization.29 While political instability remains a fact of life in Ukraine, with the Yushchenko and Yanukovych (not to mention wild-
cards like the charismatic Yulia Tymoshenko) camps doing battle over the constitution, the powers of the Rada, the timing of new elections, and foreign policy, the proxy battle between Russia and the West over Ukraine largely abated, at least until 2008. Then, Yushchenko’s outspoken opposition to the invasion of Georgia and threats to ban ships from the Russian Black Sea Fleet from returning to their base at Sevastopol rekindled fears about Russian designs against Ukraine’s integrity.

Even earlier, this détente in Ukraine was repeatedly tested, above all on the question of energy. Gazprom’s decision to raise the price of gas supplied to Ukraine, first broached in March 2005, ended up badly shaking Russia’s relations with Europe (and by extension the United States). Apart from Western interest in Ukraine for its own sake, the broader consequences of the gas dispute resulted from the fact that Western Europe itself is heavily dependent on Russian gas supplies, 80 percent of which reach Europe after transiting Ukrainian territory. Ukraine and Russia have quarreled since the breakup of the Soviet Union over the status and use of the pipelines that cross Ukrainian territory en route to Europe. Even during the Kuchma years, Kyiv sought to take advantage of Russia’s dependence on Ukraine as a supply corridor to demand high tariffs for the use of pipelines on its territory. It also (along with Belarus) fiercely resisted Russian attempts to secure an ownership stake in its pipeline infrastructure as a means of paying off the country’s debts to Russia. In 2000, Gazprom sought to undercut Ukraine’s transport monopoly by mooting the prospect of a new pipeline (which eventually became Nord Stream) bypassing Ukrainian as well as Polish territory. Kuchma as well as his then-prime minister—Viktor Yushchenko—strongly opposed Gazprom’s attempt to skirt Ukraine.

Throughout Putin’s presidency, the question of Ukraine’s payments for Russian gas festered as a major impediment to improved Russo-Ukrainian relations. The dispute became a crisis when Gazprom cut off deliveries on January 1, 2006, over the still unresolved price dispute and Kyiv’s unpaid bills. Gazprom had begun by demanding an increase in the price paid by Kyiv for gas deliveries from $50 per thousand cubic meters to $160, starting in January 2006 (even though the existing contract setting prices at $50 was set to run through 2009). Although Gazprom’s initial demand for increased payments was made in the summer of 2005, Kyiv did not respond until Gazprom threatened in mid-December to cut off supplies at the start of the new year unless the Ukrainian government and its state-owned energy company Naftohaz Ukrayiny accepted the increased price. Ukraine refused to pay the higher rate and charged Russia with violating existing agreements on gas sales, whereupon Gazprom executives told Kyiv it now would have to pay $230 per thousand cubic meters instead of the originally proposed $160. When the government of Prime Minister Yury Yekhanurov refused
to sign an agreement on Gazprom’s terms, the Russian gas monopoly stopped deliveries on January 1.\(^5\)

Kyiv responded to the resulting shortages by announcing it would siphon off Europe-bound gas from pipelines crossing its territory. While the Ukrainian authorities represented their actions as a response to blatant imperialism on the part of Russia, Moscow claimed the entire affair was a simple commercial dispute, with Gazprom deputy chief executive Aleksandr Ryazanov arguing, “This isn’t politics. Gazprom isn’t under pressure from the government. This is simple economics.”\(^34\) The Yekhanurov government portrayed the siphoning of gas destined for Europe as a desperate measure by the Ukrainian state to preserve its independence. The Russian Foreign Ministry, in a press release on the first day of the crisis, termed Ukraine’s actions “an attempt to blackmail the countries of Europe with the threat of the illegal confiscation” of gas for which the Europeans had already paid, as well as a desperate maneuver to enhance the ruling coalition’s popularity in the run-up to parliamentary elections that the “orange” parties were predicted to lose.\(^35\) After much acrimonious rhetoric on both sides, the dispute was (temporarily, at least) settled on January 4, when Gazprom and Naftohaz Ukrayiny signed an agreement setting the price for Ukraine’s gas purchases at $95 per thousand cubic meters—payable in cash only rather than the mix of cash and barter theretofore prevailing.\(^36\)

For many observers in the West, the whole dispute appeared a blatant attempt by the Kremlin, operating through state-controlled Gazprom, to punish Ukraine for the Orange Revolution and for its leaders’ interest in seeking integration with Western institutions. The Ukrainian authorities sought consciously to encourage this perception. Yekhanurov told Western ambassadors that Russia was not only in violation of a commercial agreement but was actively threatening Ukrainian sovereignty. The significance of this line of reasoning lay in the fact that Britain and the United States had signed a commitment to defend Ukraine’s political and economic sovereignty in 1994 in exchange for Kyiv’s willingness to surrender the nuclear weapons that had been left on its territory by the Soviet military.\(^37\)

The Western powers all called for a quick end to the crisis (particularly those European states whose own economies remained dependent on Russian gas). Still, the bulk of Western opinion, both public and official, seemed to assign blame for the crisis and the resulting gas shortages in Europe to Russia’s neo-imperialist policies in the CIS rather than to either a legitimate commercial dispute or manipulation by the Ukrainian authorities.\(^38\) While the gas dispute between Kyiv and Moscow did have a strong geopolitical undertone, the implications of the crisis were more complex than much of the alarmist commentary at the time acknowledged.

On one level, much of the problem was simply economic. Ukraine continues to heavily subsidize domestic gas sales (as does Russia itself), such
that households pay only $27 per thousand cubic meters, while businesses pay between $60 and $80 for the same amount—well below even the price paid by Kyiv before the renegotiation in January 2006. These subsidized prices have been a disincentive to conservation, with the result that, like its neighbors in the former Soviet Union, Ukraine’s gas consumption is profligate. Moreover, because Ukraine itself produces little gas, much of the cost of Ukrainian inefficiency has been borne by Gazprom, which, as a state-run company, is not subject to the full measure of market discipline affecting private companies. And since Gazprom is for all intents and purposes an arm of the Kremlin (or, more cynically, vice versa), Moscow believed it had good reasons for subsidizing gas exports to Ukraine as long as it could gain noneconomic benefits from doing so.

Yushchenko’s emphasis on seeking integration with the West, which of necessity implied reducing Russian influence in Ukraine, gave Moscow less reason to continue with these subsidies. In other words, Russia’s decision to reduce its subsidies by demanding a higher price was more than anything a recognition that its attempts to keep Ukraine in its sphere of influence through economic incentives had failed. If Moscow was not gaining foreign policy benefits from its (expensive) subsidization of the Ukrainian economy, there remained little reason for Gazprom to keep throwing money at Ukraine. Incidentally, the Russian demand for higher prices reflected in a general way many of the demands that European governments had long been making: to reduce the role of barter in economic exchange among the post-Soviet states, to increase Gazprom’s overall transparency, and, most importantly, to internalize the notion that the former Soviet republics had become fully sovereign states. Indeed, Moscow justified its demand that Kyiv pay more for its gas by pointing out the (much higher) price paid for Russian gas by consumers in Europe and suggesting that if Ukraine wanted to be a European state, it should pay its bills like one. That said, Moscow was more than happy to have an excuse to cause mischief for Ukraine’s pro-Western leadership.

Nor has the January 2006 agreement, which was heavily criticized in the Western press, succeeded in curbing Ukraine’s drift out of Moscow’s orbit. Moscow’s strategy during the gas crisis appeared to aim much more at cutting its losses—financial as well as diplomatic—rather than seeking to capture Ukraine as a satellite. Ambassador Chernomyrdin (a former prime minister and Gazprom chief executive) affirmed that “Russia has a general approach for all states—we are moving to market [based] relations with absolutely every state,” regardless of domestic political conditions. Gazprom has in fact demanded—and received—higher payments from all of its downstream customers in the CIS over the past few years, though the steepness of the increase and the timing of its introduction have varied.

Moscow and Kyiv conducted another round of negotiations on gas prices
in October 2006, more than two months after Yanukovych had become prime minister and after it had become clear that Ukraine’s prospects for joining the EU or NATO in the immediate future were minuscule.\textsuperscript{42} Yanukovych’s return did not prevent Gazprom from demanding another price increase for 2007. The Russian media reported that Moscow was offering Kyiv gas for $130 per thousand cubic meters (in line with the prices outlined in the Yanukovych government’s budget, rather than the $230 Gazprom had been demanding) in exchange for Ukraine holding a referendum on NATO membership and affirming its agreement to allow the Black Sea Fleet to keep its base at Sevastopol until 2017.\textsuperscript{43} While the deal that was finally signed confirmed that Ukraine would pay only $130 per thousand cubic meters, the only conditionality discussed in the aftermath touched on coordinating Moscow and Kyiv’s entry into the World Trade Organization.\textsuperscript{44} By the middle of 2008, there had been no referendum on NATO; meanwhile, the Black Sea Fleet remains very much the subject of intensive maneuvering between Moscow and Kyiv (which announced in March 2007 its intention to take control of the fleet’s ground-based navigation equipment in Sevastopol despite strong Russian protests, and which later threatened to cancel the lease altogether over the fleet’s role in the Georgian war).\textsuperscript{45} Whatever the other consequences of its gas dispute with Moscow, Ukraine remains fiercely defensive of its independence, while Russia’s overriding interest in selling gas to Europe means the Kremlin cannot lightly repeat its decision to shut off the spigots to Ukraine, at least until the South Stream pipeline entirely bypassing Ukraine becomes a reality.

In January 2007, a year after the Ukrainian gas crisis and after Moscow and Kyiv had agreed on a new price structure for gas deliveries in 2007, Gazprom likewise sought higher prices from Belarus, which had long been Russia’s closest ally among the states of the CIS. In the final analysis, the gas conflict with Ukraine seemingly had less to do with Russian revanchism than with a realization that the policy of subsidizing friendly regimes had outlived its usefulness in an age of record-high energy prices. In the words of Dmitri Simes, “Russia grudgingly accepts the Atlanticist choices of its neighbors but refuses to subsidize them.”\textsuperscript{46} Whether the war in Georgia heralds a new paradigm remains to be seen.

