



# Russia and the Near Abroad Under Putin

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## The Background

The collapse of the Soviet Union has been attributed to several factors ranging from 30 years of economic stagnation brought about by the inability of the socialist economy to adapt itself to the postindustrial era to the rising cost of keeping up with the United States (upping the stake was Reagan's policy) to the explosion of nationalism triggered by the political relaxation of the Gorbachev era. Lament for the lost empire is often heard among so-called empire restorers—politicians and scholars who not only long for the time when Moscow was the center of a multinational empire and a global power but also tend to forget that for years most Russians were annoyed with the burden of subsidizing the ungrateful “younger brothers.” In fact, Moscow was increasingly alarmed by high birthrates among the country's Muslim population as contrasted with low Slavic birthrates. This is not to say that during the last years of the Soviet regime the Kremlin wished to get rid of its Asian republics, but the ongoing debate about the Soviet equivalent of the “white man's burden” suggests a serious interest in the possibility of finding a new formula for the existing union. In consequence, the liquidation of the union, signed in 1991 by Yeltsin and his Ukrainian and Belorussian counterparts (and joined by the Kazakhs), was perceived more as freeing Russia from the burden of supporting the unruly (Trans-Caucasus, Baltics) and the poor (Central Asia) than as a concession on the part of the weakened center to mounting nationalist demands.

Most Western Sovietologists also saw the Muslim underbelly of the Soviet Union as the

principal potential trouble zone capable in time of undermining the cohesion of the Soviet Empire. Quite unexpectedly, that threat came fast and from two small economically advanced western regions of the country, both annexed to the Soviet Union as a result of the 1939 Molotov-Ribbentrop agreement: namely, the three Baltic Republics and the former Austro-Hungarian Eastern Galicia (Western Ukraine). The revolt of the three small Baltic nations—politically, culturally, and socially alien to the Russian core—was both decisive and surprising. With foresight Moscow could have dealt with the Baltic issue by repudiating the secret protocol of the Molotov-Ribbentrop agreement, which provided for the division of the entire strip of land between Hitler's Germany and Stalin's Soviet Union, and releasing the Baltic Republics before they could “contaminate” the rest. Unlike Central Asia, however, the Baltic region was not regarded as a disposable burden but as a “window to Europe” opened by Russia's two prominent tsars, Peter the Great and Catherine the Great. Thus Moscow was initially unwilling to admit the existence of the secret protocol and afterward insisted on the voluntary character of subsequent “elections” that led to the Baltic Republics' “requests” to join the Soviet Union. This campaign of denial only accelerated the determination of the local populations to see the restoration of their pre-1939 independence.

Another problem area for Moscow turned out to be the so-called Western Ukraine (or Eastern Galicia), where Ukrainian nationalism not only survived years of oppression but managed to

contaminate the rest of Ukraine, barring the Solzhenitsyn-style solution for the empire—name-ly, the possibility of retaining the Slavic core while getting rid of the mostly Muslim southern belt. Thus during the decisive days of December 1991, the de facto secession of the three Baltic states and growing Ukrainian nationalist feelings precluded the possibility of transforming the Soviet Union into a more flexible but still unified federation, as accepted by the countrywide referendum (from which the Baltic states and Western Ukraine dissented). The dissolution of the Soviet Union was followed by a series of moves on the Russians' part aimed at severing Russian ties (perceived as obligations) with the "younger brothers." Thus Russia abandoned the Joint Strategic Command, expelled the other republics from the ruble zone, and introduced trade barriers—moves that Moscow soon attempted to repair.<sup>1</sup>

## The 1990s Under Yeltsin

It appears that Boris Yeltsin and the deputies of Russia's Supreme Soviet who backed his moves interpreted the dissolution of the union as freeing Russia from the unnecessary financial burden of supporting the others, not as a way of letting them escape Russia's grip. Little time passed before regret about lost influence translated itself into a policy of keeping the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), the former union republics except for the Baltic states, within the Russian sphere of influence. This endeavor has become especially pronounced since 1995, when the new Russian strategic doctrine made that goal the centerpiece of its policy. Its weakness, however, was centered on Moscow's desire to maintain its influence without providing financial aid—the way it was done during the Soviet period. This approach turned out to be unrealistic, and soon most of the republics became Russia's debtors. The fact is that the republics of the so-called near abroad (the CIS plus the Baltics) were never regarded in Moscow as

full-fledged independent states to be dealt with on an equal basis but as continuations, albeit under a new label, of the old union republics linked in different degrees of closeness (but never too loosely) to Mother Russia.

