

CONNECTIONS

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European and Eurasian Security: Viewpoints from Russia

Connections presents diverse views on defense and security by authors from NATO and partner countries from the Partnership for Peace and beyond. For this particular issue we invited authors from universities and research centers of the Russian Federation to express their views on current issues of high interest to academics and policy makers. The response was overwhelming.

In this issue, the PfPC Editorial Board selected contributions addressing the impact of China's rise, Russian thoughts on the series of "color revolutions" and the Arab Spring, Russia's relations with Georgia after the parliamentary elections in 2012, the main factors shaping Russia's foreign policy, the establishment of the Eurasian Union, and the prospects for power transfer in Central Asia, particularly in Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan. Several authors analyze the developments in Ukraine at the end of 2013 and throughout 2014 and their impact on the security of Russia, Europe and Eurasia.

Many readers are likely to find the authors' viewpoints controversial. Nevertheless, understanding different perspectives may help our readers better appreciate the challenges in resolving some of the problems, particularly where Russian and Western analysts and policy makers have distinct and, on occasion, incompatible views.

We welcome your comments.

The PfPC Editorial Board

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The “Rise” of China in the Eyes of Russia: A Source of Threats or New Opportunities?

Anastasia Solomentseva*

At the moment, the center of global economic and political gravity is rapidly shifting to the Asia-Pacific Region. This region possesses vast financial, resource-related, industrial and human potential. As the center of global development rapidly shifts to the East, Russia regards the Asia-Pacific Region as the engine of the world economy, the key to which is a burgeoning China.

In contemporary international relations the fast-moving rise of the PRC has become a crucial issue that concerns both Western and Russian political leaders, scholars and common citizens. The true intentions of the Chinese leadership as it pursues its foreign policy course remain quite nebulous and ambiguous. In various spheres and at a various levels of Russian society there are quite a few discussions and disputes about what, in fact, lies behind the global phenomenon of the “rise” of China, what consequences it entails for Russia, and how Moscow should organize its relations with Beijing.

The Concept of China’s “Peaceful Rise”

In November 2003 at the plenary session of the Boao Forum for Asia Zheng Bijian, who in the 1990s occupied the posts of deputy head of the Department of Propaganda of the Communist Party of China’s Central Committee and permanent prorector of the Central Party School of the CPC, was the first to voice the idea of the “peaceful rise” of China.¹ Such a candid expression of the idea of China aspiring to “rise” attracted tremendous attention, mostly among foreign observers. The idea was considered to be sanctioned by the CPC of the People’s Republic of China (PRC) and, accordingly, to reflect the official position of the Chinese leadership. Zheng Bijian went on to repeatedly express this idea in other speeches and publications. Since early 2003 the term “peaceful rise” has been actively used by leading figures of the Politburo of the PRC Communist Party, and in 2005 an article about it by Zheng Bijian was published in the American journal *Foreign Affairs*.²

At its core, the concept of “peaceful rise” generally came down to three basic propositions. First, China intends to pursue its own uniquely Chinese path of socialism and in

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¹ Zheng Bijian, *China’s Peaceful Rise: Speeches of Zheng Bijian 1997-2004* (Brookings institution, 2005), available at <http://www.brookings.edu/~media/events/2005/6/16china/20050616bijianlunch.pdf>.

² Zheng Bijian, “China’s ‘Peaceful Rise’ to Great-Power Status,” *Foreign Affairs* (September/October 2005), available at <http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/61015/zheng-bijian/chinas-peaceful-rise-to-great-power-status>.

doing so actively participate in the process of economic globalization. Second, despite the PRC's desire and ambition to rely primarily on its own capacities, it also needs a peaceful world environment. And third, the "lifting up" of China will be exceptionally peaceful in nature, since Beijing firmly rejects the path of aggression and outward expansion. In a broader context this was something of an effort to adapt an obsolete image of China to new realities and to explain to the world that the steadily growing and obvious power of the PRC entails no threat for those around it.

China's actions on the world arena during the past decade have convincingly demonstrated that the last two generations of Chinese leaders have been consistently and actively realizing a course to ensure a new place for China in international relations. This allows it to play a key role in creating a new global security and cooperation architecture.

The Evolution of the PRC's Foreign Policy Objectives and Methods

Recent years have seen a gradual change among the Chinese political elite with respect to its strategic vision of the country's future. Geographic and ideologic priorities are changing and a new, more global strategy—and thus one that to a certain extent threatens the interests of many world powers—is taking shape.³ China continues to adhere to its three key interests: maintaining internal political stability; ensuring security, territorial integrity and national unity; and maintaining stable economic and social development. However, on the rebound of the recent financial and economic crisis China not only proved the viability and effectiveness of its economic model, but was able to emerge from the crisis with a clear advantage.

The PRC has become more active in putting forth its own criteria for responsible behavior that can be discerned in practically all areas of Chinese foreign policy – in economic interaction with the United States and the European Union; in exchange rates; in energized economic diplomacy, especially in the ASEAN area, the Asian-Pacific region and other regions of the world (Africa, Middle East, Latin America); and in an active energy-supply policy (the largest energy contract in history recently signed with Russia). Other areas include building its military, an ambitious space program, and the expansion of Chinese cultural and humanitarian presence in the world and in various territorial disputes around the perimeter of its territory.

The PRC's strategic thinking and its foreign policy priorities have undergone a number of changes that can be observed in various areas and quite naturally elicit some concern among world powers, including Russia.

First, the leaders of the PRC have begun to perceive the concept of security in a more comprehensive context.

³ Wang Jisi, "China's Search for a Grand Strategy: A Rising Great Power Finds Its Way," *Foreign Affairs* (March/April 2011), available at <http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/67470/wang-jisi/chinas-search-for-a-grand-strategy>.

Second, China has begun to demonstrate a greater interest in multilateral interaction to address some issues, thereby relegating its previous focus on bilateral cooperation to the back burner.

Third, the PRC is displaying a growing understanding of the need to transform China's economic development component.

Fourth, current changes also have to do with Chinese values. Realizing that China differs from many countries in terms of its political structure and ideology, the Chinese leadership nonetheless is expressing the readiness to spread its "soft power" by cooperating with other countries on the basis of common interests and values.

Fifth, China has begun to vigorously expand the geographical aspect of its presence in the world.

And finally, sixth, the PRC has boosted its militarization and begun to take a more aggressive position militarily.

For a more detailed and systematic analysis of assessments of the current transformation of the PRC's foreign policy available in Russia, one should look at discussions of this issue in three dimensions: political, academic and social.

The Russian Political Elite's View

The Kremlin's Position

During the past 15 years Russian foreign policy with respect to the PRC has undergone definite changes. Realizing the importance of changes underway in the Asia-Pacific Region, Russian leaders have begun to gradually "turn" toward the East and regard China as its close ally and main strategic partner in a wide range of global affairs. The Russian establishment has always demonstrated a certain unity of positions in the context of pursuing a foreign policy course in relation to China. Accordingly, the formation of Moscow's strategic vector toward Beijing during first and second decades of the 21st century can be easily traced based on public addresses and publications by the country's leaders.

By all indications, V. V. Putin, having only just started his first official presidential term in 2000, was clearly cognizant of the entire potential and necessity of developing relations with China.

In an opinion piece back in November 2000, V. Putin stated the Russian priorities and interests in the Asia-Pacific Region. At that time, according to him, Russia and China were confidently maintaining a "course toward building an equal and trusting partnership" that became "an important factor in maintaining global stability."⁴ These principles and a determination to develop a strategic partnership with China were also formalized in the Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation of 2000,⁵ and then confirmed in revised editions in 2008 and 2013.

⁴ Vladimir Putin, "Russia: New Eastern Perspectives," official site of the President of Russia, 9 November 2000, available at <http://kremlin.ru/transcripts/21132> (in Russian).

⁵ *RF foreign policy concept 2000. Foreign policy and the security of contemporary Russia. 1991-2002*, Volume 4 (Moscow, 2002), 109-112.; *Russian Federation foreign policy concept* (15 July 2008), official website of the President of Russia, available at <http://kremlin.ru/acts/>

In 2001 the Russian-Chinese Friendship and Cooperation Treaty was signed,⁶ which contained a statement of the parties' commitment to "develop relations of equal and trusting partnership aimed at strategic cooperation in the 21st century." This wording first appeared back in April 1996 in the Russia-China Joint Declaration,⁷ signed during a visit to the PRC by Russian President B. Yeltsin. The Treaty's provisions were confirmed and developed in ensuing joint documents, including the Declarations on Foreign Policy Matters of 1 June 2005 and 23 May 2008.⁸ A document signed during the Sino-Russian summit in Beijing in March 2006 provided a more emphatic formula for Russia-China cooperation as a relationship of "mutual support and mutual preferential treatment." And it was stressed that the parties would pursue a stronger course "toward coordination and deepening of strategic cooperation in foreign policy matters with the objective of creating a propitious international environment."⁹

In one form or another, the phrase "strategic partnership" has in recent years been heard repeatedly at numerous meetings of the two countries' leaders. Although the meaning of the very concept of partnership is somewhat fuzzy, the idea (although never deciphered in detail from the beginning) has proven to be very productive. Time, common interests and challenges Russia and China have faced in recent years on the international scene have imbued it with specific content.

The year 2004 was declared the Year of Friendship between Russian and Chinese Youth. In 2005, a treaty to settle border disputes between the two countries was ratified. The year 2006 became the Year of Russia in China and 2007 the Year of China in Russia. Military anti-terror exercises of unprecedented scale in which Shanghai Cooperation Organization countries participated were held in 2005 and 2007 in China and Russia, respectively. 2009 was the Year of the Russian Language in China, and 2010 the Year of the Chinese Language in Russia. Also, 2009 saw the adoption of the Program of Coop-

785; *Russian Federation foreign policy concept* (12 February 2013), official website of the Russian Federation Ministry of Foreign Affairs, available at http://www.mid.ru/brp_4.nsf/0/6D84DDEDEDBF7DA644257B160051BF7F.

⁶ *Treaty on Good Neighborliness, Friendship and Cooperation between the Russian Federation and the People's Republic of China*, signed on 16 July 2001 in Moscow by President V.V. Putin of the Russian Federation and Premier Jiang Zemin of the People's Republic of China, available at <http://archive.kremlin.ru/events/articles/2001/07/142467/142465.shtml>.

⁷ "Joint Sino-Russian Declaration," signed in Beijing on 25 April 1996 by President B.N. Yeltsin of Russia and Chairman Jiang Zemin of the PRC, in *Collection of Sino-Russian treaties. 1949-1999* (Moscow, 1999), 333-337.

⁸ "Joint Declaration of the Russian Federation and the People's Republic of China on the international order of the XXI century," signed in Moscow on 1 July 2005 by President Vladimir Putin of the Russian Federation and Chairman Hu Jintao (sic) of the PRC, available at <http://archive.kremlin.ru/events/articles/2005/06/90767/153816.shtml>; "Joint Declaration of the Russian Federation and the People's Republic of China on major international issues," 23 May 2008, available at http://news.kremlin.ru/ref_notes/240.

⁹ "Joint Declaration of the Russian Federation and the People's Republic of China," signed by President Vladimir Putin and Chairman (sic) Hu Jintao of the PRC on 21 March 2006 in Beijing, quote from: *Problems of the Far East* 3 (2006), p. 8.

eration between the Far East and Eastern Siberia Districts of the Russian Federation and the Northeast region of the PRC through 2018. The year 2012 was the Year of Russian Tourism in China, and 2013 the Year of Chinese Tourism in Russia.

Since 2000, the heads of state of Russia and the PRC, as well as representatives of higher governmental structures, have held annual meetings. For example, one could calculate that from December 2002 through March 2012 the presidents of Russia and chairmen of the PRC held about 40 personal meetings (counting discussions on the sidelines of various forums) – an average of four meetings per year.¹⁰

Such intensified contacts and connections are fully consistent with the obvious and steady rapprochement between Russia and China in recent years, despite all the admonitions and talk of a potential “Chinese” threat for Russia. For example, in a 2008 interview with Chinese media¹¹ while he was still president, Dmitry Medvedev noted the dynamic and energetic development of the Chinese economy and stressed that Russia “is observing its development with great interest and enthusiasm.” Moreover, according to him, this phenomenon holds “a definite incentive” and “plus for development,” since it promotes the development of competitive production capacities and the creation of products of a higher technological quality and economic and technical standards” in the Russian economy itself. In his opinion, in the context of Russian and Chinese strategic cooperation the 21st century will be “a century of high-tech cooperation” (in space, in high tech and nanotechnologies, in shipbuilding, and in automobile manufacturing), which is greatly needed for the further growth of the two economies.

In September 2010, when he was the prime minister, Vladimir Putin denied the existence of a threat of that sort from the PRC and said he believed that “rumors that China’s million-strong army would one day occupy vast areas of our Far East are greatly exaggerated.”¹² In his opinion, “China is not a threat to Russia’s security” and does not possess “sufficient resources required to begin immigration to the Far East.” The president considers development of the Far East region and Eastern Siberia a priority, and he would like to expand cooperation with China even further.

¹⁰ S.V. Uyanaev, “RF and PRC cooperation on international issues: Content and accents of its ‘new phase,’” in *China in World and Regional Politics. History and the Modern Era*, Issue XVII: annual publication, editor-in-chief and compiler E.I. Safronova (Moscow: IDV Russian Academy of Sciences, 2012), p. 19, available at http://www.ifes-ras.ru/attaches/books__texts/kitmir3_08_2.pdf.

¹¹ Interview in Chinese mass media: Xinhua News Agency, People’s Daily newspaper and Central Television of China, 22 May 2008, official website of the President of Russia, available at <http://kremlin.ru/transcripts/178>.

¹² “Putin denies the existence of a so-called ‘Chinese threat,’” *China News*, 7 September 2010, translated on the *inosmi.ru* portal (8 September 2010), available at <http://inosmi.ru/foreast/20100908/162769348.html>.

In October 2011 Vladimir Vladimirovich gave an interview to three Russian channels (“One,” “Russia,” “NTV”),¹³ where he also touched upon the issue of Russia-China relations. He stated that he did not see China as a source of a threat, but as a reliable strategic partner that is demonstrating the readiness and willingness to join with Russia in building “friendly, good-neighborly relations and seeking compromise on what would seem to be the most difficult issues.” Premier Putin went on to stress that in the “main struggle for world leadership” on a global scale Russia “does not intend to contest with China,” since it (China) has other competitors.

In February 2012 Vladimir Putin published in “Moskovskiye Novosti” [Moscow News] a landmark election campaign article with the characteristic title “Russia and a Changing World,”¹⁴ in which he outlines his vision of contemporary international relations, Russia’s place in the world, and its foreign policy priorities. An entire section was devoted to enhancing the role of the Asia-Pacific Region in the world and to the process of the “rise” of China. Moreover, passages on Russia-Europe and Russia-U.S. relations followed only somewhat later. Calling China “a most important center of the global economy,” Putin also noted the “increase in cumulative might of the PRC, including the ability to project power in various countries.” In light of numerous discussions and issues in recent years in the Western and Russian academic communities surrounding the threats and challenges that the phenomenon of China’s “rise” poses for Russia and the world, Putin in his article asked an acute and burning question: how is Russia to “conduct itself in consideration of the dynamically strengthening Chinese factor?” He amplified his reply in the following three points.

First, in Vladimir Putin’s opinion, the “growth of the Chinese economy is by no means a threat, but a challenge that comes laden with tremendous potential for business cooperation, a chance to catch the “Chinese wind” in the “sail” of the Russian economy. Moreover, in this context it behooves Russia and China “to more actively build cooperative links by integrating technological and production capabilities of both countries,” and to engage Chinese potential for the development and economic rise of Siberia and the Far East.

Second, in Putin’s opinion, China’s behavior on the world stage does not evince any claims to dominance. China has indeed begun to pursue a more confident and active foreign policy. Russia welcomes this, because Beijing shares its vision of an “emerging world order based on equal rights.” Moreover, the two countries need to continue supporting one another on the world stage and should address many regional and international problems together by bringing to bear all possible bilateral and multilateral mechanisms (UN, BRICS countries, SCO, G-20, etc.).

And, third, a solid and legally executed mechanism of bilateral links has been built between Russia and China, and all major political issues, including the border issue,

¹³ Full text of Putin interview on Russian TV channels, *RIA Novosti*, 17 October 2011, available at <http://ria.ru/politics/20111017/462204254.html>.

¹⁴ Vladimir V. Putin, “Russia and a changing world,” *Moskovkiye novosti* (Moscow News), 27 February 2012, available at <http://www.mn.ru/politics/20120227/312306749.html>.

have been resolved. The leaders of the two countries have achieved “a historically high level of trust,” which enables them to “act in the spirit of real partnership, based on pragmatism and consideration of mutual interests.”

While presenting the positive aspects of Russia-China cooperation and the phenomenon of the China’s “rise” in detail, Putin did not fail to mention the problems that nonetheless exist between the two countries – incongruity of commercial interests in some third countries, an evolving commodity circulation structure, a low level of mutual investments, and the migration issue. However, even with the existence of certain thorny issues in bilateral cooperation, this model of Russia-China relations is quite promising. Vladimir Putin’s main underlying idea comes down to this: “Russia needs a prosperous and stable China, and China, in turn, needs a strong and successful Russia.”

In ensuing publications and interviews both in Russian and Chinese media Vladimir Putin frequently touched upon the nature and essence of Russia-China relations, emphasizing their depth, sustainability and intrinsically high degree of trust and robustness.¹⁵ Moreover, the president always brings up and analyzes such important aspects of bilateral cooperation as investment cooperation¹⁶ and high tech,¹⁷ military,¹⁸ energy¹⁹ and other areas of cooperation. In addition, in connection with recent events in Ukraine and Crimea becoming part of Russia it is especially worthwhile to note the unity of positions Moscow and Beijing demonstrated during the crisis. In that connection, speaking at the Kremlin in 2014 before deputies of the State Duma, members of the Council of the Federation, leaders of the regions of Russia and representatives of civil society, Vladimir Putin expressed appreciation specifically to the people and leaders of China for viewing the current situation “in all its historical and political fullness.”²⁰

Summing up the Russian establishment’s position on the phenomenon of China’s unrelenting “rise” and the question of cooperation with the Asian giant, it’s worthwhile remembering a comment by President Putin expressed during an interview with Russian

¹⁵ See, for example: Vladimir V. Putin, “Russia and China: New Horizons of Cooperation,” *People’s Daily*, 5 June 2012, published on the official website of the President of Russia, available at <http://www.kremlin.ru/transcripts/15547> (in Russian).

¹⁶ See, for example: Vladimir Putin press conference, 20 December 2012, official website of the President of Russia, available at <http://kremlin.ru/transcripts/17173> (in Russian); Interview on Russian and foreign mass media, 17 January 2014, available at <http://www.kremlin.ru/news/20080> (in Russian).

¹⁷ See, for example: Vladimir Putin press conference (19 December 2013), *official website of the President of Russia*; available at <http://kremlin.ru/transcripts/19859>.

¹⁸ See, for example: “Direct line to Vladimir Putin,” 17 April 2014, official website of the President of Russia, available at <http://www.kremlin.ru/transcripts/20796> (in Russian).

¹⁹ See, for example: “Meeting with directors of world information agencies,” 24 May 2014, official website of the President of Russia, available at <http://www.kremlin.ru/news/21090> (in Russian).

²⁰ Address by the President of the Russian Federation, 18 March 2014, official website of the President of Russia, available at <http://kremlin.ru/news/20603> (in Russian).

and foreign media in January 2014 just ahead of the Olympics in Sochi.²¹ The president noted the following: “When such a potentially powerful country as China begins to demonstrate rapid growth rates, it becomes a real competitor in world politics and in world markets,” which in his opinion leads to the triggering of mechanisms to deter that growth. Wishing to describe the Western attitude to the East and to China in particular, he quoted a well-known phrase by Napoleon: “China is sleeping, and may God grant that she continues to sleep.” However, China has wakened, and in this politician’s opinion the surest option for developing relations with such a large, potentially powerful and great country is “to seek joint interests, not deterrence.”

Communist Party of the Russian Federation (CPRF)

In contrast to the ruling party United Russia, whose members are the prevailing authorities and leading business figures of Russia, a different wing of the political sphere is represented by the Communist Party, whose position on the “rise” of China largely coincides with the official one.

It can be said that Russian communists are coming out even more strongly than other political forces in the country for deepening Russia’s and China’s bilateral relations and even cite the Asian neighbor’s path of development as an example for the current Russian authorities. For instance, in the opinion of G.A. Zyuganov, Chairman of the Central Committee of the CPRF and leader of the CPRF faction in the Russian State Duma, the main formula for China’s success is its successful adaptation of socialism with a Chinese accent to current realities. The key components to this success lie in the use of thousands of years of traditions of Confucianism; in the combination of state-owned assets at the command points of the economy and market mechanisms; in shrewd personnel policy and implementation of highly advanced technologies; and, most importantly, in a long-range approach to one’s own development. The Chinese leadership is also not forgetting to address a number of internal problems accompanying such rapid development of the country (the existence of poor and wealthy regions, stratification of the society, the inter-ethnic problem, the environment, lack of energy resources, the danger of increased corruption, etc.)²² In Zyuganov’s opinion, China has doggedly and consistently carried out reforms for 30 years, which ultimately has enabled it to achieve such fantastic results.

Touching directly upon China’s *economic development*, the communist party leader notes its precipitous nature and the effectiveness of its leaders’ economic course. Genady Zyuganov does not agree with Western analysts who predict an imminent decline in development and the collapse of the Chinese economy. In his view, the PRC authori-

²¹ Interview in Russian and foreign media, 17 January 2014, official website of the President of Russia, available at <http://www.kremlin.ru/news/20080> (in Russian).