THE CAUCASUS: GEORGIA’S CHALLENGE

The Caucasus remains the most troubled of Russia’s peripheries. Both the North Caucasus (republics of the Russian Federation including Chechnya, Dagestan, Ingushetia, North Ossetia-Alania, Adygea, Karachevo-Cherkessia, and Kabardino-Balkaria) and the South Caucasus (the independent states of Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia plus the disputed provinces of South
Ossetia and Abkhazia that Russia seized from Georgia in the August 2008 war) are beset by a plethora of tribal, religious, and ethnic conflicts. Because of the close linkages between peoples on both sides of the Russian border, instability in the independent South Caucasian states has a direct impact on the security of the Russian Federation, and vice versa. For Moscow, the region has had a dual importance: on the one hand, as a source of instability, connected above all to the simmering conflict in Chechnya, and on the other, as a result of the competing geopolitical ambitions of the South Caucasus states.

Azerbaijan, and even more Georgia, have sought since the end of the Soviet Union to promote their independence from Russian hegemony. Their strategic location and—in the Azeri case—possession of significant oil and gas resources prompted outside powers to take an interest in the region, too. Russia has meanwhile sought, with mixed success, to keep the Caucasian states within its own sphere of influence, its invasion of Georgia a signal to Tbilisi and others that there is a large price for ignoring Moscow’s interests.

Georgia was long a flashpoint, especially since the rise of President Mikheil Saakashvili, a U.S.-educated lawyer who came to power as result of the so-called Rose Revolution of 2003, the first colored revolution directed against a post-Soviet autocrat (in this case, the former Soviet foreign minister Eduard Shevardnadze, who had ruled Georgia for a decade). While Shevardnadze’s Georgia had little affinity for Russia and was at times less than helpful in Moscow’s campaign to restore its control over Chechnya, Russo-Georgian relations worsened dramatically under Saakashvili as Tbilisi pursued fast-track integration into Western structures, especially NATO.

The deterioration of relations since the Rose Revolution is evidence of the fundamentally geopolitical nature of Russian foreign policy around its borders. For Moscow, the problem with Saakashvili was in part that he came to power without Kremlin support, in part that he attempted to end the frozen conflicts on Georgia’s territory that Moscow has done much to inflame, but mostly that he and his supporters saw Georgia as an aspiring outpost of the West. This worldview underpinned Georgia’s open interest in NATO membership (it is the only CIS country to unambiguously court NATO), its decision to send troops to the U.S.-led Operation Iraqi Freedom, and the extensive financial and military assistance received from Western sources. The prospect of Georgian NATO membership in particular fed into Russian fears of encirclement by a hostile military alliance and provided the strategic rationale for Moscow’s seizure of the breakaway provinces and attempts to oust Saakashvili.

Shevardnadze had also pursued a largely pro-Western foreign policy, which, along with his role in dismantling the Soviet Union (as Gorbachev’s foreign minister) and ambivalent attitude toward the Chechen conflict,
made him much disliked in Moscow. Under Shevardnadze’s leadership, the Georgian parliament in 2001 passed a resolution calling for CIS peacekeepers to depart Abkhazia and South Ossetia and calling on the UN to formally address the legality of their presence. Still, Shevardnadze was a recognizable type of post-Soviet leader, and one whose cronies had strong financial and political links to Moscow. Consequently, while Moscow did little to help Shevardnadze restore Georgia’s territorial integrity, it never approached him with the same degree of enmity it has shown toward Saakashvili.

For Russia, the Georgian rush into the Western embrace was seen as both an embarrassment and a threat. Like the subsequent Orange Revolution in Ukraine, the toppling of Shevardnadze fed Russian fears of the West’s encroachment and the potential for a similar colored revolution to break out in Russia itself—despite the Kremlin’s near-total control of the political process inside Russia. Shevardnadze himself blamed U.S. financier and political activist George Soros for underwriting the Rose Revolution. More importantly, the Rose Revolution also was portrayed in Moscow as an example of how the West’s democracy-promotion efforts have in fact resulted in the capture of former Soviet republics in what Russian strategists see as the Eurasian geopolitical chess game among the Great Powers. Moscow saw Western support for routing the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline through Georgia and receptiveness to the idea of Georgia joining NATO as inducements for Tbilisi to turn its back on Moscow.

Moscow’s undisguised rage at Saakashvili seems principally the result of the Georgian president’s active attempts to undermine Russian influence through bringing Georgia into NATO, encouraging colored revolutions elsewhere in the CIS, and squeezing the pro-Russian enclaves of South Ossetia and Abkhazia. While the Rose Revolution represented the first time public discontent had upset the orderly transfer of power from one oligarchic collective to another in the CIS, similar bouts of unrest soon broke out in Ukraine (the Orange Revolution), Kyrgyzstan (Tulip Revolution), and Uzbekistan (the bloody and abortive uprising in Andijon). Saakashvili thus seemed to represent the crest of a wave threatening the cozy and profitable status quo that benefited many powerful people in Moscow.

With the situation in Chechnya approaching a crisis point in early 2004, Saakashvili also had a potentially dangerous weapon in his hands in the Chechen rebels who moved back and forth across the Georgian frontier. In February 2004, Sergei Ivanov accused Tbilisi of providing sanctuary to the rebels, even issuing them passports. He then suggested Russia might withdraw from its commitments under the CFE Treaty and halt the withdrawal of Russian forces from Georgia if Tbilisi did not adopt a more cooperative approach to the conflict in Chechnya.

Saakashvili himself appeared to be encouraging further unrest. In August
2005, he signed an agreement with Ukraine's "orange" prime minister, Yulia Tymoshenko, establishing the so-called Community of Democratic Choice (CDC) as a possible democratic, pro-Western alternative to the CIS. According to Saakashvili, "The CDC will support other democratic aspirants in the region by encouraging countries at various stages of integration with Euro-Atlantic institutions to advise and support states outside the Euro-Atlantic sphere." This expansive vision of its mission, along with the CDC's stated interest in bringing civil society into the foreign policy process, has made it look in Moscow like a kind of democratic Holy Alliance aiming to spread colored revolutions throughout the post-Soviet space.

Moscow sought by a variety of means to counter the spread of colored revolutionary ideas and to keep Georgia in check. If the West's influence in Georgia was connected to the building of pipelines (principally BTC and the roughly parallel Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum gas pipeline, designed in part to maintain Tbilisi's energy independence from Moscow) and the support of Saakashvili's backers, Russia's influence flowed largely from the frozen conflicts. The Kremlin posed as protector of South Ossetia and Abkhazia, two regions with independence-minded populations that sought to break away from Georgia in the first chaotic years after 1991 (as well as Ajaria, which sought to transform itself into an autonomous part of the Georgian state). Both the Ossetians and the Abkhaz have large numbers of coethnics living on the Russian side of the Russo-Georgian frontier, mainly in the regions of North Ossetia-Alania and Adygea, respectively. Destabilization and irredentism on the Georgian side of the border thus have potentially serious implications for Russian security in the North Caucasus, a fact supporters of Russia's intervention in the frozen conflicts often tout.

At the same time, the Kremlin used the existence of the frozen conflicts (in Georgia as well as in Moldova and Azerbaijan) to keep a leash on post-Soviet states' ambitions of joining the EU or NATO, which are pledged to not admit member states with unresolved territorial disputes. The existence of the breakaway provinces and the Kremlin's willingness to prop them up even while attempting to play the role of peacekeeper and mediator has poisoned Georgian attitudes toward Russia. Both Saakashvili and his political opponents were equally hostile to the continued Russian presence in the breakaway regions and to Moscow's interference in what they consider Georgia's internal affairs—a fact that greatly complicates Russian attempts to meddle in Georgian politics directly.

Both South Ossetia and Abkhazia experienced wars in the early 1990s as they sought to establish their independence from Georgia. The conflicts resulted in hundreds of thousands of refugees (largely ethnic Georgians, few of whom had returned home more than a decade later) and the fragmenting of the Georgian state. The problems connected with such massive numbers of refugees, most of whom have been living away from their homes for a decade and a half, appears to be at the root of the conflict.
homes for a decade and a half, have bedeviled any attempt to impose a solution on the South Ossetian and Abkhaz conflicts, even though reaching a settlement on the refugee issue is absolutely critical if the breakaway provinces are to ever receive international recognition.

Yeltsin’s Kremlin eventually sent peacekeepers to South Ossetia and Abkhazia in order to keep the warring sides apart and, in Tbilisi’s view, to curb Georgian independence. Under the protection of Russian soldiers, South Ossetia and Abkhazia increasingly integrated their political and economic lives with Russia. During the Putin years, residents of the breakaway regions received Russian passports, effectively turning them into citizens of the Russian Federation and de facto internationalizing their quarrel with Tbilisi. It was on the basis of protecting these Russian “citizens” that the Kremlin justified its invasion of Georgia and seizure of the breakaway provinces.

More than on almost any other issue, the frozen conflicts highlighted the contradictions inherent in Russia’s foreign policy strategy. The Kremlin has struggled to square its backing for Abkhaz and South Ossetian separatists with its own broader geopolitical concerns and its rhetorical commitment to the principles of state sovereignty and international law. Russia’s pious concern for the fate of civilian populations in the breakaway regions of Georgia has a hollow ring when compared with the devastation inflicted on Chechen civilians. Russia, of course, managed to conduct a referendum in Chechnya following the installation of a loyalist regime, and Putin at times proposed a similar solution to the frozen conflicts in Georgia. Yet Kremlin calls for referenda to decide the fate of South Ossetia and Abkhazia (as well as Transdniestria in Moldova) were quickly silenced when anyone suggested applying the same principle to Kosovo.