### *Trans-Caucasus*

Retaining its principal aim, Moscow employed methods that varied from region to region. Thus in regard to the three republics of the Trans-Caucasus, Moscow resorted to the old tsarist policy of stirring ancient interethnic quarrels and relying on Armenia, historically distrustful of all its Turkic neighbors, as its Russian linchpin. Moscow's fear of strong nationalist feelings in the region led to the initial removal of Soviet-era *apparatchiki* from power. It was aware that there were few Russian settlers in the area, whereas potentially attractive neighbors were located just across the southern border. The ancient policy of *divide et impera*, employed in order to remain the indispensable arbiter between the conflicting parties, became the method of keeping the area dependent. Thus in the early 1990s, Russia fed the irredentist movements among Georgia's minorities (especially in Abkhazia and Ossetia) and adopted a favorable stand toward the Armenian separatist movement in Azerbaijan's High Karabagh. Moscow also pursued a policy of slowing inroads that Western oil companies and Turkish interests had made into the Trans-Caucasus.

One might argue that Moscow's policy in the area was not always consistent and that attempts were made to be more evenhanded, but that its goal remained clear: to stir enough trouble to bar all parties concerned from escaping Russia's grip. Moscow had a hand in leadership changes in Georgia and Azerbaijan, changes that failed to bring expected results because the new leaders (Aliiev and Shevernadze) turned out to be quite independent minded. It taught a lesson to the Trans-Caucasian republics about the danger of ignoring Russian interests, however. Later, un-

der the impact of events in Chechnya, Moscow became more cautious about stirring irredentist movements but remained less than helpful in bringing peace to the area.

### ***Central Asia***

Contrary to its largely destabilizing Trans-Caucasian policy, Moscow pursued a policy of stabilization in Central Asia, helping the existing regimes maintain themselves in power. What probably motivated Russia's stand was that all the Central Asian leaders came from old Soviet party cadres that had been used traditionally to seek Moscow's guidance. During Gorbachev's "perestroika," the leaders of the Central Asian republics never challenged Moscow's authority and remained faithful to the man in the Kremlin. They never sought independence for their republics, which in December 1991 were practically expelled from the collapsing union, not having been invited to attend the founding of the Confederation of Independent States. Faced with the new reality, the leaders of the Central Asian republics readily jumped on the nationalist bandwagon and adapted all the national symbols and corresponding phraseology, but they continued to rule in the habitual way. All potential opposition elements (whether nationalist, democratic, or Islamist) were soon labeled fundamentalist and harshly suppressed. Faced with the specter of genuine Islamist influence slipping across southern borders and the Chinese colossus looming from the east, the Central Asian regimes welcomed security cooperation with Russia. Moreover, the republics of Central Asia (especially Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan) had large numbers of Russian and other European settlers, an additional incentive for local governments to seek good relations with their powerful northern neighbor. Thus during the entire decade since independence, Russia remained the protector of Tajikistan against the Muslim fundamentalist menace coming from the south (and the defender of the Tajik

establishment against democratic elements as well) and retained the friendship of both Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. Given President Karimov's regional leadership ambitions, Russian relations with the most populated Central Asian republic, Uzbekistan, were more difficult, but even the latter made no serious attempts to challenge Russian interests. The self-appointed "Turkmenbashi" (father of all Turkmen), the absolute dictator of the remote and isolationist but gas-rich Turkmenistan, saw no alternative to respecting Russian interests.

### ***The Moldovan Republic***

The situation in the Moldovan republic, a creation of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact designed to give some legitimacy to Russian territorial appetites, was a case apart. There Moscow's post-1991 policy, based on using a part of Moldovan territory inhabited by Russians as a base, also served the purpose of outflanking Ukraine from the south in order to keep Moldova from rejoining its ethnic sister, Romania. To achieve its goals, Moscow relied on the fear of "romanization" among the Russian population of the Transnistria region of Moldova (an area that was Soviet before 1939). The artificial quasi-state of Transnistria benefited from the benevolent neutrality of the Russian military (initially commanded by the famous General Lebed). A Russian garrison is still quartered in the capital of Transnistria, Tiraspol.