²² V. Tetekin, “China is surging forward: G.A. Zyuganov on his trip to the PRC,” interview, *Sovyetskaya Rossiya* (Soviet Russia), 29 January 2008, available at <http://www.sovross.ru/modules.php?name=News&file=article&sid=2439> (in Russian).

ties “are closely monitoring movement along a collectively chosen path,”²³ soberly assessing existing problems and skillfully addressing them. This also applies to the intensification of the explosive situation within China itself (the problem of Taiwan, Tibet, the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region, and so forth) and beyond its borders (disputes in the South China Sea, etc.). The leadership of the PRC is demonstrating an understanding of these problems, is taking a number of “very energetic measures” to stabilize the situation and is pursuing a well-reasoned foreign policy in all areas. For example, in a meeting with correspondents from the Chinese edition of *The People’s Daily* and representatives of the Russian-Asian Union of Industrialists and Entrepreneurs, Gennady Zyuganov described the successes of today’s China as follows: “The Heavenly Empire today is taking long strides and looking far ahead.”²⁴ The political leader often draws special attention to China’s experience in surmounting the financial and economic crisis of the late 2000’s. In his opinion, “China was the locomotive that pulled other countries out of a serious crisis”²⁵ and plays an “exceptionally positive role.” Moreover, he believes China is already a leading world power.²⁶

Analyzing the current state of *Russia-China relations*, Gennady Zyuganov notes the “atrocious” structure of trade between countries, the existence of a substantial deficit in favor of the PRC, and a number of other serious problems. In assessing the prospects for the development of bilateral relations between the two countries, the CPRF leader especially stresses the fact that Russia is a Eurasian country. Accordingly, it must look both to the West and to the East. However, in his opinion the current priority should be the East, since in the 21st century it is the Asia-Pacific Region where the most important events driving the future configuration of the entire global system will be occurring. He sees China as being the key to Asia. For that reason it’s necessary to learn not just to listen to, but to hear our Asian partners.

Speaking directly to the *lessons* Russia could theoretically learn from China’s current dynamic “ascendance,” the CPRF leader places special emphasis on the effectiveness of the present Chinese model: “a combination of fundamental principles of socialism, national particularities and foreign experience.”²⁷ In his opinion, the time has come for

²³ Quote from: “G.A. Zyuganov in ‘Pravda’: China is the key to a new civilization,” official website of the Communist Party of the Russian Federation, 28 May 2008, available at <http://kprf.ru/international/79627.html> (in Russian).

²⁴ “G.A. Zyuganov: China is taking long strides and looking far ahead,” official website of the Communist Party of the Russian Federation, 7 November 2012, available at <http://kprf.ru/international/112188.html> (in Russian).

²⁵ Quote from: “Chairman G.A. Zyuganov of the CPRF CC: “China is the locomotive that is pulling other countries out of the economic crisis,”” *People’s Daily Online*, 15 November 2012, available at <http://russian.people.com.cn/95197/8021339.html> (in Russian).

²⁶ “G.A. Zyuganov – Russia-24: The CPRF will insist on forming a government of national interests,” official website of the Communist Party of the Russian Federation (CPRF), 12 January 2014, available at <http://kprf.ru/party-live/cknews/127040.html> (in Russian).

²⁷ Quote from: “G.A. Zyuganov in ‘Pravda’: Reforms in China are working. In Russia they are only being talked about,” official website of the CPRF, 1 February 2008, available at <http://kprf.ru/international/54651.html> (in Russian).

Russia to learn from China, just as China once learned from the USSR. The Chinese “reformers’ success scheme” is highly effective and represents an amalgam of the ideas of socialism, the Chinese national character, Confucianism, a love of labor and learning, respect for authority and a focus on the latest technologies. If this outline for Chinese success were to be combined with experience gained during the Soviet era “the result would be a unique phenomenon on a global scale.”²⁸ In Gennady Zyuganov’s view, China does not intend to gain unilateral benefits in its relations with Russia and does not view Russia solely as a source of raw materials.

Liberal Democratic Party of Russia (LDPR)

Another wing of the Russian political system is represented by the LDPR party, headed by one of the more influential, yet scandal-plagued Russian politician – V.V. Zhirinovsky. A positive assessment of China’s development and the prospects for Russia-China relations—although with some elements of alarmism—can be discerned in the rhetoric of this political alliance.

The party’s official foreign policy program²⁹ stresses that China today is a “new center of world production and a leader of the “resource billion” camp of countries and may become Russia’s strategic partner. At the same time it notes that China, being a nuclear power with a population of over one billion, “has the potential of being a hypothetical threat for Russia.” In this party leader’s opinion, military parity, given the numerical strength of the respective armed forces, is impossible for purely objective demographic reasons. In this connection, in order for it to provide for its own security, Russia will have to surpass its Asian neighbor in nuclear weapons and modern armaments. The party proposes to pursue toward China a so-called policy of “vigilant amicability,” the main postulates of which are: “to act openly, honestly and transparently; develop and strengthen economic ties; enter into sensible political and economic alliances;” and “not to forget to consolidate Russia’s positions in the entire Far East region.” In this context it is also suggested to concentrate on developing the Far East region, move to a policy of “forcing investments (where China would be compelled to build enterprises for advanced processing of Russian raw materials on Russian territory), and to update Russia’s defensive doctrine by identifying the “maximum scale of a hypothetical military threat” that China may create in the event of “unforeseen changes in its political course or the international power balance.” Moreover, it is suggested to formulate a “range of measures aimed at maintaining Russia-China power parity.”

That being said, such alarmist themes are virtually nonexistent in the public statements of the party leader himself and of his party cohorts. Most public statements note the fast moving and multidirectional “rise” of the PRC and the threat the Asian giant

²⁸ Quote from: “Interview with G.A. Zyuganov for the newspaper Pravda on his trip to China,” available at <http://kprf.ru/international/83089.html> (in Russian).

²⁹ “The Liberal Democratic Party Program (LDPR) Program: Foreign Policy,” official website of the LDPR, program as of 31 July 2014, available at http://ldpr.ru/party/Program_LDPR/Foreign_policy (in Russian).

poses for the US, being its “main enemy.”³⁰ In this context the party representatives often regard the phenomenon of China in the popular format of a strategic triangle, where Russia is afforded a place “between the hammer and the anvil.” Vladimir Zhirinovskiy’s opinion is that Russia, as a historically Eurasian power, will always have to cooperate with both the West and the East. As one of the party’s deputies in the State Duma noted, “history itself is turning Russia to the East.”³¹ Meanwhile, the US is carefully observing how cooperation between Russia and China is being structured, hoping they will clash in the near future. In this situation China and Russia have a good chance of “breaking this deadly scenario,”³² for which purpose Russia-China cooperation must become as active as possible at the present stage.

On the whole, the LDPR is not inclined to view China as a direct threat to Russia and its interests. For this political wing the greatest concern in the context of the Chinese “rise” is most likely prompted by the aggravated migration problem³³ and the alarm it generates in Siberia and the Far East.³⁴

A Just Russia

This party’s position with respect to China and its bilateral relations with Russia is practically identical to that expressed by the country’s president and by representatives of other Russian political parties (primarily CPRF). Representatives of the A Just Russia party regularly meet with delegations from China and travel there to arrange inter-party and inter-parliamentary cooperation between the two countries.

All speeches by party members note the significance and depth of Russia-China cooperation, the similarity of their positions on key international issues, and the prospects for future development. For instance, one party representative believes Russia is historically a European-Asian country and is today “slowly but consistently” turning to the

³⁰ “Vladimir Zhirinovskiy on current events in Russia and the world, “Russia-24” Television channel, “Interview” program, 28 February 2011,” official website of the LDPR, 31 March 2011, available at http://ldpr.ru/leader/The_leader_in_media/Vladimir_Zhirinovskiy_about_current_events_in_Russia_and_the_world_channel_Russia24_program_interview_28_02_11 (in Russian).

³¹ Speech by M.V. Degtyarev at the plenary session on the situation in Ukraine, 20 May 2014, available at http://ldpr.ru/ldpr_talks/deputys_word/speech_at_the_plenary_session_of_20_may_2014_on_the_situation_in_ukraine (in Russian).

³² “Vladimir Zhirinovskiy: We need a Far East boom,” official website of the Russia-Asia Union of Industrialists and Entrepreneurs, 21 February 2013, available at http://raspp.ru/novosti/eurasia-news/vladimir_zhirinovskij_nam_nuzhen_dalnevostochnyj_bum (in Russian).

³³ “Where is control over Chinese farms?,” official website of the LDPR, 6 June 2013, available at http://ldpr.ru/events/Where_control_over_Chinese_farms (in Russian).

³⁴ *23 steps to rebirth. LDPR proposals on Far East development* (Moscow: LDPR publication, 2014), p.16, official website of the LDPR, available at http://ldpr.ru/static/uploads/8abfd97d73_DV_2014_int.pdf (in Russian).

East.³⁵ Moreover, this party representative believes, “the Russia-China strategic partnership is one of the country’s foreign policy priorities” and Russia is ready to “continue efforts to deepen mutually advantageous cooperation in all areas.”³⁶

The need to intensify cooperation in the Far East in the area of investment and technology is especially emphasized. Also of note is the importance of the “Program of Cooperation between the Far East and Eastern Siberian Districts of the Russian Federation and the Northeast Region of the People’s Republic of China for 2009-2018,” which has been approved by both countries’ heads of state. However, the party also expresses some concern about the evolving situation in the Far East. For example, according to a party deputy in the State Duma, “those living in the Far East should not feel like members of Japanese colonies or Chinese provinces.”³⁷ In this connection a number of measures aimed at economically developing the Far East and improving the living conditions for Russian citizens there are proposed. In particular, detailed discussions are underway in the State Duma regarding measures to attract Russian citizens to work and live in the region.

Despite the situation in the Far East, the representatives of this party generally do not express particular concern about the growing might of China and do not regard it as a threat. In contrast to the previous party under discussion, alarmism is not a component of the party rhetoric of A Just Russia. Their accent is primarily on the bilateral nature of the two countries’ interaction and on their desire for mutually beneficial cooperation on a wide range of regional and international issues.

Civic Platform

In addition to the four main parties that play a key role in Russian politics, a new opposition party, “Civic Platform,” was founded not too long ago. During its thus far brief existence it has already attracted many followers to its ranks. There can be discerned in their foreign policy platform an appreciable degree of alarmism regarding the growing strength of China and its heightened activity in the areas bordering Russia. For example, the party’s founder and former leader Mikhail Prokhorov believes that the current global agenda is driven by competition between two poles (the United States with Latin American and China with the Asian countries) and that a third center of power is yet to be seen. The European Union, Russia or Japan, in his opinion, are unable on their own to rival any of these centers, and therefore it would seem desirable to create a third, alter-

³⁵ “Nikolai Levichev participates in “Security and Cooperation in the South China Sea” conference,” official website of *A Just Russia*, 18 October 2013, available at www.spravedlivo.ru/5_52085.html (in Russian).

³⁶ Quote from “Sergey Mironov: Russia-China partnership is a foreign policy priority for our country,” official website of *A Just Russia*, 19 October 2010, available at http://www.spravedlivo.ru/5_33830.html (in Russian).

³⁷ Quote from: “Will Zhirinovsky’s prescriptions help the Far East? – The opinions of parliamentarians,” *Novosti Federatsii* (Federation News) news agency, 8 November 2013, available at <http://regions.ru/news/2484938> (in Russian).

native pole (consisting of Russia, the EU and Japan) that would unify the Eurasian continent and world as a whole.³⁸

The first version of a draft Russian Foreign Policy Doctrine the party recently presented states that Japan should be Russia's strategic partner in Asia instead of China. In the party's view, "pandering to China changes the Far East and Eastern Siberia into an appendage of the Chinese economy."³⁹ For this reason Russia should "move away from its preferential orientation to China." In the party's view, the eastern vector of Russian policy today is exclusively aimed toward China, and therefore the need for diversification is crucial. The leitmotiv of this vector is a "path toward servility, vassalage, and dependence of the Russian Federation on the People's Republic of China," which harbors the risk of turning into a "colony of the Celestial Empire," and a "raw materials vassal of China."⁴⁰ The representatives of this party repeatedly raise the issue of possible Chinese expansion to the Far East and Siberia. To adequately counter "Chinese expansion" and "protect [Russia] from the creeping Chinese threat"⁴¹ Russia needs to urgently set to developing these regions by providing economic and financial support, creating jobs, developing programs to raise labor productivity in those jobs, and so forth. Thus, it is crucial for Russia today to enhance its ability to compete in the Asian region and in the world as a whole.

There are somewhat varying opinions in the Russian political community regarding the phenomenon of China's rise and the question of how Russia should structure its relations with its Asian neighbor.

In any case, all political groups note the real exacerbation of the situation in the Siberian and Far East Federal Districts associated with China's growing might and its increased level of activity in border territories and in the areas in question. The degree of alarmism expressed in statements on the matter and proposed solutions to the long-pending problem vary, but this issue has taken a prominent place in the Russian foreign policy agenda.

³⁸ See, for example: "Mikhail Prokhorov proposes creating a conglomerate of the RF, Europe and Japan," *Russkaya sluzhba novostey* (Russian News Service), 11 December 2013, available at <http://rusnovosti.ru/news/295357> (in Russian).

³⁹ "Civic Platform sees Russia as a center of power," *Kommersant*, 30 January 2014, available at <http://kommersant.ru/doc/2395655> (in Russian).

⁴⁰ Quote from: "Solomon Ginsburg: Fleeing Europe," official website of Civic Platform, 2 July 2014, available at <https://civilplatform.ru/2277> (in Russian).

⁴¹ Quote from "Mikhail Prokhorov: Stalin has 'arisen' and become a participant in today's political life," official website of *Civic Platform*, 20 July 2013, available at <https://civilplatform.ru/691> (in Russian).

The Russian Academic Community's View

A large part of Russia's academic community regards China as a global power and assesses it based on requirements applied to other countries at its level. The process of China awakening to its status as a world power has been long and difficult. The PRC's coming to this point has been a completely logical result of its steady development and its full-scale entry into world-wide links.

Nonetheless, an obvious duality and inconsistency can be discerned in Beijing's foreign policy course. On the one hand, China seeks to play an ever greater role in the world, and on the other it demonstrates a certain lack of resolve as it takes on international commitments commensurate to its growing strength. Thus, China today declares the need to act in accordance with the powers it possesses. Yet another contradiction can be observed in Beijing's statements that it does not seek to threaten the emerging world order, while at the same time proclaiming the intention to move the international order in a more equitable direction. Another contradiction is in the question of China's priority area of responsibility – does it perceive itself and is it positioning itself as a regional or global power? The answer varies depending on the situation. Overall, most experts believe, the PRC has completed its initial adaptation to its new status and will continue to move along the path of widening its sphere of interests and responsibility depending on a wide range of external—and mostly internal—factors.⁴²

Some specialists also propose certain parameters by which one may judge the potential of a given country to “secure” its status as a great power.⁴³ For example, by some definitions only the United States fully possesses all the parameters. China's data are quite inconsistent. For example, despite its fast-paced economic growth it has thus far been unable to solve the problems of literacy, poverty and lack of development in some territories, and its lagging behind the US and RF in nuclear capability. There is also the problem of providing for its energy needs and uncertainty in the choice of how and to what extent the country will participate in the process of running the world. Despite all this, China demonstrates complete independence in its foreign and domestic policy and firmly opposes any interference in its internal affairs or encroachment on its sovereignty. However, when it has to do with other countries, Beijing shows no such determination and clear policy in its actions.

On the whole, China has forged a reputation as a country where everything always works according to a plan worked out for many years into the future. Deng Xiaoping's behest to “keep a low profile” is no longer applicable; every action Beijing takes on the international scene is at the center of attention and comes under careful scrutiny, followed by either a correct or incorrect interpretation of its motives. One way or another, difficulties or successes in China's development will have enormous consequences for

⁴² For details see: V. Portyakov, *The establishment of China as a responsible global power* (Moscow: Russian Academy of Sciences Publishing House, 2013), p. 240.

⁴³ Tatyana Shakleina, “Great powers and regional sub-systems,” *Mezhdunarodniye procesy* (International Processes) 9:2(26) (May-August 2011), available at <http://www.intertrends.ru/twenty-sixth/004.htm> (in Russian).

the entire world. If the Chinese economy undergoes a decline, it will inevitably pull the entire world economy downward with it. If its dynamic rise continues, tensions will only increase, and Moscow will be faced with the need to take one side or another.⁴⁴

On the whole, proponents of the linear approach dominate among experts engaged in analyzing the prospects of China's development in the coming years. In their view, if China succeeds in resolving all its internal problems and disparities related to its rapid rise in recent years, its power will only grow and its influence spread even further in the future. However, there are other experts who believe that pro-democratic changes are inevitable in China and that they will be a catalyst for the breakup of the country into separate regions, which will inevitably entail a change in the configuration and balance of powers in the region itself and throughout the world.⁴⁵

The Chinese Threat

The topic of the so-called "Chinese threat" occupies a special place in discussions within the Russian academic community. An absolute majority of experts maintain a generally cautious and reserved position on this count. However, there are some representatives of the "alarmist" wing, who view the matter in dramatic terms. In this context, the Russian community of experts is often the scene of quite heated discussions between representatives of the various approaches to China.

In the most striking and extreme form of the alarmist approach, ideas are developed in numerous pessimistic and quite shrill publications and speeches by the director and the most active members of the *Institute for Political and Military Analysis* (IPMA), who regard China as a direct threat to Russia.⁴⁶ It has to do with an all-encompassing threat that includes not only demographic and migration factors (to which the more moderate alarmists limit themselves), but economic, military, energy-related, and many other aspects. For example, in the opinion of the organization's associates, "China is a

⁴⁴ Feodor Lukyanov, "The razor's edge," *Rossijskaya gazeta*, 14 November 2012, available at <http://www.rg.ru/2012/11/14/knr.html> (in Russian).

⁴⁵ Dmitriy Mosyakov, "A new China in the Asia Pacific Region," Russian Council on Foreign Affairs, 29 August 2012, available at http://russiancouncil.ru/inner/?id_4=725#top (in Russian).

⁴⁶ See for example: A. Sharavin, "A third threat" (28 September 2001); "Who should Russia beware of: America or China?" (15 June 2002); "Russia-China: Laughter through tears?!" (13 April 2004); "Russia and China: The prospects of a military and political alliance against the United States" (8 September 2005); "Don't wait until potential threats become real" (5 February 2009); A. Khranchikhin, "Into the embrace of Chinese colonization" (19 April 2002); "Taiwan will be annexed to the PRC" (28 October 2004); "Chinese Invasion: Scenario 2015" (24 March 2005); "China as one of the powers-that-be" (14 December 2006); "China will reach to the Caspian" (9 April 2006); "China and Japan will unleash war for oil and gas" (18 April 2006); "Quiet expansion" (20 April 2006); "The Reds will strike from the rear" (26 April 2006); A. Tsyganok, "Military threats for Russia" (2 February 2005); all available at the site of Institute for Political and Military Analysis <http://www.ipma.ru> (in Russian).

threat to Russia by virtue of its very existence.”⁴⁷ China cannot resolve all the accumulated internal political problems and disparities using only its own internal resources and imports, and therefore is obliged to look outward (mostly to Russia and Central Asia). Thus, seizing Siberia and the Far East is not only a whim but a vital necessity, and therefore this radical wing of the Russian academic community regards the scenario of a Chinese invasion and war with Russia as completely realistic.

In the view of another expert, V. Kashin, an associate of the Center for Analysis of Strategies and Technologies, Russia should not dismiss the possibility of the Chinese threat becoming real. In his article “The Sum of All Fears,”⁴⁸ the author stresses that the Chinese threat, with all its hypothetical nature, is one of the main factors driving Moscow’s foreign policy and force development. Moscow is taking a large number of precautions related to the thus far potential threat to the Russian Federation’s interests and territorial integrity. In particular, this expert believes, an analysis of the process of rearming the Russian Federation’s military forces shows that the Eastern Military District is among the leaders in the acquisition of military equipment, the deployment of troops from the European part of Russia to the Far East is one possible scenario of large-scale Russian maneuvers, and Chinese investments in some significant sectors of the economy are being purposely limited by Moscow. Considering the tentative nature of the existing uncertainty regarding its powerful neighbor, V. Kashin believes Russia would do well to keep open its effective channels of communication and cooperation with the United States and America’s allies in the Asia-Pacific Region in order to activate them should the need arise.

Yet another important aspect of the “rise” of China is its military program, which arouses particular concern in many countries, including Russia. For example, experts say that under the cover of its modern air force China has deployed the most powerful group of ground forces in the world at a distance of several days forced march to the Russian border. Of course, given today’s political and economic realities it is difficult to imagine military aggression by China, although the possibility cannot be fully excluded either. Russia need not succumb to alarmism, but it cannot ignore obvious facts. For that reason it is important to remember that friendship between Russia and China should mean openness and candor, not hidden agendas. Accordingly, some believe that Russia’s Chinese colleagues should explain the presence of a powerful military group not far from the Russian border and remove it.⁴⁹ Furthermore, considering that China has moved from being a major importer of weapons to being an exporter, the Russian military in-

⁴⁷ Quote from: A. Khranchikhin, “Chinese Expansion: Russia will not even notice...,” *Institute for Political and Military Analysis*, 4 November 2004, available at <http://www.ipma.ru/publikazii/geopolitika/541.php> (in Russian).

⁴⁸ Vasilii B. Kashin, “The sum of all fears, Russia in global politics,” *Russia in Global Politics*, 1 May 2013, available at <http://www.globalaffairs.ru/number/Summa-vsekh-strakhov-15961> (in Russian).