As long as South Ossetia and Abkhazia were discontented bits of Georgia, they were useful tools for Russian diplomacy (as a means of keeping the pressure on Tbilisi and discouraging Western initiatives to promote the independence of Kosovo), though as constituent members of the Russian Federation they would be sources of instability to Russia itself. They also gave Moscow an excuse to keep its soldiers, in the guise of peacekeepers, stationed in Georgian territory while complying with the letter of an agreement reached between Putin and Saakashvili to withdraw Russian forces from Georgia. Russia thus hoped to keep the conflicts frozen in order to maintain its leverage and to sharply limit the possibility that Georgia will be accepted as a member of either the EU or (more crucially) NATO for the foreseeable future. The West’s decision to move ahead with Kosovar independence and Saakashvili’s misguided attempt to seize South Ossetia by force reduced Russia’s incentives to keep the conflicts frozen. In essence, the threat of Russian intervention in Georgia was insufficient to deter either Tbilisi or the West, and so Moscow decided it had to make good on its threats.
While Shevardnadze remained president of Georgia, Russia’s patronage of Abkhazia and South Ossetia was largely perceived in Moscow as an inducement for Tbilisi to behave better. Russia saw Shevardnadze’s government as not doing all it could to clamp down on Chechen fighters seeking refuge in Georgian territory (especially the poorly controlled Kodori Gorge) and was annoyed at Tbilisi’s flirtations with the West, including its membership in GU(U)AM and participation in the BTC project. Abkhazia and South Ossetia were mainly bargaining chips the Kremlin was willing to trade for a more cooperative Georgian attitude, while Russian troops in the South Caucasus were an insurance policy against the further spread of ethnic unrest into Russia. They were also profitable for many well-connected Russian officials and businessmen.

In late 2004 Russia threatened to use force against Abkhazia itself in response to elections in that province that appeared to result in the victory of a candidate—Sergei Bagapsh—who promised to clamp down on Abkhazia’s widespread corruption, the tentacles of which reached back to Moscow. Bagapsh was no Russophobe (no Abkhaz politician could afford to alienate the region’s only outside supporter), but his candidacy had developed outside the framework of the Kremlin patronage that sustained his rival, Raul Khajimba. The Abkhaz crisis of 2004–2005 was thus a smaller version of the struggle for Ukraine going on at almost the same moment.

Saakashvili’s ascension to power in January 2004 again placed the Abkhaz and South Ossetian conflicts in the limelight. Saakashvili had promised to restore Georgian territorial integrity, threatening in the process to deprive Russia of its most effective leverage against Tbilisi. Still, during his first meeting with Putin in February 2004, the new Georgian president expressed a willingness to look for joint solutions to a problem for which neither Putin nor he himself bore personal responsibility. While Saakashvili spoke of the need for dialogue with Russia, he also left no doubt about his commitment to restoring Georgian sovereignty over all of the republic’s territory, or about his willingness to court Western assistance to do so.

The new Georgian president staked much of his political legitimacy on resolving the frozen conflicts, confident that his close relationship with Western powers (above all the U.S.) would insulate him against Russian intervention. His confidence in Western backing at times led Saakashvili to act rashly. In a joint press conference with Putin in June 2006, Saakashvili declared of the frozen conflicts that “the reality is that the annexation of our territory is underway.” After his first bridge-building visit to Moscow, moreover, Saakashvili then went to Washington, where he pressed the Bush administration for additional security and economic assistance in order to lessen Georgia’s dependence on Moscow. During and immediately after the Rose Revolution, Saakashvili’s government did receive substantial aid from the U.S., including $3 million to pay the salaries of Georgian military
personnel and an agreement, signed in January 2004, to provide upward of $10 million in general financial assistance. Moscow perceived this aid, along with the construction of the BTC pipeline across Georgian territory soon after the installation of Saakashvili’s overtly pro-Western government, as proof of the connection between the Rose Revolution and Western geopolitical designs in the Caucasus.66

Saakashvili also gave an indication of his approach to the frozen conflicts by moving rapidly and decisively to restore Tbilisi’s authority in Ajaria in the spring of 2004. Saakashvili’s success in Ajaria was the result of mounting frustration with regional strongman Aslan Abashidze’s corrupt and deeply unpopular government and of Russia’s disinclination to come to Abashidze’s defense—despite the presence of a Russian military base in the restive province. In contrast to Abkhazia or South Ossetia, however, Ajaria was outside Tbilisi’s grasp not because of an intractable civil conflict (its inhabitants are ethnic Georgians), but because its ruler had been a crony of ex-president Shevardnadze, who allowed him to run Ajaria as a private fief, free from state taxation or oversight. Consequently, Abashidze had little popular support. In late March 2004 Saakashvili declared a blockade of the rebel province.67 When the Ajarian strongman refused to back down, Saakashvili threatened to use force. The Kremlin dispatched then-foreign minister Igor Ivanov to negotiate a settlement, but his efforts were overtaken by events. Remaining defiant, Abashidze ordered bridges between Ajaria and Georgia proper destroyed, only to flee when mass protests in the regional capital of Batumi and elsewhere demonstrated his lack of public backing.68

While Moscow intervened late and relatively ineffectively in the Ajarian crisis, the events of spring 2004 showed that Saakashvili was serious about regaining control over Georgia’s breakaway regions. His success in Ajaria emboldened Saakashvili to take a harder line toward the frozen conflicts in Abkhazia and South Ossetia. In the summer of 2006, Tbilisi moved to reassert control over the upper portion of the Kodori Gorge, an area Moscow had long alleged to be a refuge and staging ground for Chechen rebels, and which cut across the boundary between Abkhazia and Georgia proper. The gorge had been demilitarized as a result of the 1994 Moscow Accords ending the Georgian-Abkhaz war, and in subsequent years it had remained a major flashpoint.69

In July 2006, Saakashvili sent troops from the Georgian Interior Ministry into the gorge to depose a local strongman. With this police operation completed, Tbilisi installed a loyalist Abkhaz government-in-exile in the area newly renamed “Upper Abkhazia.” Tbilisi’s intent was clearly to provide an alternative to the Abkhaz leadership in hope of reconciling Abkhazia as a whole to living under Georgian rule. Saakashvili’s efforts in “Upper Abkhazia” disturbed the Abkhaz separatist regime in Tskhinvali as well as
Moscow, which saw its influence in the region threatened by a government in Tbilisi it had already come to despise.\textsuperscript{70}

In South Ossetia, the Georgian authorities similarly tried to create a competing center of power in the fall of 2007. Tbilisi sponsored a presidential vote in those parts of South Ossetia inhabited principally by ethnic Georgians, which resulted in a victory for the pro-integrationist parties headed by Dmitry Sanakoev (a onetime Ossetian separatist). Russia, as well as the international community in the form of the OSCE, condemned the election for disrupting ongoing negotiations to ameliorate tensions on the ground.\textsuperscript{71}

For Tbilisi, of course, the point was not to reduce tensions in the breakaway regions, but to "unfreeze" the frozen conflicts altogether. In practice, Sanakoev had little authority, and South Ossetia as a whole remained outside Tbilisi's writ, setting the stage for Saakashvili's desperate gamble in August 2008 to retake the region by force.

The prewar nadir for Russo-Georgian relations came in late 2006, after Georgian security services arrested four Russian officers and accused them publicly of espionage and sabotage. In particular, Tbilisi charged that the arrested officials had coordinated a series of terrorist attacks on Georgian infrastructure with the aim of stirring up tensions between Georgia and the breakaway republics. In a television broadcast discussing the arrests, Georgian defense minister Irakly Otkrashvili blamed Russia for fomenting the South Ossetian and Abkhaz conflicts and demanded the withdrawal of Russian peacekeepers from Georgian territory.\textsuperscript{72} The Russians responded by alleging that Tbilisi was trying to provoke Russia to overreact in order to build Western sympathy and accelerate the process of NATO integration.\textsuperscript{73}

Moscow responded to the arrests by recalling its ambassador and suspending the withdrawal of Russian troops from Georgia proper, even after Tbilisi agreed to deport the arrested agents. Russia also suspended transportation links between the two countries, banned Georgia's major exports (wine and bottled water), stopped issuing visas to Georgian citizens, and announced a crackdown on the large ethnic Georgian diaspora inside Russia, whose remittances were critical for the Georgian economy. The crackdown culminated in the deportation of around 700 ethnic Georgians from Russian territory, which Moscow claimed was an anticrime measure (though members of other nationalities, criminals or otherwise, were not rounded up in the same way).\textsuperscript{74}

These measures were accompanied by a barrage of ferocious rhetoric from the Kremlin and its supporters in the press. Putin's close ally, Deputy Prime Minister Sergei Ivanov, declared that "in its insolence the Saakashvili regime has gone beyond any civilized boundaries" and charged the Georgian leadership with being in foreign pay.\textsuperscript{75} Putin himself was hardly more restrained, calling the arrest of the alleged spies "an act of state terrorism"
and “a legacy of [Stalin’s secret police chief and Georgian native] Lavrenty Pavlovich Beria.”

The Russian response was strikingly disproportionate relative to the action of the Georgian authorities, most likely by design. Worried by Saakashvili’s open courting of the West and his determination to restore Georgia’s sovereignty in the breakaway republics, the Kremlin upped the ante in an attempt to make the cost of achieving Saakashvili’s goals too high for the Georgian leadership to accept. In the event, Russian policy largely backfired. The disproportionate assault on a small, pro-Western country being considered for NATO membership merely fed U.S. and European perceptions that Putin’s Russia had become a danger to the post-Soviet status quo. Moscow’s approach did little to curb Saakashvili’s appetite for integration with the West, either. Instead, it helped legitimate an ugly streak of xenophobia in Russian society to the benefit of rabid nationalist groups, some of whom remained opposed to the Putin government anyway. If Moscow was going to teach Tbilisi a lesson, it would have to use other means.

For the subsequent two years, little was done to restore trust in Russo-Georgian relations. Even as Moscow withdrew the last of its troops from Georgia proper in the latter part of 2007 (where they had been based since the fall of the USSR), it ramped up its presence in the breakaway regions, especially Abkhazia. Tbilisi interpreted this move as preparation for war, though the Kremlin argued that it was Saakashvili who was bringing arms into the region. The frozen conflicts remained frozen, while Saakashvili’s decision to disperse antigovernment protesters with force in November 2007 damaged his democratic credentials in a West that had already begun reconsidering Georgia’s suitability for NATO membership.