### ***Potential Danger Zones***

Similar situations could have occurred in other corners of the near abroad where Russians constituted a local majority but were avoided. Among the potential danger zones one can list the northeastern corner of Estonia or Northern Kazakhstan. The Russian-Ukrainian confrontation over Crimea, which could have degenerated into something worse, took place without bloodshed and has been dealt with in a peaceful fash-

ion, leaving Transnistria the only area where the Russian minority in the near abroad resorted to force.

### ***The Baltic Republics***

Post-Soviet Moscow's relations with the three Baltic Republics developed in a very contradictory manner. The Yeltsin regime was realistic enough to concede the separateness of the Baltic Republics from all the others, accepting their refusal to join the CIS. But Moscow branded discrimination against the Russian settlers in Latvia and Estonia as a human rights violation, dismissing the security concerns of the countries involved. Western scholars subsequently coined the term "ethnodemocracies" for democratic countries such as Latvia, Estonia, Singapore, and Israel that, for security reasons, discriminate against nontitular nationalities. Despite the problem, Russian settlers did not flee the Baltic Republics the way they fled most of the non-Slavic republics of the near abroad, where legal discrimination is absent but insecurity—either physical or economic, or both—is real, unlike the situation in the Baltic democracies. During the 1990s, when Russian-Baltic relations were not at their best, mutually profitable business links flourished, and Baltic harbors profited from the transit of Russian raw materials, especially nonferrous metals. Many Russian speakers prospered in the new Baltic market economy marked by traditional Russian ties and rapidly emerging Western links.

### ***Ukraine***

Ukraine was the republic Moscow never envisaged it would lose. Ukraine is Eastern Orthodox, has a language close to Russian (regarded in tsarist times as a dialect of Russian), has a common historic heritage of "Kievan Rus," the original state structure of the three Eastern Slavic entities—Russia, Ukraine, and Belorussia. The third centennial anniversary of the "eternal"

union of Ukraine and Russia was celebrated by Khrushchev with the gift of Crimea to Ukraine—a gift that Moscow would gladly have taken back after the demise of the Soviet Union. Still, the 1997 agreement with Ukraine gave Moscow a 20-year lease on large bases in Crimea and the right to maintain a substantial number of troops as well as ships from its rusting Black Sea fleet.

About one-fifth of the population of Ukraine is Russian, and half of the Ukrainians speak Russian at home. Although nationalist tendencies were revived under the inspiration of western Ukrainian nationalists, the general attitude toward Russia and Russians remained positive in most of Ukraine. Similarly, the majority of local Russians endorsed Ukrainian independence, an action not perceived by them as hostile to Moscow but rather as the expression of their attachment to Ukraine. In consequence, in dealing with Ukraine, Moscow abstained from inciting interethnic conflicts (as it has done in the Trans-Caucasus) or encouraging separatism (as in Transnistria) or even using threats (as was done against the Baltic Republics). By contrast, profiting from Ukrainian dependence on Russian energy and raw materials, Moscow learned to rely on economic pressure in order to influence Ukrainian politics. By the end of the Yeltsin era, Ukraine had amassed a multibillion-dollar debt to Russia. As majority stakes were bought by more successful Russian companies, many Ukrainian enterprises passed under Russian control.

### ***Belorussia***

The case of Belorussia in the 1990s is probably unique in the sense that the people lack feelings of national identity that are necessary for independent existence, something present even in the most russified parts of Ukraine. After an initial surge of nationalism, mainly among some Belorussian intellectuals, the country not only lost interest in the matter but also retreated into the old Soviet-style system promoted by a former