⁴⁹ See: Alexey G. Arbatov, “The Asia-Pacific Strategic Panorama is Rapidly Changing,” *Nezavisimoye voennoye obozrenie* (Independent Military Review), 21 February 2013, available at http://nvo.ng.ru/nvo/2014-02-21/1_asia.html (in Russian).

dustry finds itself in considerable distress. Thus Russia is not only losing a significant portion of the Chinese market but is finding a powerful competitor in its Asian neighbor, since the two countries operate in the same geographical and market segments. For this reason some experts anticipate that sooner or later a group of developing countries economically and politically oriented to the PRC will emerge, which will inevitably lead to a worsening situation for Russian arms suppliers, regardless of the quality and level of their products.⁵⁰

Moreover, in the opinion of many experts, in the years since the breakup of the USSR China has succeeded in turning the new Russia into its junior partner. Chinese leaders do not relate to their Russian counterparts as equals, as frequently noted by many Russian political scientists.⁵¹ They also believe Moscow's desire for rapprochement with Beijing will bring the former neither economic or political welfare, nor social progress. An economic orientation to China will be sure to guarantee Russia the status of a subordinate country.⁵²

In his analysis of the aforementioned numerous alarmist themes, Yu. Morozov, a senior researcher at the Center for Strategic Problems of Northeast Asia and the SCO of the *Far East Institute of the Russian Academy of Sciences*, puts forth a number of facts and arguments that cast doubt on them.⁵³ Morozov believes that the problem of overpopulation in China, its deficit of natural resources, its focus on Central Asia, and the demographic pressure and migration problem in the Far East are exaggerated in alarmist publications of this sort. In his opinion, such inflation of the "Chinese threat" is capable of doing appreciable harm to bilateral Russia-China relations and to Russia in general. Such activities strengthen the positions of anti-Russian and anti-Chinese forces, promote an image of China as an enemy, and necessitate spending more energy and resources to dispel this mythical threat that is certainly taking root in the impressionable minds of citizens, especially those in the Far East. Still, he does not exclude the possi-

⁵⁰ For details see: M. Barabanov, V. Kashin, and K. Makienko, *The Defense Industry and Arms Trade of the PRC* (Moscow: Center for Analysis of Strategies and Technologies, Russian Institute of Strategic Studies, 2013), p. 272.

⁵¹ See for example: Vasilii Kolotilov, "'China does not consider Russia an equal.' Why the PRC will not become a military and political ally of Russia to counterbalance Europe and the United States," *Profile*, 20 May 2014, available at <http://www.profile.ru/rossiya/item/82161-kitaj-ne-schitaet-rossiyu-rovnej> and at www.mgimo.ru/news/experts/document251565.phtml (in Russian).

⁵² See for example: Vladislav Inozemtsev, "Russia's Pacific Destiny, Russian Council on International Affairs" (Russian International Affairs Council, 4 November 2013), available at http://russiancouncil.ru/inner/index.php?id_4=2636#top (in Russian); or Ekaterina Kuznetsova and Vladislav Inozemtsev, "Russia's Pacific Destiny," *The American Interest*, 10 October 2013, available at <http://www.the-american-interest.com/articles/2013/10/10/russias-pacific-destiny> (in English).

⁵³ Yuriy Morozov, "What publication of myths about the Chinese threat will lead to," *Central Asia and the Caucasus* 13:2 (2010): 118–129, available at http://www.ifes-ras.ru/attaches/books__texts/morozov_chinese_risk.pdf (in Russian) or at <http://cyberleninka.ru/article/n/k-chemu-mozhet-privesti-publikatsiya-mifov-o-kitayskoy-ugroze> (in Russian).

bility that a buildup of overall strength followed by an expansion of foreign policy interests will lead to a rise in the Beijing's great-power ambitions, which in turn may give rise to an increased threat to Russia's national security. In this expert's opinion, however, such a scenario is possible only in the distant future, and not at all in the near- or mid-term.⁵⁴

It is important to emphasize that the overwhelming majority of Russian experts hold an opinion opposite to that of the extreme alarmists. They focus on the need for further rapprochement and increased cooperation between Russia and China. One such expert is Y. Bazhanov, rector of the Russian Federation Foreign Ministry's Diplomatic Academy. He believes that China is primarily a partner for Russia, and not a threat at all. Bazhanov acknowledges the concern among part of the Russian population living near the Russian-Chinese border, but questions the reality of such a "Chinese threat."⁵⁵ Starting from Beijing's officially postulated statements about a multi-polar balance of power in international relations based on peaceful co-existence, Y. Bazhanov stresses China's desire to strengthen ties to Russia in various spheres and the countries' common approaches to addressing major international problems. In this expert's opinion, this speaks to its "serious interest in a long-term and close strategic partnership with Russia."⁵⁶ It is further noted that Beijing is formally declaring that it has no need for hegemony or expansion, either now or in the future. At the same time he acknowledges the fact that there is a wide range of negative factors that have a bearing on their bilateral relations. This has to do mostly with the sharp increase in the numbers of Chinese citizens living in the Far East, which naturally causes apprehension among the local population regarding "demographic expansion" by their Asian neighbor.

Other factors include cultural differences, disparate interpretations of the territorial issue, imperfections in economic cooperation, geopolitical rivalry, issues of the two countries' internal development, and so forth.⁵⁷ However, in Y. Bazhanov's opinion Russia need not unduly exaggerate the "Chinese threat," as this may cause irritation on China's part and only ruin bilateral relations. Instead, political leaders need to focus on close bilateral cooperation with an emphasis on the complementary nature of the two economies. Moreover, cooperation should be established with other countries as well (in particular with Korea, Japan, and countries of Southeast Asia) with the aim of developing the production capacity of Siberia and the Far East. This will make it possible in the future to increase the flow of Russian citizens into these regions, enhance the overall development of the territories, and so forth. That being said, Y. Bazhanov notes that while geopolitical engagement with China is necessary, cooperation with the United States and the West must not be abandoned either. Such a multi-vector and balanced policy by Moscow will help to prompt Washington and Brussels to affirm multi-polarity on the

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Yevgeny Bazhanov and N. Bazhanova, *A Multipolar World* (Moscow: Vostok-Zapad, 2010): 304-311.

⁵⁶ Yevgeny Bazhanov, "China as a Partner, Not as a Threat," *The Moscow Times*, 25 March 2009, available at <http://www.themoscowtimes.com/opinion/article/tmt/375651.html>.

⁵⁷ For details see: Bazhanov and Bazhanova, *A Multipolar World*, 288-298.

international scene, under which the world powers will cooperate—not compete—with one another.⁵⁸

In 2012 the Valdai International Discussion Club published an analytical report: “Toward the Great Ocean, or the New Globalization of Russia,” which spoke of the need for a clear-cut balance between eastern and western vectors of Russian foreign policy so that one could speak of the “country as a full-fledged modern global power.”⁵⁹ Considering the growing tension between the United States and China, Russia is being given a special place in the emerging power structures of the Asia-Pacific Region. For example, Russia is already playing the “role of the background factor” in the development of the strategic military situation in Asia as a whole and is providing a certain amount of strategic cover for the PRC’s economic leap forward. At the time, experts acknowledged the fact that Russia was not yet capable of playing the role of a heavy-weight balance between the United States (the West) and China, which does not promote stabilization of the situations in the sphere of regional security. Analysts believe that Russia has what it takes to become a full-fledged Euro-Atlantic and Pacific power, but to do so it must even the balance between the eastern and western foreign policy vectors, where the latter is still dominant. A major theme in the report is also the need to develop the Siberian and Far East Federal Districts together with China. Thus, Russia should not close itself off from China, but rather build cooperation with it. For that purpose it is important to determine the competitive advantages of the regions in question, to evaluate the real need of the Chinese market for goods and services from those regions, and to find points of complementarity in the Russian and Chinese markets.⁶⁰ It is important to note that in the experts’ opinion, these regions are becoming “not the rear area but the front – the front of development rather than confrontation.”⁶¹

In a similar report issued in 2014,⁶² analysts again emphasized the existing “demand” for Russia in Asia.⁶³ But they went further, touching upon the discussion of existing threats to Russia from China. For example, in their opinion there is no threat of military, political or demographic sinification of the eastern Russian regions in the short- or mid-term. Moreover, there is no current threat of an influx of Chinese migrants, since, in the analysts’ opinion, the Chinese themselves are uninterested in spending a lot of time in Russian territory. Added to that is the fact that the Central Asian labor force is many times greater than the Chinese labor force. The main problem with Chinese migration is

⁵⁸ For details see: Bazhanov and Bazhanova, *A Multipolar World*, 298-303.

⁵⁹ *Toward the Great Ocean, or the New Globalization of Russia, Analytical report* (Valdai Discussion Club, 5 July 2012), available at http://vid-1.rian.ru/ig/valdai/Toward_great_ocean_rus.pdf (in Russian) and http://vid-1.rian.ru/ig/valdai/Toward_great_ocean_eng.pdf (in English).

⁶⁰ For details see: *Toward the Great Ocean, or the New Globalization of Russia*, 39–51, 62–76.

⁶¹ Quote from *Toward the Great Ocean, or the New Globalization of Russia*, 31.

⁶² *Toward the Great Ocean – 2, or Russia’s Breakthrough to Asia*, Analytical report (Valdai Discussion Club, 27 February 2014), available at http://vid-1.rian.ru/ig/valdai/Twd_Great_Ocean_2_Eng.pdf.

⁶³ For details see: *Toward the Great Ocean – 2, or Russia’s Breakthrough to Asia*, 16–36.

not migration as such, but rather the corrupted system of how labor is brought in, which is ultimately manifested in the appearance of a considerable illegal sector. Also very curious is the analysts' opinion that Russia is of interest to the United States only in the context of China's "rise": on one hand Russia figures as a possible ally and partner in the fight against the common challenge of China's rise, and on the other hand Russia is regarded as a factor in China's substantial increase in strength, which makes it a threat for the United States. America looks at the strengthening of China's economic positions in eastern Russia in the same terms. As in the preceding report, analysts paid most attention to the issue of the development of a wide region of Siberia and the Far East, which is supposed to become the "Russian window to Asia." That window is supposed to become a "key implement for Russia's turn to the East," and a stronger Russian economic presence in the Asia Pacific region may lead to political consolidation in the long term.⁶⁴

M. Titarenko, director of the Far East Institute of the Russian Academy of Sciences, believes that the "threat"—if it even exists—originates not from China, but from the European part of Russia, which does not properly support its Siberian and Far East regions. In his opinion, the problem of demographic expansion by China may arise in the foreseeable future only if central authority weakens and there is a potential threat of disintegration of the country. On the topic of Chinese migration, this expert emphasizes that it is unavoidable in any case and at present it would seem impossible to eliminate the demographic imbalance with China. Russia may make prudent use of external immigration to address the problem of a labor shortage in the region and at the same time begin to more actively stimulate an influx of Russian citizens to these territories. In doing so the existing problem and "threat" can be eliminated and prevented by tying Chinese immigration to the overall strategy for the region's social and economic development and Russia-China relations in general.⁶⁵ In M. Titarenko's opinion this is how those who wish ill to Russia-China cooperation are spreading myths about the "Chinese threat" and Beijing's "demographic expansion."⁶⁶

There is another threat related to the hypothetical triumph of the nationalistic approach in the upper echelons of power in China. This type of threat has been discussed in recent years against the background of increasing numbers of publications of an extreme nationalistic bent in Chinese society. In this case, as some experts believe, Russia may encounter a huge "accelerator state" that wants to actively contend for world dominance in order to "to save the world a la China," seize world resources to prevent their honest distribution among other states, and "restore historic justice" and so forth.⁶⁷ In this scenario, Russia would have to reexamine its entire system of bilateral relations with

⁶⁴ Ibid., 37–70.

⁶⁵ For details see: M.L. Titarenko, *Geopolitical Significance of the Far East. Russia, China and Other Countries of Asia* (Moscow: Landmarks of historical thought, 2008): 199–207, available at http://www.ifes-ras.ru/attaches/books__texts/Titarenko_Dalnii_Vostok.pdf.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 140–141.

⁶⁷ See: Alexandr Lukin, "The "Chinese dream" and the future of Russia," *Russia in global politics*, 19 June 2010, available at <http://www.globalaffairs.ru/number/Kitaiskaya-mechta-ibudushee-Rossii-14857> (in Russian).

Beijing and the basis of its foreign policy in general. However, at the present moment such a scenario seems purely hypothetical.

Does a “Chinese threat” really exist? It would seem that for the most part this phenomenon is farfetched and many of its components sometimes are not real. However, at the level of Russian mass consciousness notions about such a threat remain quite persistent. The fact is China itself is interested in integrating itself into the world economy and the international system as a whole, so Beijing is making a number of efforts to level out all existing misgivings about it. Russian leaders need an extremely positive program of actions toward its eastern neighbor that contains options and proposal for joint development in order to “catch the Chinese wind.” As some experts note, passivity and a melancholic depiction of threats emanating from China and related to its growing overall strength may lead to a future where “Beijing will indeed be setting the agenda in the Asian part of Russia.”⁶⁸ It is in this scenario that economic and political threats may materialize for Moscow. For the time being Russia should heed the Chinese foreign policy model and develop close relations with other players in the region (Japan, South Korea, the ASEAN countries) and in the world (USA, EU, India) in order to maintain and preserve balance. Internal problems related to Chinese immigration and the demographic explosion should not be forgotten either; numerous measures should continue to be implemented to address them.⁶⁹

The China–Russia–USA Strategic Triangle

The question of these three powers interacting within a strategic triangle is of special interest to Russia’s academic community. In general, there are three groups of researchers in the academic community with differing assessments of Russia’s place in such a triangle. The first group believes that Russia should deepen its cooperation with China, considering all the positive factors of bilateral cooperation. The second group insists on strengthening relations with the United States and western countries. And, finally, a third group believes it is necessary for Russia to develop cooperation both with western countries and with China.

Some experts point out unsuccessful past efforts by countries to build a “two against one” triangle. In this connection, neither a Russian-American alliance against the PRC nor a Russian-Chinese alliance against the US can be contemplated. For this reason he believes that even in the long term, all three of the aforementioned points of the triangle will be “three isolated centers of power.”⁷⁰

⁶⁸ Quote from Fedor Lukyanov, “A dangerous wind in the sails,” *Moscow News*, 27 March 2012, available at <http://www.mn.ru/oped/20120327/314277549.html> (in Russian).

⁶⁹ For details see A. Druzyaka, “Chinese migration in Russia’s Far East,” in *China today: Social and economic development, national policy, ethno-psychology* (Moscow: KRASAND, 2011): 107–138.

⁷⁰ Yevgeny Bazhanov, “Tangled Triangle of Russia, China and the U.S.,” *The Moscow Times*, 22 July 2010, available at <http://www.themoscowtimes.com/opinion/article/tmt/410827.html>.

A similar opinion is held by V. Mikheyev, under whose direction a report analyzing trilateral relations with the Asia-Pacific Region was prepared in 2009.⁷¹ The authors concluded that any bilateral relationship within such a triangle is independent and does not require a third participant. In their view, it is very important not to use a third party to bring pressure to bear against another member of the triangle.

Another point of view may be presented by those experts in favor of Moscow is flexibly balancing between West and East, with a slight gravitation toward the former. Although Moscow and Beijing share identical views of the contemporary system of international relations and a dislike of the American wish to remake the world in its own way, there is a flip side to their dislike of Washington's foreign policy. Russia and China clearly signify their refusal to tag along with American policy as "junior partners." Nonetheless they are not creating a full alliance for openly standing up to the United States, but are limiting themselves to building something of a counterweight to Washington, so as not to encounter harsh reprisals. In this regard, Russia is playing the lead public role to resist America policy that both countries find unacceptable, while the PRC remains in the shadows building independent, more even and pragmatic cooperation with the United States. Thus, the experts believe that Beijing is even interested in maintaining the antagonisms between Moscow and Washington, because it fears confronting the United States openly, as this may result in China becoming isolated. For these reasons, Russia should try to find its ways between the "Chinese model" of cooperation with the United States and a fate as its "junior partner."⁷²

Another proponent of this position is Eduard Lozansky, who in one of his publications⁷³ makes a case for the need to build even relationships with both points of the triangle. Maintaining stable links with one side will enable Russia to balance the influence of the third side. Within this framework the future of strategic interaction between Beijing and Moscow will inevitably depend on how relations in the entire China–Russia–USA triangle pan out.

Yet another expert, P. Salin,⁷⁴ speaks of Russia's three possible strategies and prospects. He asserts that Russia is faced with a choice that will in the future determine the logic of its foreign policy behavior. In the first instance, Russia has an opportunity to create a new center of gravity in the Asia-Pacific Region; in the second, it may enter the orbit of interests of either the United States or China; and finally in the third, Russia may use the so-called "pendulum tactic" or "multi-vector policy." The *first scenario* seems

⁷¹ V.B. Amirov and V.V. Miheev, eds., *The Russia–China–USA triangle in the Asia Pacific Region: Factors of uncertainty* (Moscow: IMEMO, Russian Academy of Sciences, 2009): 114, available at <http://www.imemo.ru/files/File/ru/publ/2009/09038.pdf> (in Russian).

⁷² Igor Zevelev and Michail Troitsky, "Russia and China in the mirror of U.S. policy," *Russia in global politics*, 27 October 2010, available at http://www.globalaffairs.ru/number/n_9650 (in Russian).

⁷³ E. Lozansky, *Russia between America and China* (Moscow: International relations, 2007), 288.

⁷⁴ Pavel Salin, "Three paths for Russia in Asia," *Russia in global politics*, 28 October 2012, available at <http://www.globalaffairs.ru/number/Tri-puti-Rossii-v-Azii-15732> (in Russian).

least likely, since Russia is not comparable to China, India or even Indonesia in terms of economic power. Moreover, making this scenario a reality would also require military might to provide for the security of allies, but Russia has a very small presence in the Asia-Pacific Region. Nonetheless, this expert posits that Russia has a chance to remain an independent center of power in the “soft underbelly” of China in Central Asia, control over which will allow Moscow to exert influence on the balance of power in the Asia-Pacific Region overall. However, here Russia encounters the activities of the PRC itself, which is increasingly making its influence felt in a region that is of great importance to it (mostly due to energy resources) and in doing so is causing Moscow’s position to erode. The *second scenario* is that Russia will simply act by inertia, which involves moving from economic to political dependency. In Salin’s view, Beijing is lobbying for just this scenario, since it stands to gain from Russian inertness, and this will allow China to implement its “new Silk Road” project (a Eurasian transcontinental bridge), where Russia would be the main transit country and China the moderator and engine of the whole project. And, finally, the third scenario calls for using the “pendulum” or “seesaw” tactic. In this case, it is assumed that Russia will show Beijing that it has an alternative in Washington and will show Washington that it has an alternative in Beijing. However, this tactic of running from one center to another does not serve Russia’s interests either. The author believes that the paradox in the situation is that Moscow’s strategic goals coincide partly with China’s and partly with those of the United States. For that reason, none of the aforementioned strategies are acceptable for Russia; she needs to act in an ad hoc manner in the Asia-Pacific Region and position herself as a neutral force, which in an environment of growing confrontation could materialize into real economic and geopolitical gains.

It is quite noteworthy that such a position on the need to conduct a multi-vector policy was widely discussed during the First Asia-Pacific Forum, held in late 2011 by the Russian International Affairs Council (RIAC) and the Russian Research Center of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation organization (RRC APEC). The summary report notes that Russia’s interests are not amenable to being fully harmonized with either Chinese or American interests. For that reason Moscow needs to leave itself the discretion and space to maneuver, try to distance itself from outside political actors and if necessary agree to the role of moderator. The report’s authors call this approach a “flexible maneuvering position,” that makes it possible to avoid creating a conclusive alliance with China or the United States, and to become a factor in the drawing together of those countries that do not wish to become hostage to Chinese-American confrontation. The experts believe it is this policy by Moscow, aimed at maintaining balance in the region and not allowing polarization of forces, that may become a key pillar of Russian policy in the Asia-Pacific region.⁷⁵

⁷⁵ *Russia’s Interests in the Asia-Pacific Region: Security and Development. Results of the First Asia-Pacific Forum* (Moscow: Izdatel’stvo “Prospekt,” 2012), p.33, available at http://russiacouncil.ru/common/upload/RIAC_ATR.pdf (in Russian).

This mirrors the thinking of D. Trenin, director of the Moscow Carnegie Center.⁷⁶ In his view, Russian political elites perceive China as a new world power and a pole of the global system, without which it is impossible to address global challenges. As a center of influence and gravity, China distorts the economic and geopolitical space around Russia. For this reason Russia must focus on developing its eastern regions and integrating them more fully with the European part of the country. In this expert's opinion, the Russian leadership is aware that even a peaceful rise of a country of such size as China is fraught with numerous problems and challenges on a regional and global scale.

For Moscow, ensuring peace and good neighborliness with China is a priority task of bilateral relations. For Beijing, neighborly relations with Moscow are also extremely important, as they allow China not to worry about a threat from the north and to focus on addressing internal problems, while putting off an active foreign policy to a later time. Moreover, Moscow's refraining from rapprochement with Washington allows Beijing to keep Russia in the status of a reliable rear guard, thanks to which it need not fear strategic encirclement by the United States. There are many in China who regard the United States as a threat and call for rapprochement with Moscow. This attitude is widespread mostly in military circles and the north eastern regions of the PRC on the Russian border.