The dam finally broke in the summer of 2008, when with the world’s attention focused on the opening of the Olympics in Beijing, Saakashvili responded to a new round of provocations by ordering his forces to retake South Ossetia. Starting on August 7, Georgian forces launched an artillery barrage against Tskhinvali and moved to seize control of the region’s infrastructure from the separatist regime. If Saakashvili was counting on his friendship with the West to keep Moscow at bay, he miscalculated badly. The attempt to seize South Ossetia provided the Kremlin with the excuse it had been seeking to go after Saakashvili. The day after the Georgian incursion against Tskhinvali, massed Russian forces began crossing into South Ossetia through the Roki Tunnel, while the Russian air force carried out strikes on targets in both South Ossetia and Georgia proper.

Moscow charged the Georgian government with ethnic cleansing against the Ossetian population in Tskhinvali and other population centers and justified its decision to send troops on the basis of defending the civilian population (many of whom had been granted Russian passports) and the Russian peacekeepers that Georgia charged were now part of a hostile occu-
pying army.⁷⁹ New Russian president Medvedev gave a terse announcement of the Russian invasion, arguing that the Georgian peacekeeping contingent in South Ossetia had opened fire on its Russian counterpart and claiming Tbilisi’s “act of aggression” had resulted in the deaths of “civilians, women, children, the elderly, and the majority of them citizens of the Russian Federation.”⁸⁰ Moscow initially claimed that the Georgian seizure of Tskhinvali had resulted in upward of 2,000 dead, though hospital records indicated that fewer than 100 civilians had been killed in the South Ossetian capital.

After driving the overmanned Georgians out of South Ossetia, Russian forces continued into Georgia proper, seizing the key city of Gori and Georgia’s main east-west highway, blockading the Black Sea port of Poti, and systematically destroying Georgian military assets (as well as some other infrastructure). Russian troops also moved into Abkhazia, retaking the Kodori Gorge from the Georgians, who had redeployed all available troops (including their forces serving in Iraq) to defend Tbilisi. In South Ossetia, local militias rampaged behind Russian lines, looting, pillaging, and driving out the ethnic Georgian population, which fled en masse into Georgia proper.⁸¹

Despite agreeing to a cease-fire negotiated by French president Sarkozy on August 13, Russian troops remained in Georgia for several weeks thereafter, systematically destroying military assets in an attempt to weaken Georgia and prevent it from undertaking any further attempts at seizing the disputed regions.⁸² After the tame Duma had voted in favor of recognizing South Ossetia and Abkhazia as independent states, Medvedev agreed, and Russia became the first (and apart from Nicaragua, the only) state to recognize the two breakaway regions’ independence.

Following years of warning the Georgians that they were playing a dangerous game, Moscow’s patience finally ran out. For essentially the first time since the collapse of the Soviet Union, Moscow undertook a major cross-border military operation in the face of the outside world’s condemnation. The United States and Europe strongly protested Russian behavior and threatened Moscow with a range of punishments, some symbolic (expulsion from the G8), others real (the cancellation of a lucrative civilian nuclear cooperation accord with Washington). None of it mattered. The invasion of Georgia and recognition of the breakaway regions reflected a calculation in Moscow that the strategic pause—Gorchakov’s sosredotochenie or Stolypin’s peredvshka—following the collapse of the Soviet Union was over. It was a signal to the rest of the world that Russia continued to regard the CIS as its own sphere of influence, where it would not tolerate having its interests ignored.

CENTRAL ASIA

For much of the Soviet period, Central Asia was an imperial backwater, important mainly as a producer of primary goods such as cotton and as a
dumping ground for political opponents. The early post-Soviet period did not see much change. The Central Asian leaders were not consulted about the eventual dissolution of the USSR and were notified that they had become rulers of independent states only after the fact. The five primarily Muslim republics of Central Asia came into the world in 1991 as inchoate entities, with a weak sense of national identity, and where loyalty to the newly created states and their Russian-speaking strongmen was tenuous at best.

Central Asia turned into a region of key strategic interest for both Russia and outside powers like the United States primarily for two reasons: Islamic fundamentalism and energy. The power vacuum that emerged following the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan and the subsequent collapse of Soviet rule in Central Asia provided fertile ground for the development of a new politics based on somewhat fictive tribal loyalties, even as veterans of the Afghan war introduced a new, puritanical strain of Islamic thought to a region that had traditionally worn its religion lightly. This nexus of tribalism and religion erupted into war in the newly independent state of Tajikistan in 1992, followed shortly thereafter by the redeployment of Russian troops outside the border of the Russian Federation to deal with the consequences of that war. The Tajik experience, itself following soon after the end of the Soviet Union’s Afghan apotheosis, did much to color subsequent Russian perceptions of developments in Central Asia. Alongside other foreign ideological imports, radical Islam, at times manifesting itself in acts of terrorism, spread throughout parts of Central Asia in the 1990s, a combination that the secular, Russian-speaking apparatchiks who inherited power after the Soviet collapse perceived as a threat.63 Moscow found itself pulled into Central Asia to protect these secular autocrats who, even when they made difficulties for Russia, remained preferable to the specter of rising Islamist governments along Russia’s Muslim southern fringe. Greater Russian involvement in Central Asian affairs also helped compensate Moscow for its perceived neglect by the Western powers, who were at the same time busy expanding the reach of the European Union and NATO into the Soviet Union’s former sphere of influence in Eastern Europe.64

This more active Russian approach was embodied in President Yeltsin’s decree of September 1995 proclaiming the CIS a top foreign policy priority for Russia. This move was interpreted by some at the time as a signal of Moscow’s ambitions to re-establish a state resembling the USSR and to restore some kind of bipolar global order, since it called for Russia to assume a “leading role” in the CIS as part of its broader quest for “a worthy place in world society.”65 Moscow essentially gave itself an exclusive right to manage the security of its neighbors throughout the CIS, though in practical terms, Russia’s enhanced influence was at the time felt most in Central Asia. Local rulers increasingly came to see the Kremlin as the ultimate guar-
antor of their security against the perceived Islamist threat. For Russia, the Islamist threat was real enough (the first Chechen war was then at its peak), but the strategic advance into Central Asia also was part of the reaction against the West led by Primakov.

The Putin years witnessed a concerted return to Central Asia on the part of Russian diplomacy. Of course, much of the increased focus on the region is an outgrowth of the September 11 attacks and the deployment of U.S. troops to Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan thereafter. Yet Moscow’s gaze was already turning to Central Asia at the very beginning of Putin’s term in office. Putin’s first foreign trip as prime minister was to Tajikistan, in November 1999, when he sought to promote the electoral fortunes of the secularist, pro-Russian incumbent then named Emomali Rakhmonov (the Tajik leader subsequently de-Russified his surname, and officially became Emomali Rakhmon). The following month Putin traveled to Uzbekistan, signing a series of bilateral deals aimed at bringing Tashkent more directly into the Russian orbit, though in practice the Uzbeks continued to hedge their bets, joining the independence-minded GU(U)AM forum in April 1999.

Until the September 11 attacks, Moscow’s interest in the region was largely driven by a desire to prevent any further loss of Russian prestige and influence. The invasion of Kyrgyzstan by Islamist militants from the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) in August 1999 provided Putin with an opportunity to step up Russian engagement in the region. The militants’ threat to regional stability, coupled with the Kyrgyz government’s clear inability to repulse them on its own suggested that only outside intervention could defend the secular status quo. In response to the IMU’s cross-border invasion, Putin immediately began seeking a rapprochement with Uzbekistan, the country most seriously threatened by the IMU and in many ways the key to regional stability. Though Tashkent refused for the time being to back out of GU(U)AM or to join Russian-sponsored multilateral groups like the Collective Security Treaty, it agreed to limited participation in training exercises with Russia and signed a series of bilateral security cooperation agreements with Moscow.

Russia’s leaders shifted the focus of their engagement in Central Asia following the September 11 attacks, which drew the attention of Washington directly to events in the region. Instead of seeking to keep the U.S. out of Central Asia, the Putin administration took advantage of the attacks to formulate a new approach, according to which Russia would be the indispensable ally in the U.S.-led war on terror and would use its newfound role as a springboard to attain Great Power status. It is notable that the U.S. deployments in Central Asia were approved directly by Putin in the face of serious opposition from his generals. Burdened by a seemingly endless war in Chechnya, Putin readily concluded, in the words of Gleb Pavlovsky, that
"It is better to have Americans in Uzbekistan than to have the Taliban in Tatarstan." Russian leaders recognized that, given the scale of the carnage unleashed on 9/11 and their own vulnerability to Islamic terrorism (Russia has over twenty million Muslim citizens and abuts some of the least stable of Islam’s "bloody borders"), gaining the cooperation of the United States in the ongoing struggle against fundamentalism was enough of a strategic imperative to trump worries about the effects of American power inside the boundaries of the former USSR.

At the same time, cooperation with the Americans seemed to offer the best opportunity for Russia to regain its role as one of the leading pillars of the international order, since it was essentially offering to play a key role in a campaign that (if successful) would have major implications for the future shape of the world. Besides, leaders in Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Kyrgyzstan made clear in the weeks immediately following the attacks that they wanted U.S. troops deployed in the region to protect their own governments against Taliban-inspired Islamists like the IMU. Putin was thus in some sense reacting to events beyond his control—categorically refusing to allow U.S. troops into Central Asia risked sacrificing whatever influence Moscow retained in the region, and under the circumstances it appeared better to make a virtue of necessity.

Putin’s gamble turned out to be only partially justified. On the one hand, the initial intervention drove the Taliban from power and inflicted a crushing blow on the strongest of the Central Asian Islamist groups, the IMU, which had contributed to regional instability through cross-border raids, kidnappings, and bomb attacks (including one that narrowly missed killing Uzbek president Karimov in 1999). Then again, the U.S. invasion of Iraq, which Russia strenuously opposed, drew attention and resources away from the Afghan campaign, while the overall deterioration in U.S.-Russian relations since 2002 has complicated the Kremlin’s plans for using an alliance with the U.S. as a springboard for achieving greater international influence. The result has been an increasing drive by the Kremlin to secure its own dominant role in the region, sidelining the U.S. (as well as China) in the process.