“sovkhoz” chairman handily elected as president. Even the symbols of Belorussian statehood (flag, shield) were replaced by Soviet-era denationalized emblems. The regime of President Lukashenko is based on the maintenance of essential elements of the Soviet system (including devotion to Mother Russia) combined with a small measure of the market economy. Nevertheless, Belorussian offers to reunite with Russia, although officially welcomed by Moscow, were postponed by the latter. In reality, Yeltsin had serious doubts about accepting Belorussian offers. First, Moscow was not interested in a union with Minsk, only in a straightforward annexation, giving Belorussia the status of Tatarstan or Bashkirostan. Allowing Belorussia a higher status would automatically incite all the 20 or so autonomous republics that are part of the Russian Federation to seek a higher status as well. Moreover, given the large discrepancy in progress made by each country since 1991, the cost of annexing Belorussia looked very high. Finally, the personal ambitions of the Belorussian president, politically close to the most conservative elements in Russia, did not sit well with the reformist Yeltsin. Therefore, during the 1990s the relationship between the Russian and the Belorussian governments remained very much one-sided. Moscow took advantage of Belorussian goodwill to strengthen mutual cooperation in security matters, such as maintaining the Russian early-warning system in Baranovichi. In return, Moscow accepted the establishment of some common institutions and positions that sounded good but were devoid of any practical power.

### ***Economic Effects***

What helped to increase Russian prestige in the near abroad was the fact that despite the significant contraction of the Russian economy in the 1990s, the economy of all other CIS countries contracted even further. Although the standard of living in Russia fell by one-third, that of most other CIS countries fell even more, making im-

poverished Russia the envy of some of its neighbors. Specifically, the Ukrainians and Georgians were strongly affected.<sup>2</sup>

## **The United States and the Near Abroad in the Yelsin Era**

After the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Washington did its best to reassure Moscow that it had no intention of profiting from the situation by encroaching on traditional Russian interests or trying to stir up trouble in the near abroad. What appeared important to the United States was that the whole process of disintegration tearing the fabric of the empire remain orderly and peaceful and that the Soviet nuclear arsenal not be dispersed among the newly independent and still shaky states, but be kept under Moscow’s single control. Furthermore, Washington remained concerned that disputes between the newly independent states would negatively affect the process of democratization within Russia itself. Thus Washington provided financial assistance to help liquidate the nuclear arsenals stranded in some republics of the near abroad, acknowledged the extent of the Russian sphere of influence in the Trans-Caucasus and Central Asia, and threw cold water on the hopes of the Baltic Republics to join NATO in the foreseeable future.

This restrained attitude was not long-lived. Washington soon became aware of the shortage of means at Moscow’s disposal and of financial constraints in all domains, ranging from economic to military. In the Trans-Caucasus, the policy of playing off ethnic tensions was supposed to compensate for the shortage of other means. This might have worked had Washington not ranked the energy resources of the Caspian Basin as important and decided to test the limits of the Russian sphere of influence. In Central Asia, Washington began to follow the same line by pursuing bilateral agreements and showing less concern about bruising Russian sensitivities. In fact, be-

tween 1991 and 2000, the commercial exchanges of the three Trans-Caucasian Republics as well as those of the Central Asian Republics of Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, and Kyrgyzstan shifted away from Russian markets. This left only Ukraine, Belorussia, and Kazakhstan as Russia's strong business partners.<sup>3</sup>

The most radical American policy shift was the endorsement of the Baltic Republics' wish to join Western organizations—from NATO to the European Union. Washington gradually began to disregard the old Soviet borders as red lines, something Moscow resisted initially but eventually gave in on, contented just to slow the inevitable slide of the Baltic Republics into the Western camp. This rise of Western influence was very much helped by substantial investments from Finland, Sweden, and Germany, each having its favorite among the Baltic Republics.

As far as Ukraine was concerned, Washington realized the key role that country would play in the restoration of a Moscow-led new union (“no empire without Ukraine”). Washington poured large amounts of money into Ukraine, despite the knowledge that most of it would disappear or be misspent, just to keep the Ukrainian leadership from succumbing to Russian economic pressure. Ukraine was encouraged to join some Western defense institutions short of NATO (Alliance for Peace, GUUAM). The GUUAM grouping (Georgia, Ukraine, Uzbekistan, Azerbaijan, Moldova), created with U.S. backing, was specifically involved in trying to diminish the dependence of its members on Russian oil by offering the prospect of Azerbaijani and trans-Caspian oil when pipelines become functional. (Russia, obviously, would present obstacles to its realization.)