Despite China's desire that its dynamic rise not irritate or provoke Russia, Russia is concerned about the growth of Chinese might. Parallel to joint Russian-Chinese exercises it is beefing up its own group of forces that is subordinate to the "East" strategic command. That being said, a buildup of military and naval rivalry between Beijing and Moscow plays into Moscow's hand, as it weakens the chances for collusion between China and the United States and allows Russia greater discretion to maneuver to find balance between two powerful poles. In Trenin's opinion, Russian policy makers lack a clear-cut strategy toward both Beijing and Washington. Some among the ruling elite are not against turning America-China confrontation to their advantage, while others see Beijing as being more of a long-term serious threat for Russia than the United States is. In the context of the latter position, America is a potential ally for Russia in the event China suddenly acts against Russia. But the greatest worries for Russia are caused by the possibility of collusion between Washington and Beijing to the detriment of Moscow. This is why Moscow has always been suspicious of the idea of a G-2. However, in the author's view, Moscow should be more alarmed by a standoff between China and the United States, since in this case Moscow would face a very difficult choice between two more potent centers of power.

Some experts give special emphasis to the fact that within the Russia-USA-China strategic triangle, Russia must be able to resist the temptation to play the Chinese card

⁷⁶ See for example Dmitriy Trenin, *True Friends? How Russia and China Perceive One Another* (Moscow: Center for European Reforms, Moscow Carnegie Center, 2012), p. 74, available at http://carnegieendowment.org/files/CER_TreninRuss_web.pdf (in Russian).

against the American, and the American against the Chinese.⁷⁷ There are no grounds to regard the United States and China as overly dangerous competitors, just as one cannot groundlessly claim irreconcilability of interests within the triangle, despite the existence of certain elements of rivalry. In this context there are interesting prospects for turning bilateral relations along both lines into a trialogue, a desirable yet difficult-to-achieve model.

In the opinion of yet another political scientist and chairman of the presidium of the Council for Foreign and Defense Policy, F. Lukyanov, the status of junior partner in balancing between Washington and Beijing brings not only potential preferential advantages but also serious risks.⁷⁸ If it finds itself in the position of junior partner, but still with the option of free choice, Moscow may derive numerous benefits, but this may require executing a very careful policy. This expert believes that Moscow's position today lies in being an opponent to Washington and drawing in China, but without putting forth any systemic alternative whatever to the emerging world order. Being dependent on China, it would be very problematic for Russia to even out the balance by moving closer to the United States, for two reasons: due to the absence of a requisite level of trust between Moscow and Washington, and due to the excessively strong interconnection between the United States and China. Thus, it is for this very reason that the most reasonable option for Moscow is to distance itself from both participants in a potential showdown. Furthermore, as a "new Asia" takes shape it is urgently important for Russia to rely on a diversified system of relations in the Asia Pacific region and not to equate links to Asia with links to China.⁷⁹ This will only narrow Russia's space to maneuver and will create the threat of asymmetric dependence.⁸⁰

As a result of recent events in Ukraine and Crimea becoming part of Russia, many experts have begun talking of a "divorce" between Russia and the West and an acceleration of the process of Russia turning to the East. It's a correct but somewhat belated decision. The main stage of international relations has for all practical purposes shifted to Asia, which has its own definite "rules of the game" and in which Russia is not the strongest player. As F. Lukyanov notes, China views its place in the world system and analyzes the capabilities of its partners through the PRC–USA–Russia triangle. The importance of each point of the triangle depends on its relations with the other two points. If one of the points loses its connection or wrecks its relations with one of the two other points, it immediately becomes weaker and more subject to the influence of the third

⁷⁷ Vladimir Baranovsky, "Trialogue in the Asia-Pacific Region," *Russian Council on Foreign Affairs*, 17 December 2012, available at http://russiancouncil.ru/blogs/riacmembers/?id_4=264 (in Russian).

⁷⁸ Fedor Lukyanov, "How Russia Can Profit from Confrontation between the US and China," *Forbes*, 19 February 2013, available at <http://www.forbes.ru/mneniya-column/mir/234451-kak-rossii-zarabotat-na-protivostoyanii-ssha-i-kitaya> (in Russian).

⁷⁹ Fedor Lukyanov, "We and the New Asia," *Kommersant Ogonyok*, 11 November 2013, available at <http://www.kommersant.ru/doc/2335761> (in Russian).

⁸⁰ Fedor Lukyanov, "Maneuvering is the most valuable thing," *Rossiskaya gazeta*, 26 September 2012, available at <http://www.rg.ru/2012/09/26/manevr.html> (in Russian).

corner. In this regard, Russia greatly needs to retain the United States as a “way of maintaining equilibrium” with China and “heightening its interest.”⁸¹ In the current political environment Beijing would not want Moscow to suffer defeat, but the prospect of a fight between Moscow and Washington is also not in the PRC’s interests. China is expecting the present conflict to accelerate Russia’s turn to the East and it is ready to adjust its strategy in order to firmly bind together the two countries. In this case, however, Moscow is faced with the need to urgently seek a counterbalance to growing Chinese influence so as not to fall into a dependence on China even more serious than on the United States and Europe.⁸²

Some specialists are expressing yet another viewpoint, according to which the West’s current squeezing out of Russia from its traditional spheres of influence, paralleled by deterrence of Russia and China, will inevitably push Moscow and Beijing toward one another. In a new environment, it is possible and desirable not just to intensify Russia-China cooperation, but even move it to a new qualitative level of a military and political union. This would make it possible to strengthen both countries’ positions on the world arena and to finally dispense with the last remnants of mutual distrust that are hampering the emergence of bilateral relations to a new and higher quality level.⁸³

Indeed, the old adage “every cloud has a silver lining” is quite apropos in this case. However, in turning to the East and coming closer to China Russia must make a maximum effort to maintain its autonomy. For that purpose it must act in three main directions.⁸⁴ First, an all-encompassing Asian strategy must be developed and implemented that would include internal (raising up the Far East) and external aspects (positioning itself in the Asia-Pacific region). Second, Russia’s ties to other important state players in the Asian Pacific arena (Japan, South Korea, India, Vietnam, Singapore, Indonesia and others) must be expanded and diversified. And third, an effort should be made to act as an architect of a new “other” globalization, at least at the level of slogans. This could partially balance out Russia’s economic disparity with China, which still lacks extensive experience as a leader in the sense of independently putting forth ideas of a global nature. Thus, this international situation is opening a new phase in bilateral Russia-China relations and the Asia-Pacific system in general.

⁸¹ Fedor Lukyanov, “Why do we need America?” *Rossiskaya gazeta*, 26 March 2014, available at <http://www.rg.ru/2014/03/26/lukjanov.html> (in Russian).

⁸² Fedor Lukyanov, “The Chinese would not want Russia to suffer defeat,” *Kommersant-FM*, 24 March 2014, available at <http://www.kommersant.ru/doc/2436857> (in Russian).

⁸³ Yuriy Tavrovsky, “Moscow – Beijing: A new strategic axis?,” *Zavtra*, 6 March 2014, available at <http://www.zavtra.ru/content/view/moskva-pekina-novaya-strategicheskaya-os/> and at <http://www.globalaffairs.ru/global-processes/MoskvaPekin--novaya-strategicheskaya-os-16458>.

⁸⁴ Fedor Lukyanov, “A Logical Partnership,” *Rossiskaya gazeta*, 21 May 2014, available at <http://www.rg.ru/2014/05/21/lookianov.html> (in Russian).

The Russian Public's View

The image of any state greatly influences its place and role on the international scene and the perception of a country by the masses beyond its borders directly lays the foundation for building its relationship with the international community. For this reason, when analyzing how a given state relates to its partner it is vitally important to examine the state of its public opinion. Analyzing the dynamic of how attitudes change in one's own society allows leaders to evaluate their foreign policy course with respect to another state.

Over the past decade and a half Russian and foreign organizations have conducted a large number of polls of Russian public opinion connected in one way or another to the subject of China. The results of this research make it possible to track the transformation of the Russian public's attitudes toward China and its "peaceful rise" program.

According to data from a recent poll by the Pew Research Center (see Figure 1), the percentage of Russians demonstrating a generally favorable *attitude toward China* significantly exceeds those expressing a negative attitude. And the results have remained at about the same level for more than 10 years.

In a 2007 poll an absolute majority of Russians (62 %) expressed the opinion that the *Chinese economy* would outstrip the U.S. economy in the future. But 20 % of respondents believed that the U.S. economy would always be stronger than the Chinese.⁸⁵ In

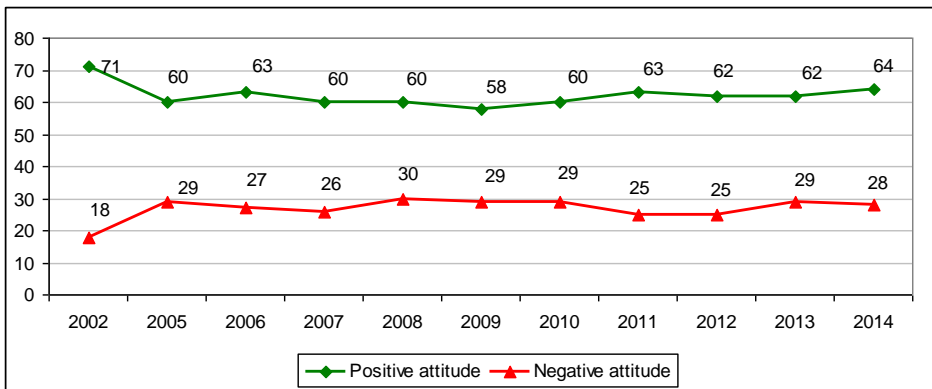


Figure 1: Changes in Attitude toward China by Members of the Russian Public (2002-2014): Generally Favorable and Unfavorable Responses.

Source: Pew Research Center, "Global Opposition to U.S. Surveillance and Drones, but Limited Harm to America's Image," July 2014, p. 63, available at <http://www.pewglobal.org/files/2014/07/2014-07-14-Balance-of-Power.pdf>.

⁸⁵ "World Publics Think China Will Catch Up With the US – and That's Okay" (The Chicago Council on Global Affairs, 25 May 2007), available at http://www.worldpublicopinion.org/pipa/pdf/may07/CCGA+_RiseChina_article.pdf.

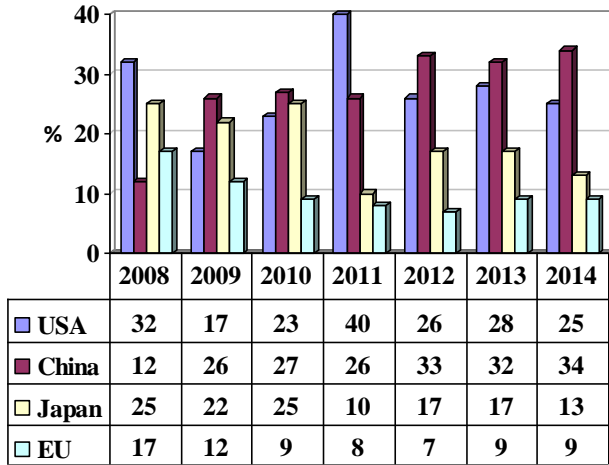


Figure 2: World Economic Leaders (USA, China, Japan, EU): Opinion of Members of the Russian Public (2008-2014).

Source: Pew Research Center, July 2014, “Global Opposition to U.S. Surveillance and Drones, but Limited Harm to America’s Image,” p. 69, available at <http://www.pewglobal.org/files/2014/07/2014-07-14-Balance-of-Power.pdf>.

their current assessments of the present state of the world economy Russians posit that China has already passed up the United States and is the *leading economic power*, holding that position for some years (see Figure 2). Furthermore, in the context of bilateral Russia-China relations, the *growth of the Chinese economy* should be regarded in a positive, rather than negative, light (see Figure 3).

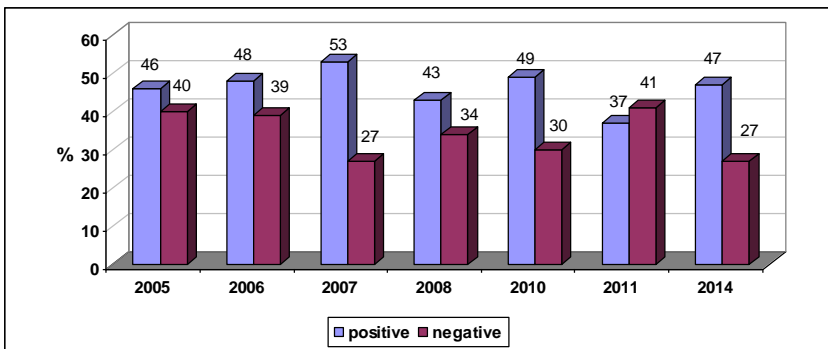


Figure 3: Consequences of Chinese Economic Leadership for Russia: Opinion of Russian Public (2005-2014).

Source: Pew Research Center, *Global Opposition to U.S. Surveillance and Drones, but Limited Harm to America’s Image* (July 2014), p.82, available at <http://www.pewglobal.org/files/2014/07/2014-07-14-Balance-of-Power.pdf>.

Also very telling is the fact that during the recent world financial and economic crisis a relative majority of Russians polled (39 %) believed that the “Chinese way” and the model of moving from a planned to a market economy is more successful than the Russian model.⁸⁶

In terms of the *military rise of the PRC*, the opposite situation is seen. In contrast to the positive assessment of the consequences of an increase in China’s economic might, the overwhelming majority of Russians expressed an exceptionally high degree of concern about the dynamic growth of Chinese military capability. For instance, in 2005 an absolute majority of Russians polled said that the strengthening of Chinese military power should be regarded more negatively (59 %) than positively (19 %). But 9 % believed that everything depends on circumstances, and 3 % said this issue cannot be perceived in a positive or negative light.⁸⁷ Some time later, in 2011, members of the Russian public again expressed their opinion on this question and the results showed that the overall picture was virtually unchanged: an absolute majority—74 %—indicated negative consequences of growing military capacity of the PRC and only 12 % positive.⁸⁸ When asked the same question in another poll, 69 % of the respondents spoke negatively and 10 % positively.⁸⁹ So, for completely understandable reasons having to do with issues of national security, the strengthening of the PRC’s military and political power causes much greater concern than the process of China becoming the largest economic power. Nonetheless, Russians are inclined to approve of joint Russian and Chinese military exercises to a greater degree (52 % “for” and 17 % “against”) than exercises between Russia and NATO (38 % “for” and 20 % “against”).⁹⁰

In the context of China’s dynamic multi-vector development and growing military, political and economic power, polls constantly raise the question of the *status of leading superpower* in the world, with the United States and China being the contenders. As for polls in recent years, the Russian public in the main believes that China has already supplanted or will soon supplant the United States as the leading “superpower” (see Figure 4).

⁸⁶ Russian Public Opinion Research Center (VTsIOM) Press release No. 1326 of 30 September 2009, available at <http://wciom.ru/index.php?id=459&uid=12509> (in Russian).

⁸⁷ 22 Nation Poll Shows China Viewed Positively by Most Countries, 5 March 2005, p. 2, available at http://www.worldpublicopinion.org/pipa/pdf/mar05/China_Mar05_quaire.pdf.

⁸⁸ Pew Research Center, “23-Nation Pew Global Attitudes Survey, U.S. Favorability Ratings Remain Positive, China Seen Overtaking U.S. as Global Superpower,” 13 July 2011, p. 39, available at <http://www.pewglobal.org/files/2011/07/Pew-Global-Attitudes-Balance-of-Power-U.S.-Image-Report-FINAL-July-13-2011.pdf>.

⁸⁹ BBC World Service Poll: “Rising Concern about China’s Increasing Power: Global Poll,” 27 March 2011, p. 12, available at http://www.worldpublicopinion.org/pipa/pdf/mar11/BBC_China_Mar11_rpt.pdf.

⁹⁰ Dmitriy V. Kuznetsov, *China in the Mirror of Public Opinion* (Blagoveshchensk: Izdatel’stvo Barnaul State Pedagogical University Press, 2013), p. 255.

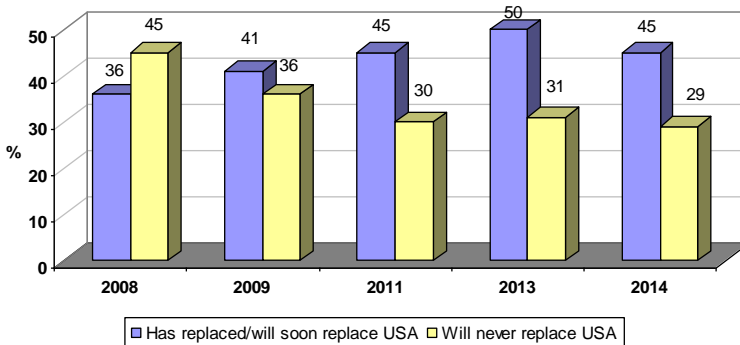


Figure 4: Prospects for Development of China (in the Status of Leading “Superpower”): Opinion of Russian Public (2008-2014).

Source: Pew Research Center, July 2014, “Global Opposition to U.S. Surveillance and Drones, but Limited Harm to America’s Image,” p. 72, available at <http://www.pewglobal.org/files/2014/07/2014-07-14-Balance-of-Power.pdf>.

However, as late as 2007 Russians were expressing an equal level of distrust toward China and the United States in terms of their *responsible behavior in the world*. For example, with respect to China, 14 % of Russian respondents absolutely did not trust China, 42 % did not have much trust, 31 % had a little trust, 4 % trusted China very much, and 10 % had no opinion. For the United States the results were: 31 %, 42 %, 17%, 3 % and 7 %, respectively.⁹¹ That said, the Russian public has rated China’s influence in the world fairly positively for a long time; however, the overall dynamic still seems somewhat unstable (see Figure 5). Since 2005 one sees certain “undulating” patterns of increase and decline of both negative (fluctuating from 3 % to 13 %) and positive indicators (fluctuating from 1 % to 14 %).

Russians also feel that China is displaying a *willingness to cooperate* with other countries on the world scene. In a 2009 poll, for instance, 73 % of Russian participants found that China is ready for cooperation (against 47 % in the U.S.) and 10 % thought the Asian giant was not ready for cooperation (against 27 % in the U.S.).⁹² It is entirely possible that the poll respondents were taking into account the efforts being made at the time by U.S. and Chinese leaders aimed at settling a number of problems and issues on a bilateral level. At the same time, residents of Russia believe that both China and the United States *use the threat of military force* to gain some sort of advantage for themselves – 33 % in China versus 78 % in the United States, while 39 % of Russian respondents stated that China certainly does not use military force for its own mercenary purposes (against 7 % in the United States).

⁹¹ “World Publics Think China Will Catch Up With the US – and That’s Okay.”

⁹² “As Hu Jin Tao, Obama Prepare to Meet, World Public Gives China, US Low Marks on Climate Change,” 11 November 2009, p. 7, available at http://www.worldpublicopinion.org/pipa/pdf/nov09/WPO_China_Nov09_quaire.pdf.

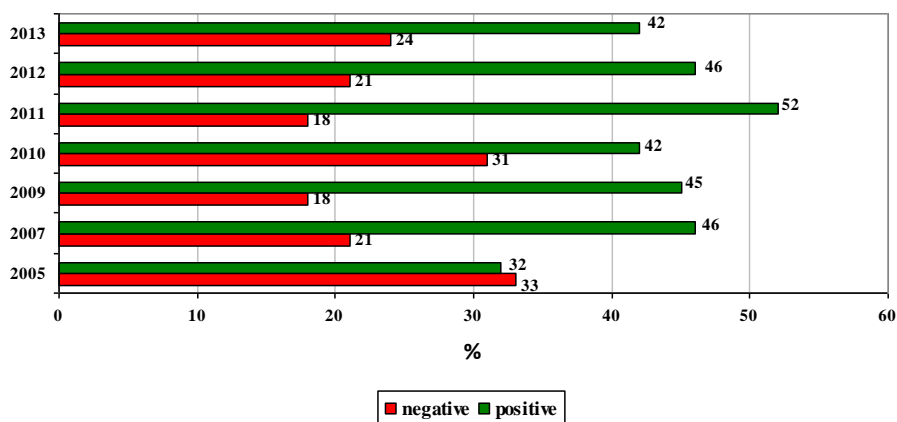


Figure 5: China's Influence in the World: Russian Public Opinion (2005-2013).

Sources: BBC World Service Poll, "Views of China and India Slide While UK's Ratings Climb," May 2013, p. 7, available at <http://www.worldpublicopinion.org/pipa/2013%20Country%20Rating%20Poll.pdf>; "Views of Europe Slide Sharply in Global Poll, While Views of China Improve," May 2012, p. 9, available at http://www.worldpublicopinion.org/pipa/pdf/may12/BBCEvals_May12_rpt.pdf; "Views of US Continue to Improve in 2011 BBC Country Rating Poll," March 2011, p. 9, available at www.worldpublicopinion.org/pipa/pdf/mar11/BBCEvalsUS_Mar11_rpt.pdf; "Global Views of United States Improve While Other Countries Decline," April 2010, p. 7, available at http://www.worldpublicopinion.org/pipa/pipa/pdf/apr10/BBCViews_Apr10_rpt.pdf; "Views of China and Russia Decline in Global Poll," February 2009, p. 7, available at http://www.worldpublicopinion.org/pipa/pdf/feb09/BBCEvals_Feb09_rpt.pdf; "Global Views of USA Improve," April 2008, p. 14, available at http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/shared/bsp/hi/pdfs/02_04_08_globalview.pdf; "Global Poll Finds Iran Viewed Negatively," February 2006, available at http://www.worldpublicopinion.org/pipa/articles/views_on_countriesregions_bt/168.php.

According to a recent poll conducted by the Russian "Public Opinion" Foundation, bilateral *relations* between Russia and China are presently taking shape quite well for the most part (see Table 1).

Table 1

Question: In your opinion, what kind of relations are presently taking shape between Russia and China: good or poor?

	<i>September 2010</i>	<i>April 2014</i>	<i>June 2014</i>
<i>Good</i>	50 %	72 %	76 %
<i>Poor</i>	6 %	3 %	3 %

Source: "Relations with China and the Gas Contract," *Public Opinion Foundation*, 17 June 2014, available at <http://fom.ru/Mir/11555> (in Russian).