Shortly after agreeing to the establishment of semipermanent U.S. military installations at Manas, Kyrgyzstan, and Karshi-Khanabad, Uzbekistan, Russia moved to set up its own facilities in the region. The Russian air base at Kant in Kyrgyzstan, which opened in early 2003, was the first new long-term deployment of Russian troops outside the borders of the Russian Federation since the end of the Cold War. It was designed to counter the expansion of American influence in Central Asia that occurred in the wake of the Afghan invasion, and to take advantage of the Central Asians’ disappointment that the U.S. presence in the region had not brought them more benefit.
Since 2003, Moscow has moved to upgrade and expand the facilities at Kant in order to establish a permanent presence in Kyrgyzstan, on the basis of the Tashkent Collective Security Treaty. In 2006, the Russian government began improving facilities at the Kant base and moving in additional personnel. Moscow signed an agreement with Bishkek by which Russia receives free use of the base in exchange for providing the Kyrgyz military with helicopters and other kinds of basic military equipment. President Putin praised the Russian forces at Kant as "a mobile and operational element in the collective development of the CSTO in Central Asia" that Moscow looked forward to further enhancing in the future.95

Following the Tulip Revolution that overthrew longtime strongman Askar Akaev, the new Kyrgyz government stepped up pressure on the United States to downsize and eventually eliminate its base at Manas. These demands were in line with a collective call issued by the Shanghai Cooperation Organization in 2005 to set a date for the eventual liquidation of the entire U.S. military presence in Central Asia (the U.S. was forced to leave the Karshi-Khanabad base in Uzbekistan after Washington called for an international inquiry into the massacre of demonstrators by Uzbek security forces in Andijon in May 2005).96 Bishkek ultimately succeeded in forcing Washington to increase its annual rent payments for the Manas facility to $200 million, while Russia continues to enjoy rent-free access to Kant. Even though the U.S. had initially supported the Tulip Revolution as an opportunity to move Kyrgyzstan back on the path to democratic development, the new government of President Kurmanbek Bakiev made a clear calculation that the country’s interests ultimately lie more with Moscow than with Washington.97 Bakiev accommodated Russia’s demands to maintain the Kant facility, despite previous opposition to the Russian base when he was an opposition leader.98

The contrasting fates of the Russian and American air bases in Kyrgyzstan reflect the degree to which international relations in Central Asia (and in the CIS more generally) became more contested in the course of President Putin’s second term. For Moscow, the strategy of bandwagoning with the United States against the Taliban gradually gave way to a more aggressive approach of attempting to restore Central Asia’s traditional role as a buffer and to sharply limit the influence of outside powers in the region. Given the fall of the Taliban and the overall worsening of relations between Moscow and Washington, it is hardly surprising that U.S.-Russian dynamics in Central Asia have changed since 2001.

When he came to power in 2000, Putin emphasized on several occasions that the principal threat to Russian security came from the south, that is, from Islamic radicalism in the Caucasus and Central Asia.99 As that threat diminished following the Taliban’s fall from power and the winding down of hostilities in Chechnya, Moscow’s fundamental threat calculus shifted.
The pro-Taliban IMU was decimated by U.S. bombing attacks in Afghanistan in 2001–2002, suffering hundreds of casualties and the death of its leader, Juma Namangani. Meanwhile, the peace treaty between government and (partially Islamist) opposition forces in Tajikistan signed in 1997 has, contrary to the expectations of many, held firm. The spate of bombings inside Russia conducted by Chechen and allied Islamist forces, which was responsible for much of Moscow’s interest in stamping out Islamist groups throughout the CIS, has also abated. Russia’s killing of Chechen rebel leaders Aslan Maskhadov, Ibn al-Khattab, and Shamil Basaev, coupled with the success of the pro-Moscow strongman Ramzan Kadyrov in restoring order to Chechnya, has made the Islamist threat to Russia less immediate—though Dagestan, Ingushetia, and other Muslim regions in the North Caucasus continue to simmer.¹⁰⁰

Consequently, Moscow was able to pursue a broader strategic agenda toward its Muslim neighbors once the link between instability in Central Asia and instability in Russia itself was severed. With the Islamist threat from the south seemingly under control for the time being and U.S. aid no longer critical to achieving Russian aims, Putin began focusing on the longer-term project of re-establishing Russian hegemony in Eurasia, which requires limiting the role played by outside powers such as the United States and China. To be sure, a residual U.S. presence in the region actually benefits Russia, since it takes the burden of conducting and coordinating counterterrorism operations out of the hands of Russia’s military, which remains in a state of transition. For that reason, then-U.S. ambassador to Russia Alexander Vershbow argued in 2004 in favor of continuing U.S.-Russian cooperation in Central Asia to help “establish a strong barrier on the road of the spread of religious extremism, terrorism, and instability.”¹⁰¹ The U.S. presence also works to limit Chinese penetration of Central Asia.¹⁰² Since China is a regional power whose interest in Central Asia is likely to be permanent, Moscow can afford to see the (relatively) fleeting presence of U.S. troops as less threatening.

Instead of seeking common ground with Washington, though, Russia has moved to integrate the states of Central Asia into a security (and economic) bloc under its own direction, under what was for a time referred to as the “Ivanov Doctrine” in honor of Russia’s former defense minister Sergei Ivanov, who was responsible for overseeing the creation of Russia’s 2003 Military Doctrine. The Military Doctrine listed the presence of “foreign troops (without UN Security Council sanction) to the territory [sic] of contiguous states friendly with the Russian Federation” as one of the major threats to Russian security.¹⁰³ When the document was issued, the only foreign troops present in neighboring countries were those of the U.S. in Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan. To counter this perceived threat, Russia took the lead in promoting the unification of the post-Soviet republics—particularly in Central
Asia—into an integrated security space under Russian leadership, while also seeking to strengthen bilateral ties with the most important countries of the region (Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan) in a kind of zero-sum competition with the United States. Thus in August 2005, the states of the CIS signed a memorandum of understanding promising to enhance their cooperation in the struggle against terrorism and extremism. Notably, the memorandum underlined the dominant role of the United Nations and international law in combating terrorism, a clear signal of the signatories' displeasure with Washington's unilateral approach to a problem that affected all of them.  

One major element in Russia's strategy of security integration has been the creation and strengthening of multilateral institutions in which Russia plays a leading role. The SCO is in some ways the most visible such organization, but its lack of institutionalization (the SCO does not control any troops apart from the national forces of its members) and the presence of China limit its usefulness as a lever of Russian control in Central Asia. While the SCO's main role so far has been to manage the inevitable conflicts and disagreements that have emerged between Moscow and Beijing, it is the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) that has emerged as the primary vehicle for the re-establishment of Moscow's strategic influence in Central Asia. 

The CSTO, which some Russian strategists have seen as a kind of Eurasian NATO, joins Russia with the Central Asian states (apart from officially neutral Turkmenistan), Armenia, and Belarus. It is one of several Russian-designed multilateral organizations in the region that took on new substance in the Putin years, along with the CIS Customs Union and Eurasian Economic Community (EurAsEC). As its name implies, the CSTO is based on the principle of collective security, with its members committed to coming to one another's aid in the event of an outside attack. It maintains a series of joint institutions, including a general staff, though its cohesiveness remains open to doubt.

The origins of the CSTO lie in the 1992 Tashkent Treaty on Collective Security, which aimed at giving the newly independent states of the CIS some kind of overarching security framework to replace the joint structures of the Soviet Union. However, throughout the 1990s, the Tashkent Treaty was little more than a pious declaration of intent, as the various states of the CIS each pursued their own interests with little coordination. Shortly after his ascension to power in 2000, President Putin proposed revitalizing the various institutions underpinning the CIS. The immediate result was an agreement on the creation of a joint CIS Counterterrorism Center based in Kyrgyzstan, followed in 2001 by a joint Rapid Deployment Force. When the CSTO itself was formed the following year, the Rapid Deployment Force became the nucleus of the organization's combined military capability. With the deterioration of the security situation in Afghanistan beginning in
2007, Moscow began laying the groundwork for the deployment of CSTO forces to curb the spread of drugs and Islamic radicalism into Central Asia. The CSTO summit in September 2008 agreed on the formation of a ten-thousand-man joint security force that could be deployed to Afghanistan, while Lavrov called for coordination between the CSTO and NATO forces to combat the spread of instability from Afghanistan to Central Asia.\footnote{107}

In his press conference announcing the formation of the CSTO in May 2002, Putin explained that the need for such an organization grew out of the post-Soviet region’s failure to adapt to new realities:

After the fall of the Soviet Union . . . an entirely new situation emerged. Attention to the new situation in the world had in the final analysis terrible consequences; like those of last September 11. All this means that we must build new security structures in the world, new mechanisms for cooperation.\footnote{108}

While leaving open the possibility for the new organization to cooperate with similar blocs elsewhere in the world (specifically NATO and the SCO), the Russian president made clear that the CSTO was first and foremost a regional organization and part of his broader agenda for rebuilding the ties binding Russia to its former dependencies in Central Asia. Given the vast power disparity between Russia and the other members of the CSTO (a problem that takes a different form in the SCO as a result of China’s immense influence), the organization has largely served as a vehicle for expanding Russian influence over its neighbors, particularly in Central Asia. Thus, despite its focus on the CIS, the CSTO has not hesitated to follow Russia’s lead in staking out positions critical of the Western powers when those powers appear to be undermining Moscow’s international position. For instance, the organization’s members adopted a collective declaration in mid-2007 criticizing NATO and the United States for planning to establish antiballistic missile defense systems in Eastern Europe, even though Russia is the only CSTO member with a missile force that could be affected by the proposed deployment.\footnote{109} Moreover, the CSTO depends on Russia for its hardware, and the Kremlin has agreed to sell military equipment to its CSTO partners at the same price paid by the Russian military. Unconstrained by Chinese concerns, the CSTO also took a more overtly pro-Russian stance on the 2008 Georgian war than did the Shanghai Cooperation Organization—though it, too, stopped short of extending recognition to South Ossetia and Abkhazia.\footnote{110}

On the level of bilateral relations, Russia similarly moved to shore up its standing with the states of Central Asia as a way of increasing its own influence and limiting that of the U.S. (as well as China). This increased emphasis during the Putin years on bilateral relations resulted both from the increasingly competitive dynamic of international politics in Central
Asia and from Moscow’s growing tendency to see influence over its post-Soviet neighbors as a prerequisite for its ambition of enhancing its global standing. While Putin’s Russia devoted more attention to Central Asia as a whole, the orientation of Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan in the global balance is a particularly important indicator of Russia’s evolving global role and key to the success of the so-called Ivanov Doctrine. Kazakhstan’s importance derives in particular from its location and ownership of substantial gas and oil reserves. Uzbekistan, on the other hand, has fewer resources but a larger population, a (comparatively) powerful military, and a more serious problem with terrorism and Islamist extremism. Both Astana and Tashkent have balanced carefully between Russia and the United States (as well as China to a lesser extent), though recently Uzbekistan has found itself both pushed and pulled increasingly into Moscow’s orbit.