Contrary to the policy of assisting Ukraine regardless of circumstances, soon after the election of President Lukashenko, Washington gave up on Belorussia. The country was seen as retaining too many Soviet-style features and situated too deeply within the Russian sphere of influence to make American recuperation efforts worthwhile. In practice, American–Belorussian relations were often mired in petty conflicts such

as those involving ambassadorial residences, which Lukashenko, for the sake of annoyance or for better surveillance, wanted to move from the center of Minsk to the suburbs.

In Moldova, Washington's activity, except for endorsing the country's unity (a policy equally applied to all the republics of the near abroad), appeared rather limited. Although Washington drew Moldova into GUUAM, it kept its distance from the Transnistrian hotbed, unwilling to upset Russian–American relations. The key Western vehicle for attracting Moldova could have been Romania, its ethnically and linguistically alike neighbor, but the economic stagnation of that country during most of the 1990s made it little desirable to the Moldovans.

The American policy toward the countries of the near abroad during the Yeltsin decade was based on preserving the independence and the territorial integrity of each republic, especially Ukraine. This policy was combined with the slow encroachment on the Russian sphere of influence that was accomplished first through expanding economic ties, then through association with Western organizations and projects, and finally by opening the way to limited defense cooperation, which stopped short of military alliances.

But it was only after September 11, 2001, that the process that culminated in the American penetration of the former Russian sphere of interest began to gain speed and achieve effectiveness.

## **Putin Comes to Power**

The transition from Yeltsin to Putin included the intermediary stage of Putin's premiership during the final period of Yeltsin's presidency, giving the chosen heir time to establish his own credentials. Many observers were surprised that Putin's background became an asset and not an impediment to his ascension to power. It turned out that his KGB past reassured right-wingers that Yeltsin's choice was not another reformist gambler selected from his varied entourage, but a solid patriot who would not endanger Russia's

security. Putin's list of Russian core values emphasized patriotism, Russia's great power mission, and social solidarity—categories lifted from Russia's imperial (tsarist or Soviet) past. His relative youth (under 50) and modern education, including foreign languages, pleased those Russians who had had enough of the tired old figures of the past (Yeltsin included). On the other side of the Russian political spectrum, Putin's endorsement of free market reforms endeared him to those who might otherwise have been repelled by his authoritarian style of governance. He thus appeared as a disciplinarian reformer capable of combining a free market economy with rule exercised with a strong hand.

The men Putin coopted into his administration were a mixture of security "apparatchiks" selected to provide strong support in sensitive security positions, his old St. Petersburg colleagues who had public service experience, and young technicians capable of managing market reforms without being influenced by liberal political ideology.

Putin's first steps—challenging the power of Russia's oligarchs, invading the increasingly terrorist-ridden Chechnya (triggered by the failed Chechen incursion into Dagestan), tightening internal security, and reining in quarreling parliamentarians—taken while pursuing economic liberalization—pleased the public. In reality, his motives did not always correspond to their appearance. Thus not all oligarchs experienced Putin's wrath. Those who did included media magnates seen as political obstacles to his rule (Berezovskii and Gusinskii). Others (such as Abramovich or Mamut) were not disturbed. The intervention in Chechnya was not purely motivated by the defense of Russian national interests and of Russia's stake in the Caspian Sea Basin. It made Putin popular among the conservative electorate in the presidential election. The acceleration of market reforms under his appointed economic tsar, Herman Gref, was less a liberal victory than a Chinese-like marriage of autocratic rule with liberal economics. It was accompanied by a tightening of Russia's internal

policies concerning the regions, the media, and democratic freedoms. Simultaneously, more emphasis was given to the military side of CIS cooperation, especially with the republics most favorably disposed in this matter (Armenia, Belorussia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan). Of those, two (Armenia and Tajikistan) directly depend on Russian military assistance and two (Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan) have too many Russian settlers living within their borders to fend off Moscow's wishes. Finally, Belorussia's willingness to cooperate exceeds Russian desires.