Furthermore, the results of public opinion polls over the past decade and a half clearly demonstrate a considerable *improvement in Russia-China relations* in the eyes of the Russian public (see Table 2).

Table 2

Question: In your opinion, over the past year have relations between Russia and China improved, worsened, or remained unchanged?

	<i>September 1999</i>	<i>September 2010</i>	<i>April 2014</i>	<i>June 2014</i>
<i>Improved</i>	34 %	28 %	37 %	59 %
<i>Worsened</i>	5 %	2 %	2 %	1 %
<i>Remain unchanged</i>	29 %	37 %	40 %	23 %

Source: “Relations with China and the Gas Contract,” *Public Opinion Foundation*, 17 June 2014, available at <http://fom.ru/Mir/11555> (in Russian).

Moreover, a majority of Russian poll respondents believe that at the present time China is a state that is *friendly* to Russia, and this conviction is growing stronger from year to year (see Figure 6). At the same time the attitude that China is an unfriendly country is gradually losing ground.

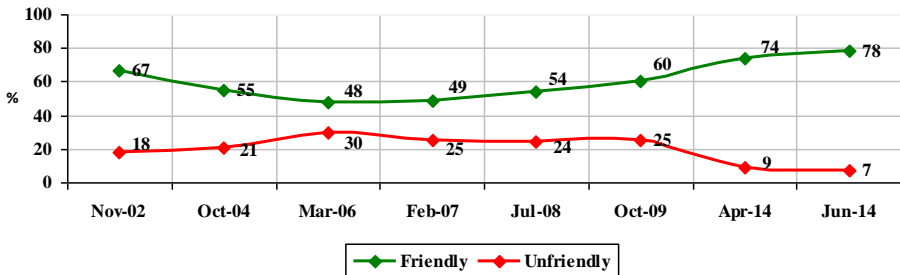


Figure 6: *Question* – In your opinion, is China a country that is friendly or unfriendly with respect to Russia?

Source: “Relations with China and the Gas Contract,” *Public Opinion Foundation*, 17 June 2014, available at <http://fom.ru/Mir/11555> (in Russian).

As for analyzing Russians’ *personal attitude toward the Chinese people*, a marked predominance of positive attitudes over negative can be observed. For example, among the more positive national traits of the Chinese people (38 %), Russians cite industriousness, intellectual excellence, mental alertness, perseverance, a sense of purpose, practicality, and so forth. Among negative traits (8 %) of the Chinese people, Russians most often name cunning, duplicity, insolence, obtrusiveness, overconfidence and so forth.⁹³ Identical results were obtained when residents of Russian regions bordering the PRC

⁹³ For details see Kuznetsov, *China in the Mirror of Public Opinion*, 209-212.

were queried.⁹⁴ However, here it must be taken into account that many notions about China, Chinese culture and the Chinese themselves arise from everyday life and do not always correspond to reality.⁹⁵ Still, it is worthy of note that the Russian and Chinese people express the willingness and desire to learn the best traits of the national character from one another.⁹⁶ Common Russians and regional experts share the opinion that mutual understanding between the two peoples should be developed and nurtured so that the concept of “good neighbor” can take firm root in the mass consciousness and become an important characteristic of both countries.⁹⁷

If we turn to a more detailed and explicit analysis of how Russian public opinion toward China is configured, we can see that it has a number of characteristics and particular features that reflect the specificity of Russians’ attitudes to the nearest Asian partner. For example, in a poll taken in 2001, the first associations Russians had with the word “China” were: “large population,” “Chinese goods,” “a large country,” “a wealthy, happy, developed country” and so forth. Russians expressed similar associations in 2007 and 2009, but in the past few years the PRC has begun to be associated more frequently in the minds of the Russian public with “rapid development of the country and economic advances” and “threat for Russia (seizures of territory, expansion, rivalry).”⁹⁸ It is important to note that those who considered China a threat to Russian interests based their response on such negative aspects of bilateral relations as the danger of territorial expansion and an increased flow of illegal immigrants (22 %), as well as the probability of a military threat (3 %).⁹⁹

But in response to the question of whether the growth of China represents a *threat for the interests of Russia*, most Russians polled believe that their Asian neighbor poses no threat. Although in 2006-2009 the number of those who did regard China as a threat and those who did not was approximately identical (see Figure 7). However, in recent years Russians’ positive attitudes toward China have trended upward.

⁹⁴ For details see T. Alagueva, K. Vasileva, and A. Ostrovksy, “How Chinese and Russians in Contiguous Territories See One Another,” *Problems of the Far East* 4 (2007): 126–134, available at <http://demoscope.ru/weekly/2008/0347/analit01.php> (in Russian).

⁹⁵ See Dmitriy V. Buyarov, “China in the Perspective of Public Opinion,” *Historical, philosophical, political and judicial sciences, cultural studies, and art criticism. Questions of theory and practice* 3 (2009): 47–49, available at <http://www.gramota.net/materials/3/2009/3/10.html> (in Russian).

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ See for example E.N. Danilova, *et al.*, *Russians and Chinese in an Era of Change: A Comparative Study in St. Petersburg and Shanghai at the Beginning of the XXI Century* (Moscow: Logos, 2012), p.452, available at http://www.ino-center.ru/doc/chin_and_rus.pdf (in Russian).

⁹⁸ For details see Kuznetsov, *China in the Mirror of Public Opinion*, 195–198.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 222–223.

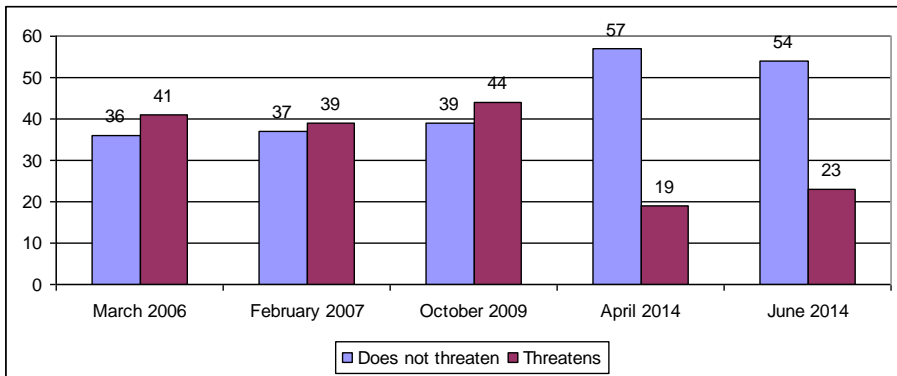


Figure 7: *Question* – In your opinion, does the growing strength of China threaten Russia or not?

Source: “Relations with China and the Gas Contract,” *Public Opinion Foundation*, 17 June 2014, available at <http://fom.ru/Mir/11555> (in Russian).

Regarding numerous polls of world public opinion taken in recent years, many experts believe that the negative component of the overall image of China arose as a result of the prevalence of ideas about a so-called “*Chinese threat*,” which is taken to mean “the aggregate of negative consequences for various countries of the world to which the dynamic development of the PRC in the late 20th and early 21st century may or may not lead.”¹⁰⁰ In this regard, the authors identify factors that contribute to the natural spreading and reinforcing of these notions at the level of public consciousness. For instance, these factors include the economic development of China, unprecedented in its scale; its burgeoning military might; the fact of human rights violations; the environmental threat; and the stepping up of its space program.¹⁰¹

It is curious that in the context of Russian public opinion the term referring to the “Chinese threat” and “yellow danger” is used directly as a description of the potential threat of Chinese expansion into the Russian regions of Siberia and the Far East. The existence of a common border of several thousand kilometers, a weak economic growth dynamic, a poor demographic situation, and other factors make this vast Russian region a center of gravity for numerous Chinese migrants. Accordingly, Russian public opinion polling organizations focus on just this serious question, and the subject of their research often becomes the inhabitants of the region who are located in direct proximity to the Russian-Chinese border.

However, it must be emphasized that a definite contradiction can be discerned in Russians’ attitude toward China: while not regarding China as an enemy but as a friend to Russia, a fairly large percentage of the Russian public nonetheless believes that a

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 129.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 129–131.

threat does arise from their Chinese neighbor. It is also important to note that concerns about competition and a multidimensional general threat from the PRC are expressed most often by residents of the Siberian and Far East Federal Districts of Russia, which are situated closest to Chinese territory.¹⁰² At the same time, however, it is they who hold that cooperation with China is “most important” for Russia (35 % in the Far East against 20 % in Moscow, with 27% overall in Russia¹⁰³) and that it would be useful for Russia to use the Chinese experience in rapid and successful development (28 % in the Far East against 10 % in Moscow, with 19 % for all of Russia¹⁰⁴).

Polls often raise the topic of the *strengthening of China* and pose the question of what consequences (positive and negative) this phenomenon holds in store for Russia. An absolute majority of Russian respondents (57 %) believe that the strengthening of the PRC is not a threat. However, there are those (19 %) who hold the opposite opinion. And those 19 % who see China as a *threat for Russia* put forth the following arguments to back up their position: 7 % refer to the possibility of the seizure of Russian territory, 4 % have concerns about Chinese populating Russian territories, 2 % see China as a military threat, and 1 % see it as a potential political leader in the world.¹⁰⁵

Migrational and demographic threats from China seem to be the most serious and real for Russians. Rank and file citizens as well as regional experts are concerned about the prospect of Chinese living in the Far East and dismemberment of Far Eastern territories. Some experts believe that mass fears regarding “Chinese expansion” are completely real, but often grow due to a dearth of objective information and a certain measure of xenophobia among the population.¹⁰⁶ Despite the shortage of labor resources in Siberia and the Far East, Russians consider the participation of Chinese companies and workers in the life of this region to be more dangerous than useful.¹⁰⁷ According to Russian public opinion polls, the use of Chinese hired labor is leading to an increase in unemployment and an exacerbation of the criminal situation in the region, not to a rise in labor productivity in Russian businesses.¹⁰⁸ In this connection, a recently conducted poll that

¹⁰² For details see A.G. Larin, *Chinese Migrants in Russia. History and the Present Day* (Moscow: Vostochnaya kniga, 2009), 298–301, available at http://www.ifes-ras.ru/attaches/books_texts/larin_chinese_migrants_in_russia.pdf (in Russian).

¹⁰³ See Larin, *Chinese Migrants in Russia*, 293.

¹⁰⁴ See Larin, *Chinese Migrants in Russia*, 296.

¹⁰⁵ “Relations with China and the Gas Contract,” *Public Opinion Foundation*, 15 April 2014, available at <http://fom.ru/Mir/11460> (in Russian).

¹⁰⁶ See Kuznetsov, *China in the Mirror of Public Opinion*, 224.

¹⁰⁷ VTsIOM press release of 30 July 2001, available at <http://wciom.ru/index.php?id=459&uid=346> (in Russian); VTsIOM press release No. 268 of 15 August 2005, available at <http://wciom.ru/index.php?id=459&uid=1607> (in Russian); VTsIOM press release No. 674 of 16 April 2007, available at <http://wciom.ru/index.php?id=459&uid=4397> (in Russian); VTsIOM press release No. 1326 of 30 September 2009, available at <http://wciom.ru/index.php?id=459&uid=12509> (in Russian).

¹⁰⁸ VTsIOM, “Opinion monitoring: July–September 2007,” p. 83, available at http://wciom.ru/fileadmin/Monitoring/83/s47-84_Journal_Monitoring83.pdf (in Russian).

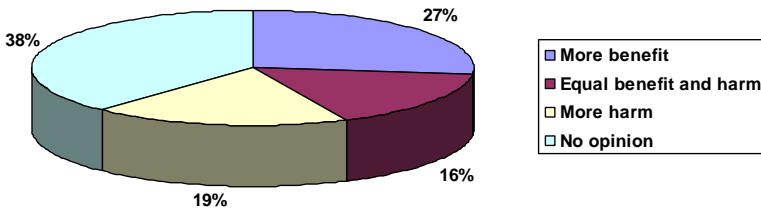


Figure 8: *Question* – The issue of expanded participation of Chinese businesses in the development of the Far East is currently under discussion. Do you think this will bring to the Far East more benefit, more harm, or equal benefit and harm?

Source: “Relations with China and the Gas Contract,” *Public Opinion Foundation*, 17 June 2014, available at <http://fom.ru/Mir/11555> (in Russian).

touched upon the topic of expanded participation by Chinese business in development of the Far East is very revealing (see Figure 8).

The 43 % of the respondents who believe that wider presence of Chinese business in the Far East will bring benefit cited the following potential benefits: development of the Far East, increased investment in the region and the overall economic growth of the territory (16 %); more jobs (5 %); development of industry and agriculture (3 %); development of trade relations (3 %); mutually advantageous cooperation and establishment of friendly relations (3 %); development of the region’s infrastructure (2 %); benefit to Russia (2 %); development of business (1 %) and so forth.¹⁰⁹

The 35 % of the respondents who believe that wider presence of Chinese business in the Far East poses a threat noted the following potential consequences: excessive numbers of Chinese in the Far East (10 %); seizure of Russian territories (7 %); environmental degradation (2 %); excessive competition in business and a weakening of the Russian economy (2 %); plunder of Russian natural resources (2 %); fewer jobs for the local population (2 %); Russia should develop independently (1 %) and so forth.¹¹⁰

So, in the first decade of the 21st century residents of Russia had a negative perception of the expansion of Chinese labor and business into Russia, stressing the potential negative social, economic, demographic and territorial consequences. In their opinion, therein lies the main threat for Russia from China. Undoubtedly, this is largely connected to the complex perception throughout the world of the rapid economic and military rise of China, with its immense population, vigorous expansion of its goods and

¹⁰⁹ “Relations with China and the Gas Contract.”

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

capital into world markets, and accumulated internal disparities and territorial disputes with its Asian neighbors. Against this background the Far East continues to “drop out” of the Russian space, and a decline in production and continuing depopulation are seen. Superimposed on all this is the so-called “demographic pressure” a densely populated China exerts on the sparsely populated Russian Far East, a substantially greater interest by the PRC in opening up and utilizing the raw material wealth of Siberia,¹¹¹ and exacerbation of the migration situation in the regions in question.¹¹² Despite all these factors, however, Russians (including the inhabitants of the Far East and Siberia themselves) are as before inclined to regard China in a mostly positive light.

It is important to understand that the existence in the public consciousness of two views of the phenomenon of the “rise” of the PRC and the future of Russia-China relations—expectations that they will intensify and deepen mixed with unequivocal alarmism—are completely natural and realistic, even though they may seem at first glance to be mutually exclusive. After all, burgeoning bilateral interaction not only does not hinder increased dependence of Russian Siberia and the Far East on China but even creates the premises for it. The reality today is such that the rebirth and rise of the Russian Far East is impossible without cooperation with China, which in turn has an interest in implementing various forms of investment and trade cooperation for purposes of its own development. And judging from a multitude of public opinion polls, Russian citizens understand this.

So despite all the concerns, public opinion polls demonstrate that a positive attitude toward China continues to dominate in Russian society. For most Russians, China today is a friendly country and one of its most important partners in the world arena. Russians have a positive view of the rise in Chinese influence in the world and the growth of Russia-China cooperation on various points of the global agenda. It is also important to note that the overall position in Russian public opinion that emerged during the first decade of the 21st century is generally in line with the official policy toward Beijing the Kremlin has pursued in the past and continues to pursue in the present.

Conclusion

There are varying assessments in Russian society regarding the phenomenon of China’s “rise” and its implications for Russia. All three layers of Russian society—politicians, scientists and common citizens—can be divided into three basic groups that rather accurately reflect the most vigorous discussions.

The first group is comprised of the pro-China portion of the society that regards the Asian neighbor as a vitally important strategic ally on the global scene. Along with this, the economic rise of China is also viewed positively. The economic model serves as an example for Russian authorities, and very positive scenarios for China’s further development are being put forth.

¹¹¹ For details see Larin, *Chinese Migrants in Russia*, 312–315.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 318–340.

The second group is comprised of people who look at the phenomenon in the framework of a strategic triangle and who advocate moderate cooperation with China while continuing to interact with Western countries, including the United States. Two subgroups can be discerned in this group—supporters of a *multi-polar approach* and supporters of a *flexible balance* between the West, as represented by the United States and Europe, and the East, as represented by China and other Asian countries. *The first case* anticipates interaction with China on a strategic level and China's involvement in international affairs with a greater share of responsibility. So this implies movement toward a final formulation of multi-polarity, which for the time being exists only in draft form. It is further assumed that it is China that will be the main counterbalance to the United States in the international arena, and Russia will endeavor to maintain neutrality and distance itself as much as possible from the growing confrontation between the two powers. In this regard it is entirely possible that a new, third center of power will be established – headed by Russia and comprised of all countries that do not wish to be drawn into the Sino-American rivalry. In the second instance it is assumed that Russia will balance between the points of the triangle, while retaining its discretion and the possibility of selective cooperation with and support of either of the other centers of power. It is thus anticipated that Russia will play either the American or Chinese card, depending on the situation.

The third group consists primarily of alarmists who regard China as a multidimensional potential threat that may in very short order become real. In this context, all aspects of the rise of China bring with them a number of problems and challenges, with which Russia is already dealing. Russia's prospects in this regard remain quite pessimistic; in the best case scenario a role has been prepared for Russia as the PRC's eternal junior partner that will be even more distant from the West than China itself.

In any case, all three groups are united by trepidation at the migration and demographic situation in the Far East and Siberia. Representatives of all three groups speak with a greater or lesser degree of alarmism about the need to focus on this problem in the regions in order to prevent the situation from worsening. A number of proposals and ideas are being put forth that could change the existing situation for the better; these involve doing everything possible to lift up the Siberian and Far East Federal Districts and to continue to integrate them into the common Asia-Pacific space that will be the main international political stage in the 21st century.

Russia and the Arab Spring

*Alexander Vysotsky**

Introduction

The Russian attitude to the Arab Spring—a mixture of skepticism, caution and mistrust—was for a long time poorly understood outside the country. In the West, which initially saw in the Arab Spring the familiar battle between “democracy from below” and “dictatorship from above,” many accused Moscow of sympathizing with outdated authoritarian regimes, even facilitating their behavior, and of being incapable of keeping up with the times.

Later, the situation changed. As democratic revolutions were replaced by civil conflicts (some more peaceful, others more bloody, all exacerbated by ethnic or religious differences) Russia’s conservative position started to find support, both within the Middle East and beyond. The breakthrough Russo-American agreement on Syrian chemical weapons opened the door to the Geneva II talks, bringing factions within Syria to the same talks table, and also helping regulate the Iranian nuclear issue.

To understand the factors that shaped the Russian attitude to the Arab Spring, we need to review recent Russian history and how the situation has changed Russia’s borders. In this article, we will attempt to circumscribe these factors, and offer insights into their true nature.

The wave of revolutions that swept through the Middle East and North Africa, subsequently labeled the “Arab Spring,” was probably the most significant feature of global politics in 2011. One after another, decrepit Arab authoritarian regimes were replaced by new political forces. The speed of events was so great that outside players could only rush to adapt to the changing realities, as the domino effect swept through the region.

Russia was no exception, though this country preferred to initially distance itself. Moscow understood the irreversibility of the changes in most of the states overrun by the Spring, but chose not to join the West in loudly supporting democratization.

It is widely thought that the turning point in the Russian attitude to the Arab Spring was Libya. After abstaining from voting on UN Security Council Resolution 1973 in March of 2011, which declared the sky over Libya a no-fly zone, Moscow later expressed objections as foreign military interventions began in the country. The resolution that permitted any action to protect the civilian population and the territory they occupied, excluding the introduction of occupying forces,¹ became a foundation of military

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¹ “Security Council Approves “No-Fly Zone” over Libya, Authorizing “All Necessary Measures” to Protect Civilians, by Vote of 10 in Favor with 5 Abstentions,” <http://www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2011/sc10200.doc.htm#Resolution>.

support for the insurgents and regime change. Many in Russia saw in these Western actions an unpleasant echo of Iraq in 2003.

Preventing a similar development of events in Syria became an important Russian foreign policy task. In the Western press and expert circles, the popular explanation was that in Syria, Moscow was holding on to an old ally (Syria was a strong ally of the Soviet Union), as well as a handful of military contracts and bases.² However, it is perhaps a mistake to assume that Russian interests were so pragmatic.

Both in Libya, and later in Syria, the Russian position was not dictated by the sole desire to prevent foreign military intervention. More likely, Moscow's policy was influenced by a range of diverse factors. In this article we will attempt to list—in no particular order or hierarchy—these factors, to expose the logical algorithm that produced Russia's position on the Arab Spring. Such a list of underlying factors could be useful in analyzing the motivation driving Russian foreign policy not only in the Middle East, but also in other regions of the world.

Factor 1 – Russia and the Islamists

Russian pundits usually agree that after the Cold War ended, Mid-East affairs became relatively peripheral to Russia's foreign-policy interests. In February 2013, a revised Foreign Policy Concept was published (section IV covers "Regional Priorities"), in which the Middle East not only foots the list, but is entirely covered in three succinct bullet points.³ This position is also typical for the other declarative policy documents of the 1990's and 2000's.⁴

A reduced Russian involvement in regional affairs is understandable. If during the bipolar confrontation the Middle East served as one of the key arenas, after 1991 the scale of Russia's practical interest contracted here. This was due to the lack of dependence on local energy sources, a low level of trade and economic relations, and Moscow's shift of attention to the perimeter of its own borders – to Europe and, later, the Asia-Pacific Region.