Situated on the Caspian coast, Kazakhstan is the largest oil producer in the former Soviet Union apart from Russia itself, with output reaching 1.4 million barrels per day. Given its location, it is also critical as a transport route for energy bound for other countries in both Europe and Asia. During the Putin years, Moscow relentlessly pursued economic integration with Kazakhstan while also seeking Kazakh support for its broader international objectives. Kazakhstan was among the first littoral countries to agree with Russia on a pact establishing national sectors of the Caspian Sea (in 1998). Astana and Moscow also signed a friendship and cooperation treaty in 2002, opening the way for greatly expanded Russian investment in the country, giving Kazakhstan access to Russia’s Baltic pipeline system to Europe, and encouraging the participation of Russian energy companies in developing Kazakhstan’s resources (Lukoil alone has invested over $3 billion in Kazakhstan since the agreement). Kazakhstan has also been an enthusiastic supporter of Russian attempts to create a single economic space in Central Asia and other forms of economic integration being pushed by Moscow.

In the security sphere, Moscow and Astana agreed on a long-term lease for the Baikonur Cosmodrome (from which almost all Russian space launches are conducted) and on training Russian soldiers at Kazakh facilities. Putin’s January 2004 visit to Astana paved the way for Kazakhstan to adopt an increasingly pro-Russian leaning in its foreign policy, with the two countries agreeing on a joint plan for security cooperation a month later that called for greatly enhanced collaboration against terrorism and external threats. In April 2006, Putin and Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbaev spoke in favor of deepening integration between the two countries. While praising the level of integration already achieved, according to the Russian president, “We need instruments for resolving problems that arise in order to move forward. . . . We will continue to work toward strengthening all the integration processes in the post-Soviet space.”
Russia’s interest in seeking greater influence in Kazakhstan has had its analogue in U.S. attempts to recruit Astana as a major ally in the war on terrorism. U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice has praised Kazakhstan for its commitment to fighting Islamic terrorism and its role as Washington’s key partner in Central Asia. Kazakhstan participated in the U.S.-led campaign in Afghanistan, providing several of its facilities for refueling of planes involved in anti-Taliban operations, while Nazarbaev allowed the U.S. military to train and supply their Kazakh counterparts.

Yet the government of President Nazarbaev has become increasingly authoritarian since the start of the war on terror and has refused to place itself firmly in the U.S. camp in opposition to Russia and China. Instead, Astana has pursued a careful balancing act. On the one hand, Nazarbaev agreed after much prodding to build a link from Kazakhstan’s enormous Kashagan oil field to the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline in June 2006. Kazakhstan agreed to link its oil production with BTC only after signing a separate agreement committing to ship more than twice as much oil (sixty-seven million tons per year, versus twenty-five million tons through BTC) through the Caspian Pipeline Consortium (CPC), which is privately owned but crosses Russian territory. Effectively connecting Kazakhstan to BTC will require building a new pipeline beneath the Caspian Sea at enormous cost.

Yet for geographical as well as demographic reasons, Astana continues to see Russia, rather than the United States, as the principal guarantor of its security. Despite its cooperation with the U.S. in the context of Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan and its active participation in NATO’s Partnership for Peace program, Astana remains a member of the Russian-dominated CSTO, whose members are prohibited from joining any competing security organization (i.e., NATO). The Kazakh economy is also heavily dependent on Russia, thanks to the fact that Soviet industries and supply chains were constructed around the assumption that inter-republican borders were essentially meaningless (as they were while the USSR existed). Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, Kazakhstan’s economy has benefited substantially from cross-border remittances and the migration of workers to Russian cities.

Another, less discussed component of Russia’s enduring influence in Astana is the presence of a large Russian diaspora in the northern third of Kazakhstan and in major cities. Not only are the ethnic Russians heavily concentrated in scientific and technical sectors of the economy that Astana would be loath to harm, but the potential for ethnically based politics and even irredentism (which nationalist groups in Russia have at times pressed) is never far from the surface. Indeed, Nazarbaev’s decision to move the capital from Almaty in the southeastern corner of Kazakhstan to the newly built city of Astana in the north has often been interpreted as a carrot to the
large Russian population of the northern region. For all these reasons, and despite concerted diplomatic and economic inducements offered by Washington, Kazakhstan remains balanced precariously between outside powers seeking to influence its foreign policy and gain access to its energy riches.

The struggle for influence between Russia and the U.S. has been even more intense in Uzbekistan, the most populous and militarily potent of the Central Asian states. In contrast to Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan’s government has vacillated over time between Moscow and Washington, and the battle for Tashkent has in many ways served as a kind of proxy for the broader evolution of Russian foreign policy in Central Asia. For much of the 1990s, Uzbekistan confronted a simmering Islamist insurgency (which eventually coalesced into the IMU) and pursued a fairly independent line in foreign policy, rapidly ridding itself of Russian advisers and resisting Moscow’s overtures for a closer relationship, while seeking a dominant role for itself within Central Asia, often at Russian expense. Tashkent withdrew from the CST and joined GU(J)AM in 1999, in part because the former refused to take a firm line against the emerging Islamist threat.

Putin made a concerted effort to heal the breach between Moscow and Tashkent, particularly following the IMU’s 1999 incursion into Kyrgyzstan and attempts on the life of Uzbek president Karimov. The attacks allowed Putin to link Russia’s own campaign in Chechnya with Uzbekistan’s battle against the IMU as part of a larger struggle against radical Islam. More fundamentally, the growth of the IMU threat convinced Tashkent that Russia had a central role to play in defending the status quo in Central Asia. However, the two sides continued to disagree, most notably over what to do about the impending takeover of Afghanistan by the Taliban. Despite the warming climate in relations with Moscow, Uzbekistan did not rejoin the CST and remained wary of falling too far under Russia’s influence.

In the aftermath of the September 11 attacks, Tashkent moved rapidly to accommodate the U.S. and participate in the campaign against the Taliban. Following a phone call by President Bush on September 19, 2001, Karimov acceded to the U.S. request to base coalition troops in Uzbekistan (the U.S. considered Uzbekistan a more palatable rear zone than its old ally Pakistan because of the strength of anti-American and pro-Taliban feeling in Pakistan). Karimov promised the U.S. use of the old Soviet Karshi-Khanabad air base in exchange for a security guarantee from Washington and a tacit promise to look the other way at Uzbekistan’s abysmal human rights record. On October 5, 2001, Karimov agreed to allow the U.S. to base both troops and aircraft at the base (but not to use it for launching attacks into Afghanistan). Karshi-Khanabad soon became a major staging point for U.S. aircraft ferrying supplies into the Afghan theater. Washington meanwhile
gave Tashkent a series of wide-ranging security guarantees, solemnized during a visit by Secretary of State Colin Powell to Uzbekistan in early December.\textsuperscript{127} The relationship was upgraded to a strategic partnership in March 2002.\textsuperscript{128} The presence of U.S. troops strengthened Karimov’s hand against the Russians. Shortly after the agreement on U.S. access to Karshi-Khanabad, Uzbekistan pulled out of an SCO summit meeting, a move interpreted at the time as a snub to Moscow and a signal that Tashkent viewed itself as part of the U.S.-dominated security sphere emerging around Afghanistan.\textsuperscript{129}

Even during the high point of U.S.-Russian cooperation in Central Asia during 2001–2002, the government of Uzbekistan consciously sought to balance between the two major powers in order to maximize its own flexibility and independence, essentially acting as if Washington and Moscow remained rivals for influence in Central Asia. Karimov sought to modernize the Uzbek military with arms purchased from the U.S. and other NATO countries and rejected Russian calls to set a deadline for the coalition troops’ departure from Karshi-Khanabad. Yet at the same time, Karimov pursued a series of energy deals with Moscow, including a major cooperation agreement between Gazprom and Uzbekneftegaz signed in 2002 and deals with both Lukoil and Gazprom in 2004 that assigned the Russian firms a major role in developing new oil and gas deposits in Uzbekistan.\textsuperscript{130} Tashkent and Moscow even signed a strategic partnership agreement in June 2004, while Uzbekistan remained committed to supporting U.S. operations in Afghanistan.\textsuperscript{131}

Russia then moved rapidly to consolidate its position as the dominant influence in Uzbekistan following Karimov’s brutal crackdown on demonstrators in the city of Andijon in May 2005 (which the Uzbek government blamed on Islamist radicals attempting to overthrow the government). Following the massacre, Washington rapidly, if tepidly, criticized the Karimov government’s excesses, claiming to “condemn the indiscriminate use of force against unarmed civilians and deeply regret any loss of life.”\textsuperscript{132} Along with the EU, Washington called for a formal investigation into the Andijon events. In response, Karimov declared that the Western powers had no business interfering in Uzbekistan’s internal affairs and communicated through the UN that he would not allow an outside investigation.\textsuperscript{133} Karimov fulminated, “Is Uzbekistan an independent, sovereign state? . . . Why should we have to give you answers as though we’re the accused?”\textsuperscript{134}

At the end of July, Karimov moved more concretely, demanding that the U.S. vacate the Karshi-Khanabad base in six months’ time. The eviction notice, delivered to the U.S. embassy with insulting formality, did not give a reason for Tashkent’s change of heart, but was clearly in response to the continuing fallout over the Andijon crisis.\textsuperscript{135} The implicit bargain—access to Karshi-Khanabad in exchange for diplomatic support and silence about Uzbekistan’s human rights record—had quickly unraveled. Karimov
believed the U.S. had broken a promise. If he could not rely on Washington to defend his regime in a crisis, Karimov rapidly came to the conclusion that his alliance with the U.S. had lost its value.