From the outset of his presidency, Putin took a stronger, more decisive hand in dealing with the near abroad and showed more readiness to use Russia's economic power to attain his goals. A recent article by an American strategic studies expert is skeptical of Putin's post-September 11 friendly image. The author emphasizes Putin's "assaults on Russian democracy" and his increased reliance on the internal security apparatus as well as the continued pressure he has exerted on GUUAM, including pressuring Georgia to drop the idea of creating the Baku-Ceyhan pipeline, allowing Russian troops to pursue Chechen rebels into Georgian territory, posing as the guarantor of ethnic peace in Moldova, and trying to persuade Tashkent to abandon its efforts to forge an independent defense policy.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, Russia prompted Kiev to fire two pro-Western politicians simultaneously—the foreign minister, Tarasyuk, in November 2000 and the prime minister, Yushchenko, in May 2001—and dispatched the former Gazprom boss (and former prime minister) Chernomyrdin as ambassador to Ukraine with the aim of taking advantage of Ukraine's principal economic weakness: its dependence on Russian energy. The recent reconnection of Ukraine to the Russian electric grid is one of the results of this policy.

In his willingness to abandon useless confrontations with the West, concentrate on applying economic pressure on the near abroad, and take advantage of their energy dependence on Russia as well as their large debts to Russia, Putin proved himself more realistic than his predecessor. Given

the current Russian financial situation, he saw no benefit in fighting Western economic penetration for purely ideological reasons, a cause dear to Russian conservatives. To him, it seemed more profitable to associate with the West wherever mutual advantage could be gained.

The attacks of September 11, 2001, confirmed the correctness of Putin's policies. Despite overwhelming opposition from Russia's Security Council, he endorsed Washington's antiterrorist campaign without preconditions and accepted the American deployment in Central Asia. Those decisions allowed him to gain better American understanding of his policies and to sell his military campaign in Chechnya as a purely antiterrorist enterprise (which is not the case). He also increased pressure on Georgia on the pretext that the latter (even if unwillingly) provides refuge to Chechen terrorists. Georgia was singled out for such harsh treatment because it is the key to the Caucasus and consequently to the Caspian Sea Basin. Russia has no access to Armenia, its sole genuine ally in the region, without passing through Georgia. No oil can flow from Azerbaijan to Turkey without flowing through the pipeline in Georgian territory. Georgia provides the only access to Chechnya, which borders territories of the Russian Federation on three sides. Moreover, the internal situation in Georgia facilitates Russian maneuvers. The country is torn by separatism (a goal not confined to Abkhazia and South Ossetia) and regionalism, is militarily weak, and has shown the poorest economic performance of any country in the CIS. Since the fall of the Soviet Union, its economy has contracted to 29 percent of the old level.

Moscow did manage to split the GUUAM group by luring at least partially away the indebted Ukraine and Moldova, which recently elected a neocommunist government. The May 2002 meeting convoked to commemorate the signing of the 1992 Moscow-led CIS Collective Security Treaty, however, was marked by the absence of the three late (1993/1994) joiners of that treaty as well as members of GUUAM that are reluctant to rejoin Russia's fold: Georgia, Azerbaijan,

and Uzbekistan. There is no question that, as far as the near abroad is concerned, the future development of Russian-American relations will be played out on the fate of those three countries.

## **The Situation in Russia's Southern Belt After September 11**

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After Putin's speedy alignment with the American-led antiterrorist campaign, Washington found itself facing a dilemma: how to benefit from Russia's adherence to the war on terror without paying too high a price for Russian cooperation. Putin has not officially asked for anything, but shortly after September 11 it became obvious that Washington had toned down its criticism of Russian actions in Chechnya and included some Chechen groups in its list of terrorist organizations. At the same time, a relaxation of Russian-American relations became visible in some contested areas, especially in Central Asia and Ukraine and, to a lesser extent, in the Caucasus.

The degree of mutual cooperation has been most visible in Central Asia, where the establishment of American bases received a prior green light from the Kremlin. Although it is possible to envisage that the more independent Uzbekistan might have accepted the American military presence without Russian approval, that would have been improbable for Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan and impossible for Tajikistan. It is significant that despite the defeat of the Taliban in Afghanistan, American bases in former Soviet Central Asia are not about to be removed. Although some Russian publicists shed tears about the loss of Russian influence in the area, both Putin and Bush seem to believe that mutual cooperation, at least at this stage, is beneficial for all parties concerned. Moscow is ready to cooperate on the condition that Washington accept the power-sharing principle and bankroll most of the

cost. It is, however, worth noting that Kazakh sources are skeptical about the sincerity of the parties concerned, interpreting Washington's actions as directed not only at stopping terrorist and narcotic threats but also at removing Kazakhstan from the Russian sphere of influence and weakening the Shanghai Five group.<sup>5</sup>