² See, for example: Holly Yan, "Syria allies: Why Russia, Iran and China are standing by the regime," *CNN*, 30 August 2013, available at <http://edition.cnn.com/2013/08/29/world/meast/syria-iran-china-russia-supporters>; Holly Yan, "Why China, Russia won't condemn Syrian regime," *CNN*, 5 February 2012, <http://edition.cnn.com/2012/02/05/world/meast/syria-china-russia-relations>; "The four reasons Russia won't give up Syria, no matter what Obama does," *Washington Post*, 5 September 2013, available at <http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/worldviews/wp/2013/09/05/the-four-reasons-russia-wont-give-up-syria-no-matter-what-obama-does>.

³ *RF Foreign Policy Concept*, Approved by RF President V.V. Putin, 12 February 2013, available at http://www.mid.ru/brp_4.nsf/0/6D84DDEDEDBF7DA644257B160051BF7F (in Russian).

⁴ *RF Foreign Policy Concept 2000*, <http://www.scrf.gov.ru/documents/2/25.html>; *RF Foreign Policy Concept 2008*, <http://kremlin.ru/acts/785>; *Russian National Security Strategy to 2020* (approved in 2009), <http://www.scrf.gov.ru/documents/99.html>.

In truth, against a backdrop of reduced engagement in one narrow field—security—Russia’s interest in the Middle East had remained constant, if not expanded. This was due to the new risks and national security threats, such as religious extremism and terrorism, which the country had already encountered, mostly in the North Caucasus and Central Asia. For the purposes of this article, it is worthwhile dwelling in greater detail on this phenomenon and the Russian attitude to it which, we believe, later played a significant role in the formation of the Russian take on the Arab Spring. The Spring helped reinforce Islamist forces in the Arab world, many of which (though not all) were, in essence, highly sympathetic to the post-Soviet Islamist terror underground.

Russia’s skeptical attitude to Islamists was continuously evolving. During the Cold War, the USSR supported secular Arab regimes in the Middle East (for example, Nasser’s Egypt, Baathist Syria and Iraq, and Arafat’s PLO). On the opposing, American, side there was not just Israel, but also such countries as Saudi Arabia and the smaller states of the Persian Gulf with strong Islamic traditions. Zigzagging regional policies led to confrontations between Soviet and American allies (e.g. the Saudi-Egyptian confrontation during the civil war in Yemen), while during the Afghanistan war Saudi Arabia was one of the most generous sponsors of the Mujahidin. In the second half of the 1980’s, the kingdom took concerted action to radically reduce oil prices, in order to undermine the Soviet economy.

This situation is described in detail by Egor Gaidar, who was Economy Minister and acting Russian Prime Minister in 1991-1994. In his book *The Soviet Collapse*, this was how he described the oil market:

The war radically changed the geopolitical situation in the Middle East. In 1974, Saudi Arabia decided to impose an embargo on oil supplies to the United States. But in 1979 the Saudis became interested in American protection because they understood that the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan was a first step toward—or at least an attempt to gain—control over the Middle Eastern oil fields.

The timeline of the collapse of the Soviet Union can be traced to September 13, 1985. On this date, Sheikh Ahmed Zaki Yamani, the minister of oil of Saudi Arabia, declared that the monarchy had decided to alter its oil policy radically. The Saudis stopped protecting oil prices, and Saudi Arabia quickly regained its share in the world market. During the next six months, oil production in Saudi Arabia increased fourfold, while oil prices collapsed by approximately the same amount in real terms.

As a result, the Soviet Union lost approximately \$ 20 billion per year, money without which the country simply could not survive.⁵

The war in Afghanistan, where Soviet troops fought Islamist forces, as well as subsequent wars in Tajikistan and Chechnya, showed Russia the gravity of Islamist terror threat, while Persian Gulf countries continued to sponsor fighters, year after year. Moreover, formal mechanisms for delivering such support (organizations such as the Saudi

⁵ Yegor Gaidar, “The Soviet Collapse,” 19 April 2007, available at <http://www.aei.org/issue/foreign-and-defense-policy/regional/europe/the-soviet-collapse>.

“Kosovo and Chechnya Aid Committee”⁶) were complemented by informal channels of finance and support for anti-Russian forces, that side-stepped control by local authorities. In essence, this meant direct involvement by a number of Mid-East terrorist organizations,⁷ and their sponsors, in organizing acts of terror in Chechnya, Dagestan, as well as Tajikistan during the civil war. Furthermore, this meant their participation in organizing acts of terrorism in the European part of Russia.⁸ The best-known commanders of foreign fighters in Chechnya came from Saudi Arabia: Huttab, Abu al-Walid, Abu Amar, Abu-Haws and others, who maintained contact with Osama ben Laden and Al Qaeda. Their cooperation began during operations against Soviet troops in Afghanistan,⁹ and then continued in Tajikistan and Chechnya.

It is noteworthy that such terrorist tactics were usually typical of the “jihadists.” According to the definition of G. Mirsky, a renowned Russian orientalist, “Jihadists strive to recreate a caliphate, but this is not essential. The main objective is to ensure the dominance of Islam in the world, and to this end we see a merciless fight against non-believers, who will never give up on the intention to destroy Islam.” Moreover, this is a planetary battle. The Salafists have a different worldview: “fundamentalists calling for Moslem society to return to the “Golden Age” when a pure, untarnished Islam dominated, and devout rulers lived in strict accordance with the Koran and Sunnah. This is the source of the slogan of the “Muslim Brotherhood” and that of almost all Salafists: “*Islam is the solution.*”¹⁰

This situation also illustrates Russia’s differentiated attitude to various Islamist groups. In their fight against terrorism, the Russian special services have mainly dealt with Jihadists, and these groups have made it onto Russian terror lists.¹¹ Other Islamist groups, such as Hamas and Hezbollah, which have no record of helping fighters or organizing terrorism in Russia, have not been classified as terrorist groups, and the Russian FSB has issued special comments on this point.¹²

As separatists have been driven out of the Republic of Chechnya, a number of Persian Gulf countries, including Qatar and the UAE, have offered shelter to their leaders, giving them the opportunity to continue activities abroad. This has cast a shadow over

⁶ G. Kosach, “Arab countries and the Independence of Kosovo” (Institute Blizhnego Vostoka, 27 February 2008), available at <http://www.iimes.ru/rus/stat/2008/27-02-08.htm> (in Russian).

⁷ “FSB publishes Russian terror list,” *Newsru.com*, 27 July 2006, available www.newsru.com/russia/27jul2006/terror.html (in Russian).

⁸ Lorenzo Vidino, “How Chechnya Became a Breeding Ground for Terror,” *The Middle East Quarterly* 12:3 (Summer 2005): 57–66, available at <http://www.meforum.org/744/how-chechnya-became-a-breeding-ground-for-terror>.

⁹ Timur Teplenin, “Abu Haws: three is definitely a crowd. Muhammad Atef: the last of the triad of ‘Ben Laden’s deputies,” *Utro.ru*, 27 September 2004, <http://www.utro.ru/articles/2004/09/27/355146.shtml> (in Russian).

¹⁰ Georgiy Mirsky, “The Arab Spring – fog and fear,” *Global Affairs*, 1 May 2013, <http://www.globalaffairs.ru/number/Arabskaya-vesna--tuman-i-trevoga-15957> (in Russian).

¹¹ “FSB publishes Russian terror list.”

¹² “Russia does not recognize Hamas or Hezbollah as terrorist organizations,” *Lenta.ru*, 28 July 2006 (in Russian), <http://lenta.ru/news/2006/07/28/list/>.

relations between Moscow and countries in the region, and efforts to identify and eliminate separatist leaders have only added fuel to the fire (the most notorious case was the February 2004 liquidation of Z. Yandarbiev, in Qatar¹³). Russia's relations with Gulf countries began to improve only in the mid 2000's, as local power elites started to distance themselves from supporting terrorists. The 9/11 attacks also played a role – after that point, the US administration chose to fight terrorism across the world, and began to apply pressure on its allies.

The general picture of Russia's attitude to radical Islamists and the Arab Spring would be incomplete without a description of the recent events in Syria and Iraq. Here, in 2011-2014, fighters from the North Caucasus actively participated in battles, alongside the opponents of Al-Assad, and later in the invasion by the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) of Iraq. The numbers of terrorists were fairly high – according to media reports, up to a thousand Chechen fighters took part in the Syrian conflict.¹⁴ Subsequently they moved into Iraqi territory, where one of the ISIL commanders turned out to be a Kistinets¹⁵ (Georgian Chechen), Umar ash-Shishani (Tarhan Batirashvili).¹⁶ Such facts clearly influenced Moscow's vision of the true contours, objectives and goals of a large part of the Syrian opposition, as well as their assessment of the risks posed by Western support for the opposition.

The above exploration of recent Soviet and Russian history of relations between Moscow and Islamist movements should shed some light on the reasons for the predominance in the Russian foreign-policy establishment of a negative or suspicious approach to (radical) Islamist forces. This system of views, that formed over a decades-long period of challenges for the country, was one of the underlying factors that shaped Russia's attitude to the Arab Spring, which many in Russia claimed had turned into an "Islamist Autumn."¹⁷

¹³ David Holley, "Yandarbiyev Killed by Car Bomb in Qatar," *The Moscow Times*, 16 February 2004, <http://www.themoscowtimes.com/news/article/yandarbiyev-killed-by-car-bomb-in-qatar/232886.html>.

¹⁴ "Up to a thousand Chechen fighters active in Syria, in one unit, the Al Muhajirin," *Newsru.com*, 19 September 2013, <http://www.newsru.com/world/19sep2013/chechsiria.html> (in Russian); Daria Solovieva, "Chechens Among Jihadists in Syria," *Al-Monitor*, 26 April 2014, <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2013/04/chechen-jihad-syria-boston-bombing.html#>.

¹⁵ "The Kistinets people are against Basher Assad," *Georgia Times*, 21 November 2013, <http://www.georgiatimes.info/articles/97050.html> (in Russian).

¹⁶ "How a Georgian sergeant became a Jihad leader in Iraq," *BBC (Russian Service)*, 8 July 2014, http://www.bbc.co.uk/russian/international/2014/07/140704_isis_shishani_father_interview.shtml (in Russian).

¹⁷ See, for example, A.B. Podtserod, "Arab Spring or Islamist Autumn?" *Instute Blijnevo Vostoka*, 6 August 2012, <http://www.iimes.ru/rus/stat/2012/06-08-12d.htm> (in Russian); Interview with A. Malashenko, "The Arab Spring has become an Islamist Autumn," *Kommersant.ru*, 8 November 2011, <http://www.kommersant.ru/doc/1810908>; Andrey Fedorchenko, "The Motherland of the Arab Spring and the Process of Islamicization," *MGIMO University*,

Factor 2 – US Mid-East Policy During Bush Jnr.'s Adventures in Iraq

The restructuring of social and political systems and, more importantly, the psychological watershed in public opinion in the Mid-East of the 2000's, which culminated in the Arab Spring, came under the influence of coinciding internal and external factors. The main internal factor was growing dissatisfaction in different social strata with the socio-economic situation, in parallel with Islamist forces gaining ground. The key external factor was American (more generally, Western) influence, the essence of which was reflected in specific foreign-policy acts, as well as conceptual ideological programs, central among which was the "Greater Middle East" plan.

According to the opinion that formed in Russia, the Arab Spring revolutions were the deferred result of the Mid-East policy of George Bush Jnr. According to Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, "the Arab Spring was the harvest of seeds sown by Bush Jnr., with the concept of the Greater Middle East and democratization of that entire area." Later, he says

The slogans of change and democratization [promoted by the USA] were not agreed by the countries of the region. We have seen a lifetime of revolutions and firmly insist that any changes take place by evolution, resting on the desires of the peoples themselves. The fact that the peoples of the Middle East and North Africa, just like the peoples in any other part of the world, want a better life, want to be respected as citizens in their own states – this is absolutely natural, and we actively support these ambitions. When the "Arab Spring" started to happen, this is what we stated. At the same time, we strongly urge external actors to obey the principle of "do no harm."¹⁸

These words of Sergei Lavrov, uttered in 2012, are a reference to the first Iraq adventure. The US decision to invade the country not only failed to win the support of Moscow, but also Paris and Berlin, triggering an unheard-of crisis in transatlantic relations. Subsequent attempts at state-building in the occupied country not only collapsed, but provoked a wide-scale and sustained crisis across the region. Any extrapolation of this experience to other countries of the region, even without any direct American involvement, was seen by Russia's leadership as undesirable and dangerous.

It is telling that in the early 2000's, American rhetoric with respect to Iraq was focused on the need to give the region an example of a successful economic and political transition to democracy, at least in one country. This was seen as a first stage in a broader, regional "democratic transition" which, thought Washington, was necessary to silence the threats of religious extremism and terrorism. As George Bush Jnr. declared, "the establishment of a free Iraq in the heart of the Middle East will be a watershed point in the global democratic revolution."¹⁹ The Arab Spring showed that these words had

17 July 2013, www.mgimo.ru/news/experts/document240647.phtml (in Russian); Mirsky, "The Arab Spring – fog and fear."

¹⁸ Interview with Sergey Lavrov, *Rossisyskaya gazeta*, 24 October 2012, <http://www.rg.ru/2012/10/23/lavrov-poln.html> (in Russian).

¹⁹ Remarks by the President at the 20th Anniversary of the National Endowment for Democracy (U.S. Chamber of Commerce, 6 November 2003).

been ironically prophetic – the new order was not to be liberal-democratic in the country or region, and there was certainly no drop in the terrorist threat, but a wave of revolutions did indeed rise up in 2011.

At the beginning of the Iraq campaign, the United States declared a basic goal: to build a democratic, federal, parliamentary republic in Iraq, with stably functioning political and socioeconomic systems, with developed legal and civil-political institutions. This was to be achieved by removing from power the previous regime and its supporters (“deBaathization”), holding free elections based on a new constitution, with the eventual inclusion of Iraq into regional integration, along the lines of the Cooperation Council of Arab Gulf States and the construction of stable, conflict-free relations with the USA and their allies (Arab countries of the Persian Gulf and Israel). The material foundation for such a transition was to be income from the oil sector, after rapid infrastructure reconstruction involving a wide circle of international energy companies.

Subsequent events included the overthrow and execution of Saddam Hussein, the absence in Iraq of weapons of mass destruction or evidence of links with Al Qaeda, the interethnic civil war of 2006-2007, growing terrorism, the collapse of the Iraqi economy, millions of refugees and hundreds of thousands of victims amongst the civilian population, the *de facto* collapse of the Iraqi state, the start of a Shiite-Sunni confrontation across the region and, finally, the birth of ISIL. All this demonstrated the undesirability, if not perfidity, of foreign (military) intervention.

To better illustrate the gloomy view that Russia took of the Iraq situation, one need look no further than the words of Satanovsky, director of Russia’s private Middle East Institute: “The development of Iraq after Saddam Hussein’s regime was overthrown cannot be considered a model of democracy; more than this, it is the worst possible advertisement for democracy... Sub-confessional and ethnic groups in the Iraqi population that were contained by the Baathist regime only used their “freedom” to begin oppressing the former “oppressors.” The height of justice in today’s Iraq is ethnic cleansing.”²⁰

For Russia and its leaders, Iraq became a model for any attempt by the US and the West to impose any external solutions on unfriendly regimes, circumnavigating the UN Security Council. Western statements about hopes to support the Arab masses’ struggle for democratic rights and freedoms were met with skepticism in Moscow. When the Arab Spring ceased to be exclusively the internal affair of each separate country, the Russian attitude to it changed from mainly neutral to cautiously negative. This is why the events around Libya, where the internal political struggle almost immediately entered a military phase, before foreign “sympathizers” joined in, can be seen as a turning point in Russia’s attitude to the Arab Spring.

Factor 3 – Palestine and the Rise of Hamas

Another argument for this reading of Russia’s position was the experience of US interference in the state-building process in the Palestinian Authority, which led to the vic-

²⁰ Evgeniy Ya. Satanovsky, “Five years of war for oil and democracy,” *Mezhdunarodnaya zhizn* 5 (2008): 3–10 (in Russian).

tory of the Hamas movement at parliamentary elections in 2006, and an armed, inter-Palestinian conflict.

This began, as in Iraq, with the ousting of an authoritarian leader after many years in power. Yassir Arafat was the founding father of the PLO and the leader of the Palestine Authority (PA); in Israel and the USA, he had the reputation of an unreliable and undesirable partner. Many linked the likelihood of progress in regulating the Palestine-Israel question with the need for internal political transformations in the Authority itself. This problem was seen as part of a broader context, in which democratic transformations in Arab countries were seen as a precondition to achieving peace with Israel. Russian Ambassador Bovin also mentions this in his description of conversations with Netanyahu.²¹

In this context, it was natural to undermine Arafat's position, forcing him to act under growing internal and external pressure. It is known, for example, that the Hamas movement benefited from a benevolent attitude on the part of Israel and the USA when it first appeared, as it was seen as a counterweight to Arafat.²² The Islamist factor in the 1980's-1990's was not considered to be a threat to Israel and Western interests in the region, that could be compared to Leftist secular authoritarian regimes. Criticism of Arafat as a terrorist and unreliable negotiator, and the question of his replacement, traditionally remained among the *leitmotifs* of Israeli domestic and foreign policy agendas.

Yassir Arafat's lack of readiness to share power, corruption amongst the administrative structures of the Palestine Authority, and usurpation of all the capital flows in the Authority, all boosted the popularity of this idea, across the world. When George Bush Jr. came to power and the "Greater Middle East" plan emerged, the question of replacing Arafat was integrated into the general logic of Washington's regional policies, and was given the necessary ideological format. The decision was taken to launch the democratization in the Authority to create the preconditions to form a Palestinian state coexisting with Israel. In June of 2002, Bush announced that "Peace requires a new and different Palestinian leadership, so that a Palestinian state can be born."²³

Growing pressure—international, within Palestine and within his party—forced Arafat to reject attempts at cosmetic reform, which would leave his *de facto* status unchanged. Through long negotiations and consultations with Arafat himself, as well as with Americans and Israelis, by the early 2000's a compromise candidate for the post of the head of the PA was finally found. This was to be a well-known figure from the PLO, Arafat's long-time comrade Mahmoud Abbas (Abu Masen),²⁴ previously the head of the Palestinian delegation at the Oslo talks.²⁵

²¹ Alexandr E. Bovin, *5 Years Among Jews and MID-men* (Moscow: Zakharov, 2002), p. 152 (in Russian).

²² Statement by US Ambassador to Israel Daniel Kurtzer, 20 December 2001, <http://www.whale.to/b/andromidas.html>.

²³ Full text of George Bush's speech on Israel and a Palestinian state, *The Guardian*, 25 June 2002, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2002/jun/25/israel.usa>.

²⁴ Within Fatah at this time, there was a serious division between the old and new generations of party functionaries. The younger generation—supporters of M. Berguti—insisted on changes in internal structure and procedures of Fatah activities, including democratization of the proc-

Abbas won easily, with 66% of the presidential election votes in January 2005, based on moderate positions on questions of peaceful regulation with the Israelis, and this convinced the international community, but primarily the USA, that the future of democratic state-building in Palestine was rosy. In the eyes of the Bush administration, Palestine had sufficient prerequisites to soon create an independent Palestinian state, and to construct a liberal democratic state model. Bush had previously spoken of this publicly, saying that “An independent, democratic Palestinian state will be created no later than 2009.”²⁶

The next critical step in creating such a state after the presidential elections was the articulation of effective legislative authorities and, therefore, holding parliamentary elections. These were slated for January 2006. The Americans had intended that the largest possible number of citizens would participate and, therefore, the entire range of political parties and forces had to be represented. Islamists made it onto the lists.

Israel was categorically against awarding Hamas and other such organizations the right to participate in the parliamentary election campaign. As Prime Minister Ariel Sharon stated on several occasions that Israel “will never agree that this terrorist organization, this armed terrorist organization, will participate in the elections... I don’t see how they can have elections without our help, ... We will make every effort not to help them in their elections.”²⁷ Sharon also declared that Israel was ready to create the conditions necessary to make it impossible to hold elections.

In this question, however, Washington held the opposite position, ultimately forcing the Israelis to accept the participation of Islamist election candidates. The official American explanations claimed that “A decision as to who can participate in a [Palestinian Legislative Council] election obviously is up to the Palestinian Authority. We do not believe that a democratic state can be built when parties or candidates seek power not through the ballot box but through terrorist activity, as well.”²⁸ America believed that Palestinian Islamists would be given equal right to participate in parliamentary

ess of electing party leaders, and a renewal of the tradition of party congresses, which had not met since 1989.

Fatah’s ‘Old Guard’ resisted these processes, demonstrating at the same time greater loyalty to the USA, and a more flexible approach to talks with Israel. These nuances were particularly salient in 2007, when M. Barguti spoke from an Israeli jail in favor of an initiative of national reconciliation and dialogue with Hamas. Abbas’ supporters were not in agreement with this, and this is how they gained the chance to receive full-fledged US support in their struggle, both in domestic politics, and within the party.

²⁵ Abu Mazen (Mahmoud Abbas), *The Road to Oslo* (Institute Blizhneva Vostoka, 1996), 306 p.

²⁶ Mike Allen and Glenn Kessler, “Bush Goal: Palestinian State by 2009,” *Washington Post*, 13 November 2004, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A46469-2004Nov12.html>

²⁷ Glenn Kessler, “If Hamas Participates, Sharon Says Israel Won’t Aid Palestinian Elections,” *Washington Post*, 17 September 2005, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2005/09/16/AR2005091601768.html>.

²⁸ *Ibid.* National Security Council spokesman Frederick L. Jones II.

elections in the Authority, considering that they were sure to lose the elections. This prediction was apparently based on the results of the presidential campaign.