Unable to lean on the U.S. in his struggle against Islamic extremists (Karimov blamed the Andijon uprising on fanatical Islamists who had led a prison break with the assistance of sympathizers in the town), the Uzbek leader maneuvered his country back into a partnership with Russia. Just days after the U.S. call for an investigation, Karimov announced Uzbekistan’s departure from GUUAM, which thus reverted to its pre-1999 appellation of GUAM. More broadly, Karimov began reconsidering his alliance with the United States in a way that opened the door for an increased Russian presence in Central Asia.

Moscow had quickly concluded that the post-Andijon tension between Tashkent and Washington could be used for its own purposes. Even before Karimov’s decision to evict U.S. forces from Karshi-Khanabad, a summit of the SCO heads of state adopted a declaration calling on Washington to set a date for the departure of its forces from the territory of SCO member states. Putin welcomed the declaration, claiming “Russia is completely satisfied with the conclusions, the decisions that were taken, [which are] in our general interest.” Moscow also invited Tashkent to join the plethora of Russian-sponsored organizations throughout Eurasia. During a visit to Tashkent in October 2005, Russian foreign minister Lavrov discussed Uzbekistan’s possible membership in the Eurasian Economic Association, receiving a favorable response from the Uzbek authorities. Uzbekistan formally joined EurAsEco in January 2006.

Uzbekistan also signed an alliance agreement with Russia in November 2005 during Karimov’s visit to Moscow, committing both sides to upholding the supremacy of the UN as arbiter of international security and containing an unconditional mutual defense clause, essentially committing Russia to defend Uzbekistan against outside aggression. According to the Russian president, the 2005 agreement “brings our countries to a qualitatively new [level] and the maximum degree of cooperation.” Karimov praised the re-assertion of Russian power in the region, claiming in his joint press conference with Putin that “the strengthening of Russia’s position in Central Asia is a firm guarantee of peace and stability in our region, and answers the deep interests of our two countries as well as the international community as a whole.” Finally, in June 2006, Karimov attended a summit of CSTO heads of state, where Putin announced to journalists that Uzbekistan had formally rejoined the organization from which it had withdrawn in 1999 when it joined GU(U)AM. The announcement of Tashkent’s membership in the CSTO ended Uzbekistan’s attempt to use its value to the U.S. in the war on terror as a means of shielding itself from Russia.

Although Uzbekistan is in many ways the most important and influential
of the Central Asian states, Russian policy there has been extremely cautious. When Putin agreed to the presence of U.S. troops in Central Asia following the September 11 attacks, he was in many ways making the best of a bad situation, since Karimov and other regional leaders had made clear they would offer Washington basing rights regardless of Russian concerns. However, until the fallout over Andijon, Russia's growing interest in Central Asia in general and Uzbekistan in particular was usually filtered through the prism of Moscow's relationship to the United States and its broader global ambitions. Despite mounting tensions with the U.S. throughout the war on terror, Russia remained content to leave Uzbekistan alone as the linchpin of the U.S. security alliance in Central Asia until 2005. Even then, it was the SCO (at Chinese behest), along with Uzbekistan itself, that were instrumental in forcing U.S. troops out of Karshi-Khanabad and ultimately reversing Tashkent's alliance posture. Moscow was more than willing to take advantage of circumstances to strengthen its own hand in the region but generally awaited developments rather than initiating them itself. In this way, Russia's growing influence in Central Asia was as much the result of strategic opportunism as of any overt desire to challenge U.S. hegemony. Once again, the major objective of Russian foreign policy has been to enhance its own global role, in partnership with the U.S. if possible, in opposition to it if necessary.

The second major factor driving Russia's intervention in the politics of Central Asia besides security is energy. Russia's emergence as a key supplier of both oil and gas owes much to its presence in Central Asia. Moscow has moved aggressively to lock up production and transit infrastructure in countries like Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan, both as a means of asserting its own influence in these countries and to limit other states' ability to cut Moscow out of deals involving Central Asian hydrocarbons. Central Asia is a major producer of both oil and gas, and growing interest on the part of European (and American) energy companies has also placed the region at the forefront of pipeline diplomacy.

The struggle to control pipelines has been a key piece of Moscow's attempts to exert influence over all the Caspian littoral states of the CIS. With the Western powers dreaming of access to the Caspian's energy riches, Brussels and Washington have aggressively promoted new pipeline deals bypassing Russia, while Moscow has responded with its own attempts to bottle up Central Asia's energy in Russian-controlled pipelines. Azerbaijan, with the BTC and BTE pipelines, had largely escaped Russian domination by the late 1990s. Kazakhstan managed to balance between the competing demands of Russia, the West, and China by signing multiple deals. Turkmenistan, which is one of the world’s largest producers of natural gas, is the post-Soviet state most in play among the various Great Powers at the beginning of Medvedev's presidency. Gazprom has long eyed Turkmenistan...
hunggrily as a solution to mounting demand and stagnant supply inside Russia. For the time being, Russia essentially possesses a monopoly over the Turkmen pipeline network, controlling Turkmenistan’s ability to ship its gas to the outside world, with both economic (higher prices) and geopolitical consequences, not only for Turkmenistan but also for Ukraine and the countries of the EU who are the ultimate customers for Turkmen gas shipped across Russia.\textsuperscript{143}

The death of Turkmenistan’s eccentric and autocratic leader Saparmurat Niyazov in December 2006 made the country the object of an intense geopolitical and geo-economic struggle between Russia and the other major powers. Washington and Brussels have sought to gain Turkmen cooperation in the Nabucco project. With mounting interest from Western energy firms as well as from China, which is building its own pipeline to Turkmenistan, Moscow was forced to agree in early 2008 to start paying Ashgabat (as well as the other Central Asian gas-producing countries) “European prices” for their gas, rather than the deeply discounted rate it had been getting up to that point. Turkmenistan meanwhile used the possibility of a deal with outside powers as a form of leverage in negotiations with the Russians, holding discussions with other powers (including the Europeans and Americans, Iranians, and Indians) to explore the possibility of breaking the effective Russian monopoly on Ashgabat’s gas exports.\textsuperscript{144}

In a more general sense, Russia’s involvement in Central Asia, as along many of its foreign policy vectors, has emphasized using economic means to achieve geopolitical ends. In November 2005, Putin praised the signing of the Russo-Uzbek alliance primarily for clearing the way for greater trade and economic cooperation between Moscow and Tashkent.\textsuperscript{145} Russian diplomats often emphasize the importance of ties with the other Central Asian countries in similar terms, with economic integration taking precedence (at least rhetorically) over security cooperation.\textsuperscript{146}

Of course, such economic ties often have security consequences, especially when it comes to the energy sector. In the major energy-producing countries, Russian participation in the energy sector has overlapped with the Kremlin’s broader foreign policy goals, as Russian businessmen with Kremlin connections have sought to establish cartel arrangements solidifying Russia’s influence over the politics and economies of the Central Asian states and coordinating their move into Central Asia.\textsuperscript{147} This process also coincides with the Kremlin’s more direct attempts to promote political and economic integration in the region by way of multilateral organizations like EurAsEC and the Central Asian Cooperation Organization (CACO).\textsuperscript{148} Even in the states that are not major energy players in their own right—Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and (to some degree) Uzbekistan—the Kremlin has moved to establish Russia as the major supplier and pipeline operator with an eye to promoting economic integration on its own terms.
Russian domination of the energy sector has significantly constrained the Central Asian states' foreign policy autonomy (in contrast to Georgia and Azerbaijan, which rely on the non-Russian BTC and BTE pipelines). Not surprisingly, leaders of several Central Asian republics have sought to regain some of that autonomy by bringing in outside powers to break the Russian stranglehold on their economies—though others do not perceive their dependence on Russia as necessarily problematic. Kazakhstan has been the most successful practitioner of balancing, allowing Western firms to develop its major oil fields, even while much of its gas transportation network remains controlled by the Kremlin. For Georgia (as well as Azerbaijan), the war of August 2008 was a stark reminder that Moscow has not entirely reconciled itself to a loss of influence in the region, despite the existence of pipelines outside its control.\[^{140}\] The Central Asian leaders perceived the war as altering the region's balance of power, diminishing their enthusiasm for Western-sponsored pipeline projects such as Nabucco. At a minimum, the war seriously complicated efforts to expand the West's energy corridor through the Caucasus by highlighting the region's political (and economic) risks.

With the Western powers unable to offer sufficiently attractive proposals, many Central Asian leaders have looked to China as a potential hedge against overweening Russian influence. With its neighboring location and nearly insatiable appetite for foreign energy, China has emerged as the most important alternative pole of attraction for the Central Asian states. Beijing has tended to see Central Asia's energy infrastructure as a strategic asset for whose acquisition it is willing to pay a premium. The most notable such example is the Chinese National Petroleum Company's August 2005 decision to purchase a controlling stake in Petrokazakhstan, the largest oil company in Kazakhstan, for well above market price.\[^{130}\] Uzbekistan also signed a deal with Beijing in mid-2007 to construct a new gas pipeline to China, while Turkmenistan is also building a pipeline to the Middle Kingdom.\[^{151}\]

With the West largely frozen out and a significant Chinese role still in the future, Russia remains the most important player in Central Asian energy politics. Russia's ability to dominate the energy transport routes out of Central Asia is in part a result of strategic opportunism. The United States in particular was slow to recognize the significance of Central Asia as both a battleground in the ideological struggle between Islamism and secularism and a potential alternative to the Middle East (and Russia itself) as a source of energy. Until the late 1990s, the U.S. government viewed Central Asia as a neutral zone, where no outside power exercised a predominant influence as local elites pursued economic development and political stabilization on their own terms.\[^{152}\] U.S. diplomacy was critical to sustaining support for the construction of BTC, which proved to be an enormously complex and expensive undertaking, but Washington was less successful in tying produc-
ers on the east side of the Caspian into the energy corridor it sought to build around Russia and Iran. Unlike Georgia or Azerbaijan, the Central Asian states did not have unresolved territorial disputes that Moscow sought to manipulate; of the Central Asian republics, only Uzbekistan participated in GU(U)AM, and then only temporarily. Worried, too, about the spread of Islamic radicalism, Central Asia’s leaders had reason to patch up their disputes with the Russians.