In the Trans-Caucasus, however, the road to mutual cooperation is more difficult. The key point of dispute is not even Azerbaijan, which has been struggling lately to achieve better relations with Russia without damaging its ties with the United States. Baku even managed to persuade Moscow to agree to delimit the border between the Russian and the Azerbaijani Caspian Sea zones (something that Iran, insisting on treating the Caspian Sea as a lake, was trying to prevent). Russia even softened its objections to the Ceyhan pipeline by entering into an energy barter agreement with Baku.

The most difficult case has been the Moscow–Washington confrontation in Georgia. Although Washington agreed to classify Chechen fighters as terrorists and accepted the need to root them out of the Pankisi Gorge in Georgia, it clearly stated its opposition to possible Russian military raids into Georgian territory. A few hundred American advisers were speedily dispatched to Georgia to implement the official mission of training the ill-prepared Georgian forces and for the undeclared purpose of showing an American presence on Georgian soil. This concern was well understood by the Russian side, which returned to the old method of stinging Georgia by enflaming ethnic conflicts. The situation in Abkhazia became tenser while the Armenians in the Djavakhetie district of southern Georgia became more demanding. Finally, Dmitri Rogozin, the chairman of the Foreign Relations Committee of the Russian Duma (and the representative from Kaliningrad—a connection that speaks for itself), asked the government to recognize the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. He expressed the opinion that peace in the area cannot be achieved as long as President Shevernadze remains in power. Putin is not about to accede to

this request but probably welcomes it as a signal to Washington to keep in mind that as far as Georgia is concerned, he is under nationalist pressure. Picturing Georgia as a safe haven of Chechen supplies, not unlike Pakistan for the Afghan mujahedin during the Soviet intervention, serves also to divert Russian public attention from failures to end the Chechen conflict.<sup>6</sup>

## **Conclusion**

The attacks of September 11 have resulted in a Russian–American antiterrorist alliance, an undoubtedly positive and helpful development, as we saw in the Russian acceptance of American bases in former Soviet Central Asia and just witnessed in the unanimous adoption of the UN resolution dealing with the return of inspectors to Iraq. This does not mean, however, that agreement between the parties has been achieved on all the sticky points of mutual relations. Russia and the United States are basically in agreement on a common definition of terrorism but still harbor differences about whom the definition applies to. Divergences between the two sides are bound to continue on a number of issues, ranging from ways to handle Saddam Hussein to settling the issue of each country's interests in the Caspian Sea Basin and adjoining lands. We probably will never reach a common policy toward Ukraine, a country Russia cannot perceive as a foreign entity entitled to sovereign existence outside of Russia's embrace. But Washington will continue to value (and reward) Russian cooperation as long as Moscow rejects the dreams of empire restorers and pursues a realistic policy in the near (and far) abroad, making mutual cooperation beneficial to both parties.

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### **Notes**

1. Susan Eisenhower, "Putin's Policies Toward the Near Abroad," Aspen.org./Congressional papers, 29.
2. L. B. Vardomskii, "Mezhdú globalizmom i regionalizmom. Problemi I tendentsii regionalizatsii postsovetskogo prostranstva," *Politiia*, no. 1, 24 (spring 2002): 65.
3. *Ibid.*, 73ff.
4. Stephen J. Blank, "Putin's Twelve-Step Program," *The Washington Quarterly* (winter 2002): 147ff.
5. Murat Laumulin (deputy director, Kazakhstan Institute for Strategic Studies), "Central Asia After 11 September," *Central Asia and the Caucasus* 4 (16): 2002, 32.
6. Silvia Serano, "Les Américains en Géorgie: perceptions régionales," *Insight Archives* (PSAN), vol. 2, issue 4; *NIS Observed. An Analytical Review*, vol. 7, no. 15, September 2002; Laura Bagdasarian, "The Southern Caucasus in the New World Order Context," *Central Asia and the Caucasus*, 5 (17): 2002, 33ff.