However, the results of the parliamentary elections in January 2006 were an unpleasant surprise for America. The (now waning) popularity of Abbas did not help Fatah. It turned out that in the thinking of most Palestinians, the party was associated with corruption, ineffectiveness and the failures of previous years, a lack of progress in creating the Palestinian state or resolving the problem of Israeli settlements, or the status of either Jerusalem or refugees. This disappointment brought victory to the opposition, which in Palestine were the Islamists in the Hamas movement. Candidates put forward by the movement won 76 of 132 seats in the parliament. As a renowned Russian Mid-East expert, M. Khrustalev, wrote, "it is telling that even the leaders [of Hamas] did not expect to win."²⁹

As a result, according to I. Zvyagelsky, a leading Russian expert on relations between Palestine and Israel, "in the most secular Arab society, an organization has come to power, that claims the goal of not only continuing the war with Israel to the point of victory, but also wishes to islamicize that society." It is well known how events evolved subsequently. Between Fatah and Hamas appeared first a division, then civil war; the Gaza strip and the West Bank started to develop independently of one another, and Gaza once again became the main hotspot in Israeli-Palestinian relations.

Post-revolutionary scenarios for the Arab Spring countries, where Islamists were the unrivalled election winners, prompted the Russian foreign-policy community to draw predictable analogies.³⁰ Civil wars were indeed triggered in Syria, Libya and Yemen, while the largest (and, traditionally, fairly secular) Arab country, Egypt, hung from a thread. Worrying symptoms could be seen in Lebanon. Concerns were voiced even in such stable countries as Jordan and Tunisia.³¹ The sustainability of the peace agreement between Egypt and Israel was now in question.

All these factors together persuaded the Russian establishment of the inexpediency and harmfulness of external support for rapid democratic transformation in problematic Arab countries, where such transformations at best brought Islamists to power, and at worst provoked civil war. Thus, the aggregate experience of American interference in Mid-Eastern affairs in the 2000's, the central symbols of which were post-Hussein Iraq and post-Arafat Palestine, served as a weighty argument in Russia for a more cautious approach to regional affairs.

²⁹ Mark A. Khrustalev, "International aspects of social and political stability," *Mezhdunarodniye protsessy* 17 (May-August 2007), <http://www.intertrends.ru/seventeenth/005.htm> (in Russian).

³⁰ Elena Suponina, "Arab Spring: The Season for Victory over the Islamists," *Forbes*, 25 December 2012, <http://m.forbes.ru/article.php?id=231831>.

³¹ Josef Fellon, "Arab Spring: Expectations and Reality" (Russian Foreign Affairs Council, 4 October 2013), http://russiancouncil.ru/inner/?id_4=2443#top (in Russian).

Factor 4 – The Color Revolutions

Strictly speaking, the Arab Spring was not the first wave of revolution to sweep the world in the 21st century. It was preceded by a chain of events, more spread-out over time, that mainly took place in the post-Soviet space and were labeled the “color revolutions.”

This term is understood to mean a series of non-violent coups in Georgia (2003), Ukraine (2004), Kyrgyzstan (2005), as well as similar attempts in Uzbekistan (2005), Belarus (2006) and Armenia (2008). Some commentators also include the turmoil in Serbia (2000) that led to the resignation of Milosevic, the cedar revolution in Lebanon (2005) and the coups in Moldova (2009).

Any comparison of such different countries and regions, such as the Middle East and East *per se* are doomed to be incomplete. Factors include history, culture, faith, political preferences and standards, and the social make-up of participants. In this article, it would be excessive to study in detail each of the color revolutions; let us simply say that their common denominator is the illegal (but legitimized with Western support) replacement of unpopular leaders, with regimes that declared the goals of moving towards the European Union as an alternative to cooperation with Russia. At the same time, a commitment was declared to build liberal democratic states on the Western model.³²

The Russian response rapidly switched from caution to a negative attitude. The initial hopes of building constructive relations with the new authorities in neighboring countries were not justified. Russo-Ukrainian authorities under the presidency of Yushchenko fell to an unprecedented low, while Russo-Georgian relations under Saakashvili led to war in 2008 and the termination of diplomatic relations.

But prior to all of this, as early as 2004, President Putin spoke openly of his negative attitude to illegal methods of political struggle with support from abroad:

if we are to speak of post-Soviet space, I am most concerned by attempts to resolve political issues by non-legal means. This is the greatest source of danger. The most dangerous activity is to create a system of endless revolutions – rose revolutions; what will they think of next – blue revolutions? We need to get used to living by the law, and not political feasibility, as defined in some distant place, on behalf of one people or another. Within society itself, clear rules and procedures have to evolve. Of course, we must also be aware that democracies need to be supported and helped, but if we take the path of endless revolutions, there will be nothing good in it for these countries, and their peoples. We will drown the entire post-Soviet space in a chain of never-ending conflicts, that will have fairly tragic consequences.³³

³² This definition neatly covers the “Euromaidan” in Ukraine at the end of 2013/start of 2014, which led to the ousting of President Yanukovich.

³³ A press conference for Russian and foreign journalists, 23 December 2004, http://archive.kremlin.ru/appears/2004/12/23/1414_type63380type82634_81691.shtml.

It is clear that this phrase, almost word-for-word, matches the words of Foreign minister Sergei Lavrov, cited above, speaking eight years later about the Arab Spring.³⁴

The very first of the color revolutions—in Georgia—inspired mistrust on the part of the Russian leadership with respect to the true motives of the USA and the West. Russian Foreign Minister Ivanov, acting as intermediary between Shevardnadze and the opposition, stated:

There are plenty of facts that indicate that everything that took place on those days was not spontaneous; it did not happen overnight. There was preparation, in which the US ambassador actively participated, according to the words of Shevardnadze *himself*. The preparation was organized through the Soros Foundation. In the last few months there have been ever more emissaries in Tbilisi, who are on the list of good friends of Eduard [Shevardnadze], above all former US Secretary of State Baker, former Joint Staff Command Shalikashvili, and others. Today, it is becoming ever more obvious that one of the objectives was to convince Shevardnadze to surrender his seat.³⁵

It is perhaps salient to remind readers that this took place in 2003 – a time when Russo-American relations, although tarnished by the Iraq affair, nevertheless were at a high, following the first years of cooperation between Putin and Bush Jnr., including cooperation on anti-terror activities and active support for American operations in Afghanistan, including issues of the deployment of American military infrastructure in Central Asia.

Russian suspicions specifically concerned the activities of American government and non-government structures, including the Soros Fund, which Shevardnadze accused of overthrowing him. Suspicions were also expressed about the American embassy, and US Ambassador Miles personally, who had worked in Belgrade before his posting in Tbilisi. As the press then wrote,³⁶ a great deal was said at the time in Moscow about these bilateral links – not only were the TV images similar, but the very mechanism was. For example, there was talk of external support to consolidate the previously fragmented and motley (and, therefore, weak) opposition in Serbia, and in Georgia. The creation of the Serbia Democratic Opposition block and the promotion of Saakashvili to the forefront of the Georgian opposition took place as a result of active American mediation. The events in both countries developed along the same lines: heated debate over the election results grew into protests by the dissatisfied and calls for “restraint” in handling protesters, culminating in the overthrow of the head of state.

In truth, unlike Milosevic, Shevardnadze benefited from support from Washington for a long time. America was happy to see the Georgian president disassociate himself

³⁴ Interview with Sergei Lavrov, *Rossisyskaya gazeta*, 24 October 2012, <http://www.rg.ru/2012/10/23/lavrov-poln.html>.

³⁵ “Igor Ivanov stated that the Georgian regime change was prepared with US support,” *Newsru.com*, 8 December 2003, <http://www.newsru.com/russia/08dec2003/ivanov.html> (in Russian).

³⁶ “A diplomat by the name of Richard Miles,” (Shevardnadze accused Soros of organizing the regime change in Georgia) *Newsru.com*, 1 December 2003, <http://www.newsru.com/world/01dec2003/soros.html#1> (in Russian).

from Moscow, declaring a course for *rapprochement* with the West and requesting Georgian membership in NATO. However, as he lost support, so US sympathies shifted towards young opposition figures.

Another defeat for Russia was the orange revolution of 2004 in Ukraine. Moscow saw the same picture again: Western support facilitated anti-Russian forces taking power illegally. Considering the role and significance of Ukraine not only for Russian foreign policy, but for the self-image and history of the country as a whole, these events became a watershed moment for all Russo-Western relations. Interestingly, another 10 years later, Ukraine is once again the focal point where these relations have reached an acute conflict, which could generate even deeper divisions.

The Russian leadership has unambiguously expressed concerns over such events. Ivanov declared that the spreading practice of color revolutions is

not in the interests of the countries of the CIS, nor of stability in the region, nor international security. I hope that the responsible political forces will not be tempted to push any countries in the CIS onto that path, that led to the change of leadership in Georgia. The responsibility of Western countries is very great here; they must not welcome, as some of them do, what happened in Georgia, and they must assess the events correctly. Next, they must not issue credits to those politicians who have not yet demonstrated that they are supporters of, or committed to, democratic principles.³⁷

The *leitmotif* of Russian statements on these issues is accusations against the West of double standards and dishonest play. Citing the example of dubious election procedures in Kosovo, Iraq and Afghanistan, Russian officials and President Putin himself have underscored the selectiveness of demands to observe democratic standards. Equally, standards in observing the rights of ethnic minorities. The main issue here is the infringement of rights of Russian-speakers, including in the Baltic states that have joined the EU.

The oddest statement on these issues was made by Vladimir Putin during a press conference in December of 2004. Even then, shortly before the infamous Munich speech of 2007, he gave emotional and frank assessments of world events:

[Recently] elections were held in Afghanistan. We know that these were the first elections in Afghanistan; we supported them, as they were necessary. But was everything so good? Bags of fingerprints of voters were shipped all around the country, and according to our data, they had been shipped in from Pakistan over 2-3 weeks. Who counted those fingerprints, compared them and conducted dactyloscopic analyses? First they said the ink was indelible, then it turned out that it could be washed off.

Elections were also held in Kosovo. Over two hundred thousand Serbs were forced to leave their homes, and could not participate in the elections – and this was considered normal. Now, elections are planned in Iraq. Perhaps this will not happen, but it was one of the ideas discussed. The OSCE will conduct elections control from Jordan. This is a total farce. And when we offered to monitor the elections in the Chechen Republic, then “no, you can’t, because the conditions have not been created,” although there had not been military action for a long time there, and the agencies of power and governance had

³⁷ “Igor Ivanov stated that the Georgian regime change was prepared with US support.”

been created. Yet, in a 100% occupation of Iraqi territory, elections can be held. Between June and November, 3500 civilians died in Bagdad alone, and in Fallujah there was not even a body count. According to our sources, in just nine cities yesterday, major population centers, there was fighting – yet, no problem, elections can be held, but not in Chechnya! We consider that this is unacceptable, to approach important issues that are of universal interest, in this way.³⁸

In the same speech, the Russian president touched on issues of linguistic and cultural rights:

we talk a lot about human rights. Take Macedonia. The EU suggested that in the south of the country, where 20% of the Albanian population live, that they could participate in the activities of the authorities and governance agencies in the same proportion, of at least 20%, including in law enforcement agencies. Currently, Romania is preparing to join the EU, and that country will be presented with the same terms for ethnic minorities. Is this good or bad? I think that it is correct, and right. But when we say: “Listen, 60% of the residents of Riga are Russian, let’s introduce the same standard there,” we are told: “no, you can’t – the situation there is different.” How is it different? Are the people of a different category? It is time to stop flouting common sense.³⁹

Returning to the color revolutions, we can say that after Iraq in 2003, they have become a second booby-trap to fundamentally shake Russian trust in America and the West. The same structure, algorithm and consequences of these revolutions became an indirect reason for mistrust of the Arab Spring – if only because the West, in striving to stay “on the right side of history” rushed to declare its support for the Arab revolutions.

In March 2014 President Putin, in a statement to the Federal Assembly to mark the entry of Crimea into Russia, demarcated a direct link between the events in Yugoslavia, the color revolutions, and the Arab Spring. He stated that Western partners had behaved coarsely and unprofessionally, attempting to drive Russia into a corner, and noted that the democracy that the USA was trying to impose had “triggered violence”:

There are constant attempts to drive us into a corner because of our independent position, because we defend interests, because we are not hypocritical ... The USA prefers to forge foreign policy on the principle that “might is right.” They have started to believe they are an exception; they think that only they can be right. That was exactly what happened in Yugoslavia ... There was Afghanistan and Iraq, and the blatant violations of UN Security Council resolutions in Libya. There was the whole series of “color revolutions.” It is clear that people in these countries are tired of tyranny, of poverty, of having no prospects. But these feelings were cynically manipulated. As a result, instead of democracy and freedom, a time of terror has started, violence has flared up. The “Arab Spring” has become an “Arab Winter.”⁴⁰

³⁸ A press conference for Russian and foreign journalists, 23 December 2004, http://archive.kremlin.ru/appears/2004/12/23/1414_type63380type82634_81691.shtml.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ “Putin: the Arab Spring has become an Arab Winter,” *RBK daily*, 18 March 2014, <http://rbcdaily.ru/politics/562949990878702> (in Russian).

Thus, a painful experience of multiple anti-Russian revolutions that took place along the country's borders with Western support, was in part extrapolated by Moscow into its attitude to the Arab Spring. The color revolutions provoked instability, then chaos, and ultimately the loss of human life (amongst Russian peacekeepers in South Ossetia in 2008, and in the form of mass victims in Ukraine in 2014, events that reflect the same underlying logic). Moreover, this same pattern of events was repeated on a far more catastrophic scale in the Middle East. This was the pattern of events that helped crystallize Russia's very particular, conservative position, as discussed below.

Factor 5 – Questions of Sovereignty and Russian Socio-Political Conservatism

F. Lukyanov, a renowned Russian journalist on international affairs, described the logic behind Russia's view of the world situation in the following way:

Putin now believes that the modern world is an unforgiving playmate. His attempts to integrate into that world on equal terms, that would benefit Russia, that were evident during his first presidency and which stagnated in his second, brought him to the conclusion of his third term, that integration was futile. First, because they did not want to let him in, and then because of the growing reason that there was no longer anything to integrate into. The system was breaking up, and Putin could sense this acutely, because for him, just like other Russian politicians of his generation, the central life event was the disintegration and collapse of the USSR. Vladimir Putin understands, far better and more deeply than Western politicians, how deeply everything is interconnected and how dangerous it is to take decisive action without pondering the multiple possible consequences. This is the foundation of his sincere commitment to the *status quo*. The same goes for foreign and domestic policies: better not to touch anything, as any form of innovative interference could trigger a collapse.⁴¹

This important conclusion sheds light not only on Moscow's attitude to the Arab Spring, but also on modern Russian world-views in general, and the logic behind both external and domestic politics. It is important here to remember Russia's own historical experience. Both the authorities and the vast majority of Russian citizens continue to see domestic and world events, including events in the Middle East, through the prism of the end of the 1980's and the 1990's. Another quote of Lukyanov underscores this:

modern Russian society does not believe in revolutions: there is too much turmoil, hopes that turn out to be illusory, and disappointments. The value of stability is shared—so far—by both the elites and the grassroots. The average Russian observer looks on the euphoria of ecstatic crowds with extreme skepticism, knowing that it all usually comes to an end, while the leadership does not hide its disgust at such sights, consciously or subconsciously imagining the destructive forces in their own homeland; therefore any discussions about the “sides of history” provoke, at best, a sense of irony in Russia. The

⁴¹ Fedor Lukyanov, “What to expect from the meeting of Russian and US presidents in Northern Ireland” (Russian Foreign Affairs Council, 3 June 2013), http://russiancouncil.ru/inner/index.php?id_4=1929#top (in Russian).

results of change in the countries of the Arab Spring do not offer any grounds for optimism – not in any of them.⁴²

This view of the world was the product of a long series of events in Russian life (the collapse of the USSR and the beginning of armed conflicts in the post-Soviet space) and the world in the 1990's and the 2000's. The destruction of the bipolar system of international relations did not lead, as some thought, to the “end of history” and the victory of universal liberal ideals. In fact, the opposite is true: with each year the ever-more deeply-interconnected economy of the global village is becoming increasingly chaotic in terms of politics and international law. The United States made a claim for global leadership, but not only failed in that role, but after the failures of Iraq and Afghanistan (against a backdrop of economic difficulties) began to demonstrate an underlying desire to isolate themselves from the regulation of international problems. Actual policy-making was largely replaced by empty political correctness and the imitation of activity. Across the world, people were disappointed by the caliber of politicians and their ability to take and implement decisions. With respect to Russia, this was most clearly demonstrated in the demonization of President Putin in the West – an attempt to describe Russian behavior in terms of mania and inadequacy; as former U.S. Secretary of State Henry Kissinger eloquently wrote, “For the West, the demonization of Vladimir Putin is not a policy; it is an alibi for the absence of one.”⁴³

Meanwhile, the world was descending further into chaos. The norms and rules that served as a foundation for the 19th and 20th centuries slipped into oblivion, and no new ones appeared to replace them. This was particularly relevant for the issue of state sovereignty, a basic concept for international relations since the times of Westphalia. The erosion of sovereignty, which was clearly evident in the cases of Kosovo and Iraq, and during the color revolutions, was categorically unacceptable to Moscow. The significance of domestic policy steps by the Russian authorities in the 2000's, from ideological concepts such as “sovereign democracy” to a number of legislative initiatives, including control over foreign funding of NGOs and additional regulation of the media, was a part of the sustained effort to prevent attempts at foreign-policy interference from abroad.

The chronicles of the Arab Spring offer numerous opportunities for analysis of this Russian worldview. When in 2011 the 30 year-old regime of Mubarak collapsed, the Russian reaction, according to Lukyanov, “amazed the world by its slowness. The long-time president of Egypt had never been any particular friend of Moscow, remaining completely loyal to Washington. So there was no reason for the Kremlin or MFA to shed any tears, but the general disgust of revolutions, now inherent to the modern Russian establishment, meant they could not welcome this triumph of popular will. Both Western and Arab colleagues shrugged in unison: surely one should not be so inflexible, and not

⁴² Fedor Lukyanov, “Let it be...how it used to be,” *Ogonek*, 15 July 2013, <http://www.kommersant.ru/doc/2219495> (in Russian).

⁴³ Henry A. Kissinger, “To Settle the Ukraine Crisis, Start at the End,” *Washington Post*, 5 March 2014, http://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/henry-kissinger-to-settle-the-ukraine-crisis-start-at-the-end/2014/03/05/46dad868-a496-11e3-8466-d34c451760b9_story.html.

think about the future. The American interpretation was, as usual, more colorful: Russia was on the “wrong side of history,” apprehensive of democratic breakthroughs in the Middle East.”⁴⁴

Subsequent events showed, at the very least, the justification for Russian inertia. The new Egyptian president, Morsi, elected in universal, democratic voting in June 2012, a representative of the Muslim Brotherhood, managed to keep the seat for just one year. He quickly turned large parts of the Egyptian population against him, including the liberal youth, previously the main driving force behind anti-Mubarak protests at Tahrir, the Copts, and moderately religious Egyptians. The Egyptian military took advantage of this and once again “heard the voice of the people” and removed Morsi from power, just as Mubarak had been ousted. A little while later, in May 2014, a new round of presidential elections was won by the Egyptian Defense Minister, General Abdel Fattah as-Sisi, with 97 % of the vote, according to official sources.⁴⁵

In this way, the country went through a full circle, eventually returning to square one: an authoritarian, military regime, and austere repression of Islamists (the Muslim Brotherhood were once again outlawed) that was despised by a liberal minority. In the same two years, the already weak Egyptian economy deteriorated yet further, poverty and unemployment increased, the level of violence in society increased, and the tourism industry suffered.⁴⁶

The Egyptian military coup was apparently not condemned by the West: everyone understood the true reasons, but no-one wanted to add their voices to those of protesting Qatar extremists,⁴⁷ yet no-one supported the coup, either, as this would hardly have confirmed the idea of being on the “right side” of history.

Predictably, the chain of Egyptian revolutions and coups did not inspire any Russian enthusiasm. President Putin expressed concerns about the possibility of civil war breaking out in the country,⁴⁸ but very quickly restored contacts with the new Egyptian leadership, that came to power as a result of national elections. In the short period of time that Morsi spent in power, Vladimir Putin held talks with him on two occasions (in March and April of 2013).⁴⁹ Later, he continued the dialogue with as-Sisi, as presiden-

⁴⁴ Lukyanov, “Let it be ... how it used to be.”

⁴⁵ “Egyptian ex-Defense Minister As-Sisi wins 96.91 % of presidential election votes,” *ITAR-TASS*, 3 June 2014, <http://itar-tass.com/mezhdunarodnaya-panorama/1236051> (in Russian).

⁴⁶ “Arab spring economies. Unfinished business,” *The Economist*, 4 February 2012, <http://www.economist.com/node/21546018>.

⁴⁷ “Riyadh asks GCC states to condemn Qatar’s actions in Egypt and Yemen,” *Middle East Monitor*, 25 November 2013, <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/news/middle-east/8496-riyadh-asks-gcc-states-to-condemn-qatars-actions-in-egypt-and-yemen>.

⁴⁸ “Russia’s Putin says Egypt moving towards civil war,” *Reuters*, 7 July 2013, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2013/07/07/us-egypt-protests-russia-idUSBRE96607820130707>.