U.S. attention to the economic importance of Central Asia wavered in the aftermath of the invasion of Iraq in 2003. With mounting concerns about Gazprom’s ability to produce enough gas to meet its existing contracts, Russia is again moving aggressively into Central Asia, promoting its own pipelines (most notably the Pre-Caspian pipeline from Kazakhstan, designed to undermine the competing Trans-Caspian line backed by Western energy firms) and seeking to deny outsiders direct access to Central Asia’s gas. With less attention now being paid to the threat of Islamic extremism in Central Asia, it is energy that remains the most important prize in the geopolitical competition among Russia, China, and the West.

CONCLUSION

While the effects of Russia’s more assertive foreign policy have been felt most strongly inside the CIS, the post-Soviet republics have, for the most part, mattered to Moscow primarily insofar as they have become a contested zone between Russia and other major power blocs—the United States and Europe on the one hand, and China on the other. Russia possesses unique advantages in the CIS relative to other parts of the world where it has attempted to exert influence since the end of the Soviet Union. The history of Russian-Soviet control has created a series of cultural, economic, and political linkages that make reliance on Moscow a relatively familiar strategy for the Soviet-trained elites of most CIS countries. Then again, nearly two decades of independence have trained the populations of the post-Soviet states in the habits of independence, including the benefits of maneuvering between competing suitors. With the paradoxical and partial exception of Belarus, none of the Soviet successor states has exhibited a strong inclination to return to provincial status under Moscow—whatever fantasies Russia’s Eurasianist fringe may indulge in.

In response to the perception that its periphery was slipping out of its control in a way that posed real threats to its security, the Kremlin responded with an active, assertive, and initially defensive strategy designed to stop the bleeding while it was busy putting its own house in order. The invasion of Georgia was a clear indication that, at last, Russia’s leaders were ready to use the full range of tools available to them to restore Russian
influence over its former empire. Moscow has made use of tools like the CSTO and the frozen conflict zones to ensure that the non-Baltic states of the former Soviet Union retain a significant degree of dependence on Russia for their military and economic security. Like Putin, Medvedev has been keen to demonstrate Russia’s interest in the states of the former Soviet Union, making his first foreign stop as president in Kazakhstan and presiding over the unleashing of Russian military power in Georgia.

Zbigniew Brzezinski’s grand chessboard metaphor is nowhere more apt than in the CIS. To be sure, while the Kremlin claims to be playing the same game as its rivals, with influence over the foreign policy orientations of the CIS states the prize, the West has repeatedly been caught off guard through its inability to understand the rules. Western leaders may say that the spread of Western ideals and institutions to the CIS is a natural step in the progression of liberalism and democracy, but Moscow still sees geopolitics around every corner. Not that the West itself has been immune to the lures of geopolitics: the BTC pipeline was a geopolitical tour de force. The problem is that, having played the game (quite successfully) by Russian rules in the past, the West has a credibility problem in Moscow when it announces that the rules have changed now that Russia is itself equipped to play the old game more successfully.

The spread of liberalism and democracy in the CIS has the potential to benefit millions of people, but until such political transformations can be divorced from the competing geopolitical ambitions of the Great Powers, they also pose the danger of deepening instability as well as the progressive deterioration of relations between Russia and the Western powers. That is, if democratization is to spread throughout the CIS, it will have to be an organic, homegrown process, and even then, Moscow will insist that democratic governments respect its interests. Following the war in Georgia, the Western powers look set to adopt a more cautious approach to promoting political change in the region.

The Ukrainian experience proved that democratization can occur without dramatically upsetting the balance of power in the affected region. The standoff between Yushchenko and Yanukovych reflected a real divide in Ukrainian society (and one that appears to exist in most of the non-Russian parts of the CIS) between those who would prefer to remain in the Russian orbit and those favoring closer ties with outside powers as a means of limiting Russian influence, and also demonstrated the value of a democratic system in which the losers can hold onto the hope of coming to power at some point in the future. Only if democratization comes to be valued for its own sake, as an organic result of developments within the affected society and not as a means of installing pro-American or pro-Western regimes, can prospects for a cooperative relationship between Russia and the Western powers in the CIS be realized.
Russia, to be sure, has not sought to completely exclude outside powers from a role in the affairs of the CIS. China is a leader in the SCO, while even NATO has a substantial presence in the CIS through its Partnership for Peace program. Confrontation with outside powers is not a development that stands to benefit Russia, and for that reason it has never been an aim of Russian foreign policy in the region per se. What continues to matter for the Kremlin is the protection of Russian strategic and financial interests. In particular, the expansion of NATO into the former Soviet Union is seen as a profoundly threatening development by many in the Russian political and security establishment. By invading Georgia, Moscow demonstrated it would take vigorous steps to check its loss of influence and that for all their rhetoric, the Western powers’ options in the region remain much more limited than Russia’s.

NOTES

1. This ambiguity is above all reflected in the politically fraught “Near Abroad [blizhnoe zareb’ye],” used to distinguish the CIS states from the rest of the world (the “Far Abroad”). Though no longer normally employed in official statements, “Near Abroad” can still be found in the Russian academic and popular press.


4. The so-called Russia-Belarus Union State has never had much substance. By late 2007, there was some speculation that the union would be upgraded and given a strong executive, presumably so that Putin could take over as chairman and continue to wield power after the end of his term as Russian president. See Fred Weir, “Putin Eyes Full Merger with Belarus,” Christian Science Monitor, 10 Dec 2007. Under such a scenario, Russia would essentially absorb Belarus.


before temporarily returning to Georgia proper in the course of the August 2008 war.


8. According to the 2001 census, 67.5 percent of the inhabitants of Ukraine listed Ukrainian as their native language, versus 29.6 percent who listed Russian. Such statistics require context, however, since most Ukrainians understand Russian, and a large number (including President Yushchenko) speak Russian or a mixed dialect known as surzhik in everyday life. See “Chislennost’ i sostav naseleniya Ukrainy po itogam Vseukrainskoj perepisi naseleniya 2001 goda,” http://ukrcensus.gov.ua/rus/results/general/language.

9. GUAM (an acronym of its members’ names: Georgia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan, Moldova) was formed in 1994 and aimed at (in the words of the organization’s charter) “promoting democratic values, ensuring rule of law and respect of human rights; ensuring sustainable development; strengthening international and regional security and stability. . . .” See “Charter of Organization for Democracy and Economic Development GUAM [sic],” 23 May 2006, http://www.guam.org.ua/267.0.0.1.0.0.phtml. GU(U)AM has often been seen as a counterweight against Russian influence, even though all of its members are also members of the Commonwealth of Independent States. From 1999 to 2004, the organization was known as GUUAM, reflecting Uzbekistan’s decision to join, then leave the group.


32. On Kyiv’s charge that Moscow was violating existing agreements, see Mikhail Krasnyanskiy, “Who Is Blackmailing Whom?” Ukrayinska Pravda, 12 Dec 2005, http://pravda.com.ua/en/news/2005/12/12/4919.htm. Moscow also signed a new deal in December 2005 to buy more gas from Turkmenistan, the major supplier in Central Asia, thus reducing the amount of non-Russian gas available to the Ukrainians.

33. A detailed overview of the events leading up to the January 2006 gas cutoff is provided in Nikolai Sokov, “Alternative Interpretations of the Russian-Ukrainian Gas Crisis,” Center for Strategic and International Studies, PONARS Policy Memo No. 404, Jan 2006. The cutoff affected not only gas produced inside Russia but also gas originating in Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan that flowed to Ukraine through Russian pipelines.

34. Quoted in Igor Torbakov, “Kremlin Uses Energy to Teach Ex-Soviet Neigh-


36. Additionally, the agreement specified that Russian gas would be sold to Ukraine through the joint company RosUkrEnergo, which would pay $230 per thousand cubic meters, then mix the Russian gas with cheaper gas from Central Asia before selling it to Naftohaz Ukrainy at $95. The deal also resolved a related Russo-Ukrainian dispute over tariffs paid by Gazprom for the use of Ukraine’s pipeline network for moving its gas to Europe. See “Russia: Moscow, Kyiv Announce End of Gas Dispute,” *RFE/RL Newsline*, 4 Jan 2006.


52. NATO agreed to offer Georgia an “intensified dialogue” with the aim of eventual membership in September 2006.
64. “Press-konferentsiya po okonchanii vstrechi s Prezidentom Gruzii Mikhailom Saakashvili.”


69. When Chechen fighters sought refuge in Kodori in mid-2001, Moscow accused the Georgian government of aiding the separatists. Russian troops, along with pro-Russian Abkhaz militiamen, drove the Chechens out militarily while Tbilisi protested the Russian incursion as a violation of its sovereignty. After the Chechens left, Shevardnadze’s government deployed Georgian forces to the area over the opposition of Moscow (and the Abkhaz leadership in Sukhumi). The UN eventually negotiated a withdrawal agreement in the spring of 2002, though Russian forces made an abortive attempt to return later that year, nearly starting a firefight with the Georgians. See Keti Bochorishvili, “Georgia: Fear and Poverty in the Kodori Gorge,” Institute for War & Peace Reporting, 31 May 2002, html://iwpr.net/?p=crs&s=f&o=1608388&apc_state=henrics2002.


76. “Putin Fury at Georgia’s ‘Terrorism,’” BBC News, 2 Oct 2006, html://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/5397102.stm. The sociopathic Beria was an ethnic Mingrelian from Abkhazia (which was then part of the Georgian SSR). Putin’s remark thus carried the implication that in political terms Saakashvili was Beria’s descendant.


81. By and large, the looting and attacks on civilians appear to have been the work of the irregular South Ossetian militias rather than the Russian military, which in places worked to stop the depredations (and in others did nothing). Sabrina Tavernise, “Signs of Ethnic Attacks in Georgia Conflict,” *New York Times*, 14 Aug 2008.