⁴⁹ “In the margins of the BRICS summit, Vladimir Putin met with Muhammed Morsi,” *Vesti.ru*, 29 March 2013, <http://www.vesti.ru/videos?vid=495347>; Kira Latuhina, “Sochi, palm-trees, pyramids,” *Rossiyskaya gazeta*, 22 April 2013, <http://www.rg.ru/2013/04/22/putin.html> (in Russian).

tial candidate and then as president, when the latter visited Russia both immediately after the coup,⁵⁰ and his election victory.⁵¹

In the cases of both Egypt and Tunisia, the central issue for Russia—sovereignty—did not make it onto the agenda. There was no mention of military invasion from abroad or other forms of interference in the internal affairs of these states. The situation with Libya and Syria, whose sovereignty was in question, was different: “The fact that during the Libyan campaign Moscow surprised everyone by abandoning its usual position of non-interference, did not signal the start of a new trend but, rather, catalyzed the extremely harsh and uncompromising position that followed. Whatever may have guided President Medvedev, taking the decision not to block intervention by force, the result merely persuaded all players how erroneous this step was. The course on the Syrian issue, which did not shift one iota over the past two and a half years, was intended to demonstrate once and for all the model in which external forces decide who is “right” in a civil war, and then help the “right side” to win – but it is not going to be allowed any more.”⁵²

It is clear from this explanation that the Russian approach is broader than the Arab Spring and the Spring itself is not the key issue. The core question is which formats and mechanisms for regulating conflicts are acceptable to Moscow. As the situation in Syria showed Russia, frequently accused of excessive pragmatism and reluctance to compromise on commercial benefit, was ready to defend this principled approach to the bitter end, regardless of the cost.

Factor 6 – Civil War in Syria and the ‘Crystallization’ of Russia’s Position

From the start of the civil war in Syria the press, including leading Western publications, carried plenty of material about Russian researchers explaining the logic of Moscow’s actions on the Syrian issue. In order not to repeat the theses mentioned previously, let us restrict ourselves to one example, a series of materials by Russian authors in the *New York Times*, including the articles of Dmitri Trenin,⁵³ director of the Carnegie Moscow Center, and R. Pukhov, the head of the Centre for Analysis of Strategies and Technologies, which commands respect in Russia.⁵⁴

⁵⁰ Jonathan Marcus, “Putin supported Sisi: the Kremlin’s Egyptian gambit,” *BBC (Russian service)*, 14 February 2014, http://www.bbc.co.uk/russian/international/2014/02/140213_sisi_russia_egypt_gambit.shtml (in Russian).

⁵¹ “In Sochi, Putin reached agreement with Egyptian president to increase agricultural shipment to Russia by 30%,” *Newsru.com*, 12 August 2014, <http://www.newsru.com/russia/12aug2014/putinsisi.html> (in Russian).

⁵² Lukyanov, “Let it be ... how it used to be.”

⁵³ Dmitri Trenin, “Why Russia Supports Assad,” *The New York Times*, 9 February 2012, http://www.nytimes.com/2012/02/10/opinion/why-russia-supports-assad.html?_r=2&partner=rss&emc=rss.

⁵⁴ Ruslan Pukhov, “Why Russia Is Backing Syria,” *The New York Times*, 6 July 2012, http://www.nytimes.com/2012/07/07/opinion/why-russia-supports-syria.html?_r=0.

In Syria, as if under a magnifying glass, we see the two factors described above, each influencing the formation of Russian policy with respect to the Arab Spring, while the Syrian precedent itself was the quintessential manifestation of this policy in real life.

The beginning of the Syrian conflict did not inspire optimism regarding the prospects of President Assad for remaining in power. Most voices, including those in Russia, discussed how long he would manage to remain in power, and whether he would run from the country – the only way to avoid the fate of Colonel Kaddafi. In 2012, the Russian MFA saw the fall of the Assad regime as highly probable,⁵⁵ and Minister Lavrov saw fit to underscore that Moscow had no plans to offer the Syrian president asylum.⁵⁶

Nevertheless, since the very beginning of the Syrian crisis, Russia had occupied a position to which it later remained loyal. The core message was that the fate of Syria was to be decided by the people of Syria themselves; interference from outside was inadmissible, and the only possible path to regulation was an inclusive national dialogue and talks between the authorities and the opposition, while the departure of Assad could not be a precondition of such talks, as he was the lawfully-elected president.

2012 and January to September 2013 saw the greatest tension around the defense of this position. It found no sympathy in the Middle East (Assad had made plenty of enemies amongst Arab leaders, and placed most hope on Iran), or in the West. Russia was criticized for blocking the anti-Syrian resolutions of the UN Security Council and for indifference to the suffering of the Syrian people.⁵⁷ Moscow's arguments, that the key role in the armed struggle against the Syrian regime was played by radical Islamists using terrorist tactics, whilst conducting ethnic and religious cleansing, initially went unheard abroad.

The most serious challenge was the incident in August of 2013, when the West unanimously accused the Syrian authorities of using chemical weapons. The fact that President Obama had called the use of WMD in Syria a “red line,”⁵⁸ crossing which would inevitably trigger a military response, left no-one doubting that Syria would be struck in September or October 2013.⁵⁹ It was clear that the affair would go beyond the destruction of chemical weapons stocks, and the issue would follow the Libyan scenario,

⁵⁵ “Russian MID does not rule out insurgent victory in Syria,” *RT.com*, 13 December 2012, <http://russian.rt.com/inotv/2012-12-13/MID-Rossii-ne-isklyuchaet-pobedi> (in Russian).

⁵⁶ “Russia does not intend to offer Assad shelter, states Lavrov – he has friends in Europe,” *Newsru.com*, 28 December 2012, <http://www.newsru.com/russia/28jul2012/noassad.html> (in Russian).

⁵⁷ “Suffering children in Syria: Cameron accuses Russia and China,” *BBC (Russian service)*, 27 September 2012, http://www.bbc.co.uk/russian/international/2012/09/120926_cameron_un_blasts_russia.shtm (in Russian).

⁵⁸ Glenn Kessler, “President Obama and the ‘red line’ on Syria’s chemical weapons,” *The Washington Post*, 6 September 2013, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/fact-checker/wp/2013/09/06/president-obama-and-the-red-line-on-syrias-chemical-weapons/>.

⁵⁹ “Politologists: A strike against Syria is inevitable,” *Gazeta.ru*, 3 September 2013, http://www.gazeta.ru/politics/video/politologi_udar_po_sirii_neizbezhen.shtml (in Russian); “A strike will be carried out against Syria,” *Russian Foreign Affairs Council*, 28 August 2013, http://russiacouncil.ru/inner/?id_4=2258#top (in Russian).

including military support for the insurgents and the overthrow of the government. The absurdity of the situation, both in Syria and in the Arab Spring in general, was emphasized by Lavrov on 26 August 2013 (on the eve of the planned invasion) when he called an extraordinary press conference on the Syrian issue:

It is very difficult to understand the true motives that guide our Western colleagues when, conducting destructive interventions in Iraq and Libya, and without resolving other problems in the Arab Spring to help these same states achieve stability, as well as inter-confessional, interethnic peace, they start making statements at the highest level, which are truly stunning, given the vagueness of the course they are proposing...

As regards the strategy of our Western partners, please note: a few years ago one of the most popular refrains, addressed to us and to China, was to choose “the right side of history.” In the past six-to-twelve months I don’t remember the topic of the “right side of history” being mentioned any more...many key players have taken one side, acting on the principle “the winner is always right,” forgetting about old alliances, and placing bets on those that they considered to be the winners. Then, the winning side once again turns into the loser. This is what is called *ad hoc* policy-making. But we need policies to be comprehensive and logical.⁶⁰

The fact that the intervention in Syria did not take place demonstrated that the West, apparently, had understood: the war in Syria had ceased to be a conflict between the authorities and the opposition, and had turned into an interdenominational bloodbath. The authorities confronted the opposition, the secular opposition ended up fighting the radical opposition, while the country itself became an arena of clashes between external forces, mainly from Saudi Arabia and Iran. Armed interference by the West in such a conflict could do no more than further confuse an already complicated situation.

Subsequent events are well known. Moscow’s position on Syria and the sophisticated combination of moves proposed to solve the problem of Syrian chemical weapons were virtually the first example of genuine multi-lateral diplomacy in the past 20 years. As a result, this success made it possible to organize Geneva II and achieve progress in six-party negotiations with Iran. The refusal to invade Syria and the achievement of agreements on the Iranian nuclear program signaled a degree of normalization in Americano-Iranian relations.⁶¹

The Russo-American agreement on Syrian chemical weapons made it possible to contain the Syrian crisis. The Assad regime was left standing, and the jihadists from Al Qaeda and ISIL who fought it turned their attention to Iraq, still weak after the American invasion and unable to build functioning state institutions or an effective army. The enhanced effectiveness of international efforts to assist the authorities in Bagdad or Erbil in their fight against ISIL was the most topical issue of Middle-East security at the time of writing this article.

⁶⁰ Sergei Lavrov: press conference in Moscow, 26 August 2013, http://www.mid.ru/brp_4.nsf/0/366D32761BA7D4F244257BD300546B19 (in Russian).

⁶¹ Chelsea J. Carter, “It’s a three-decade first: Presidents of U.S., Iran talk directly, if only by phone,” *CNN*, 28 September 2013, <http://edition.cnn.com/2013/09/27/politics/us-iran>.

The absurdity of the situation, in which the West fought in Mali and Iraq with the exact same people they supported in Libya and Syria, against a backdrop of growing chaos in the Middle East, was yet further proof for Moscow of the validity of its conservative position:

In Mali the French lent a hand in the fight against terrorists – groups that France had armed and supported in Libya ... Inflating illegal armed groups with weapons creates colossal threats. One should not simply declare “let’s forget about everything else – Syria has problems, let’s help it.” It is just a short while ago that we were working with Libya in just the same way, and before that – Iraq, without a thought for the consequences that this creates across the Muslim world ... we can already see the terrible consequences of previous interference in conflicts in the same region ... In Libya the central authorities do not exert control over huge swaths of their own country, while the fighters that helped overthrow Kaddafi have brought their weapons to Mali, although they are already feared in other countries, such as Niger and Chad.

Take a look at Iraq, where dozens of lives are lost each day, and hundreds are wounded due to bloody acts of terrorism. What is happening in Syria is a real civil war. The government is fighting the so-called “Free Syrian Army” and with a growing number of terrorists affiliated with Jabat an-Nusra, ISIS and other terrorist groups. The Free Syrian Army occasionally clashes with terrorist groups. If anyone thinks that after bombing the Syrian military infrastructure to create an empty battlefield for the regime’s enemies to gain victory, then everything will be over – this is an illusion. Even if there will be such a victory, the civil war will continue.⁶²

So, as Lukyanov notes, “as early as 2012 there was just one, universal opinion, that Russia was the unquestionable loser of the Arab Spring. Her last allies, inherited from the USSR, are departing, and their predecessors are hostile to Moscow, while those with neutral positions have nothing to offer Moscow. Today, all this looks different.” A year after the planned invasion of Syria that never took place, even in the West people have started to recognize how right Russia’s position was (although such voices are subdued, as relations between Russia and the West had by this time deteriorated beyond recognition).⁶³

The same took place with respect to Moscow’s attitude to the Arab capitals. Differences between Russia and the Arab states in their attitudes to the Syrian crisis were gradually surpassed by a more constructive agenda, according to which Russia and the countries of the region noticeably upgraded the intensity of bilateral dialogue, whilst also expanding the scope of such talks. The countries of the region were appreciative of Russia’s logical alternative to the Western position, and quickly made 180-degree changes in their public discourse: Russia had changed from a country that supported the “dying, blood-spattered Syrian regime because of Empire mania,” to become a popular partner inspiring high expectations.

⁶² Sergei Lavrov: press conference in Moscow.

⁶³ Ishaan Tharoor, “Was Putin right about Syria?” *The Washington Post*, 22 August 2014, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/worldviews/wp/2014/08/22/was-putin-right-about-syria>.

The unprecedented intensity of contacts between Moscow and Riyadh, Teheran, Tel Aviv, Ankara, Damascus, Cairo and Ramallah, against a backdrop of close cooperation with the USA in almost all aspects of the regional agenda, even at the height of the Ukrainian crisis (Syrian internal talks, Israelo-Palestinian regulation, and dialogue with Iran) soon became a tangible factor shaping the new Middle East.

Meanwhile, Moscow is continuing to maintain a completely conservative approach to Mid-East affairs, supposing that, in the realities of this region, attempts to sponsor rapid change only exacerbate old problems and create new ones. It turns out that, in a period of apparent chaos on the international arena, such a position meets with growing understanding, if not outright approval.

Russo–American Relations: Antagonism or Reset 2.0?

The instability that has swept the Middle East from the beginning of the Arab Spring continued to deepen in 2014. In addition, another source of world tension has sprung up: the crisis around Ukraine. Initially, this was just another example of a failed state: the collapse of a fragile state organism, typified by previously concealed interregional differences that became evident due to a systemic economic collapse. The case of Ukraine subsequently eclipsed the outrages of ISIL in Iraq, the Israeli operation in Gaza, and yet another wave of tension in the South-East China Sea. The unprecedented deterioration of Russo-Western relations and the subsequent mutual launch of sanctions forced the whole world to talk of a return to the times of the Cold War.

Interestingly, this new situation did not affect Russo-American cooperation on Mid-East issues for some time. Moscow and Washington continued to jointly support internal Syrian talks, as well as the far more productive contacts of the Iran six-party talks, while the Middle-East quartet continued its work. However, as the two countries entered into a cycle of permanent mutual rejection, it became clear that no more joint initiatives of significance—such as the Syrian chemical weapons deal—were to be expected. The familiar logic of the “zero sum game” dictated a very different kind of action in any arbitrary international situation.

The feeling of an imminent return to the old ways is currently predominant in Russia and in the USA. In Russian society, there is now an ever-wider understanding that the Western sanctions of 2014 are aimed not only at undermining the national economy and doling out “punishment” for Crimea, but have the ultimate goal of regime change in Russia.⁶⁴ In such a situation, there can hardly be any hope of constructive cooperation.

In 2007, Russian Foreign minister Lavrov, speaking on a very different issue, wrote:

If we analyze the ideological inertia that brought the USA to “transformative democracy,” it is clear that between the foreign policy efforts of Washington and Moscow there is a wide gap. One can only suppose that herein lies the problem [of Russo-American relations], or at least a large part of it. Russia has had more than her share of revolutions – for us, most of the 20th century was tied up in one revolution or another. The past century was

⁶⁴ See, for example, the interview with Sergey Karaganov in *Rossiyskaya gazeta*, 24 April 2014, <http://www.rg.ru/2014/04/23/karaganov-site.html> (in Russian).

a sort of purgatory for European civilization, overcoming evil by driving out one's ideological "demons" – the various extremist products of European liberal thinking. It is for this reason that Russia will not lend its support on any ideologized project, and is all the more determined not to adopt one that comes from abroad.

The Westphalian system, which it has become fashionable to criticize in some circles, placed differences in values outside of the relations between states. In this sense, the Cold War was one big step backwards. Should we now continue to move backwards on this path, that can only lead to confrontation?⁶⁵

For the Middle East, where conflicts even during the "real" Cold War had a unique dynamic and did not vanish either in the 1990's or in the 2000's, the climate in Russo-American relations plays a secondary role. Local leaders have long since learned how to make gains playing on the differences between the great powers. Here, all parties have their own interests, yet a balance between them is yet to be found; moreover, it is up to the countries of the region to find it. External players will be unable to help even if they wish to: the degree of their influence on the actual balance of power is falling irreversibly, even if it may appear that something can be achieved by a sudden surge of efforts.

Meanwhile, Russo-American antagonism, if it is predominant, closes the doors on diplomatic solutions such as that in Syria. The production of such solutions, much like their implementation, is possible only if the two countries can reach agreement. In the current situation, the elites of both countries will tend to avoid compromises with their opponent, even if the arguments of the latter are well-justified. The readiness to listen to the opinion of the opposite side will diminish.

In June 2014, speaking before the members of the Russian Foreign Affairs Council, Sergei Lavrov attempted to produce a general assessment of the history of Russo-Western relations over the past two decades and expressed the hope that the Ukrainian crisis could become a sort of "refreshing storm" for these relations.⁶⁶ This appears unlikely. However, given sufficient political will, and considering the lack of predictability in the world situation today, a second, deeper "reset" cannot be excluded.

In this article, we have attempted to describe not only the attitude of Russia to the phenomenon of the Arab Spring, but also offer a portrait of the events, phenomena and processes, which informed the current Russian worldview over the past two and a half decades, and without which any understanding of Moscow's position toward the Arab Spring will be incomplete.

During the time of bipolar international relations, Soviet-American antagonism supported that stable axis, around which international life was built, developing in a predictable fashion. Today's world has changed much in the last decades: Europe's role is diminished, the economic centre of gravity and the potential for conflict have both shifted to the East, and the international system no longer has a reliable point of support.

⁶⁵ Sergei Lavrov, "Russian Deterrence: Back to the Future?" *Rossiya v globalnoi politike*, 22 August 2007, http://www.globalaffairs.ru/number/n_9236 (in Russian).

⁶⁶ Statement by Russian Foreign minister Lavrov at a meeting with members of the Russian Foreign Affairs Council, Moscow, 4 June 2014, http://www.mid.ru/brp_4.nsf/0/412C7BA2A5A1E66544257CED0059D4DF.

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In this world, Russo-American confrontation cannot be a source of greater stability or predictability. More likely, this will simply become one more daub in the chaotic and muddled portrait of the modern international environment.

Russia's View of Its Relations with Georgia after the 2012 Elections: Implications for Regional Stability

*Nikolai Silaev and Andrei Sushentsov**

Abstract: The aim of this paper is to analyze the impact of political developments in Georgia since the 2012 parliamentary elections on Russo-Georgian relations. First, the authors examine the effect of changes in Georgia's politics towards the Caucasus, Russia and the Euro-Atlantic region. Second, the authors analyze the opportunities for improving Russo-Georgian relations through studying the three following aspects of this bilateral relationship: creation of common economic space between Russia, Georgia, South Ossetia and Abkhazia; transformation of the Georgian North Caucasus Policy and its shift towards cooperation with Moscow; and implications of Georgia's Euro-Atlantic integration for the regional security. The article suggests that Russo-Georgian relations are not doomed to be strained and have the potential for improvement.

Keywords: Russo-Georgian relations; Georgian domestic policy; South Ossetia; Abkhazia; international relations in the Caucasus.

In October 2012 Georgia saw a change of power. Since that time Russia and Georgia have broken the stalemate in their relations, which have been normalizing despite the skepticism coming from both sides.¹ A political dialogue has been in progress between the two states. Russian Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Grigory Karasin has been holding regular meetings with the Georgian Prime Minister's Special Representative in Relations with Russia Zurab Abashidze. The hostile rhetoric from both sides has significantly diminished. Back on the Russian market are traditional Georgian goods, and the influx of Russian tourists in Georgia has grown by 40%. Amendments to the Law on Occupied Territories are under discussion in the Georgian parliament. It is expected that visits to Abkhazia and South Ossetia made by Russian citizens without Georgia's permission for the first time will be decriminalized. Additionally, contacts between the two

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¹ Nikolai Silaev and Andrei Sushentsov, *Georgia After the Elections and Prospects for Russo-Georgian Relations* (Moscow: MGIMO, 2012).

countries in the cultural sphere have intensified, and the scientific communities of Russia and Georgia have been actively interacting.

Before the Sochi Olympic Games 2014 Georgian Prime Minister Bidzina Ivanishvili offered assistance to Moscow in providing security during the event. The detention of Mikhail Kadiev, Rizvan Omarov² and Yusup Lakaev, the suspects of murdering of some Russian officials, could also be seen as a result of cooperation between Georgia and Russia on security issues. This cooperation is especially important with Russian President Vladimir Putin having said in 2013 that the efficiency of a joint terrorism counter-action may be the first step towards restoring visa-free regime between the two countries.³

Naturally, these symptoms of rapprochement in the Russo-Georgian relations are combined with some serious obstacles. The latter are inevitable taking into consideration the long period that Moscow and Tbilisi had been at loggerheads. Nonetheless, the general dynamics of the bilateral relationship today is positive. The purpose of this paper is to analyze, why the normalization of these relations came so late and in what way it may affect both the Russo-Georgian relations and the regional security.

A Deferred Normalization

It has taken more than four years for conditions to ripen enough politically to finally raise the question of possible normalization of Russo-Georgian relations damaged by the August conflict 2008 between Georgia and South Ossetia. On August 8 in violation of international treaties Georgian leader Mikhail Saakashvili launched an artillery and ground assault on the breakaway region of Tskhinvali near the Russian border. Under its peacekeeping mandate, Moscow responded with a military campaign to coerce Georgia into ceasing its operations. After five days of hostilities Russian forces expelled the Georgian troops from South Ossetia. In order to prevent further attempts by Tbilisi to capture Tskhinvali by force, Russia decided to recognize South Ossetia as an independent state and to provide it with military deterrence capabilities.

Moscow believed that coming to any agreement with Mikhail Saakashvili was impossible. In the Russian leadership's eyes he became notorious for failing to keep his word. The most striking—although not the only—example of this was the shelling of Tskhinvali on 8 August in 2008 several hours after he had announced a unilateral ceasefire on Georgian television. Had Moscow started relations with Georgia afresh, would there be any guarantee that this will not happen again? At the same time Georgia was also giving contradictory signals, and discerning the general logic of its policy was impossible. Saakashvili made some statements that could be considered encouraging. For instance, he spoke in favor of dialogue with Russia and promised not to use force against

² “Moscow Demands Extradition of the Detained Terrorist from Georgia,” *Georgia Times*, 17 June 2013, <http://www.georgiatimes.info/news/91797.html> (in Russian).

³ “Visit to the *Russia Today* Channel,” official site of the President of Russia, 11 June 2013, <http://www.kremlin.ru/news/18319> (in Russian).

Abkhazia or South Ossetia, he promised from the podium of the European Parliament.⁴ However, in the wider perspective of the Georgian government policies these speeches were hardly convincing, and shortly after the call for dialogue, Saakashvili claimed that Russia's sole goal was to "swallow Georgia."⁵

While the Georgian government's State Strategy on Occupied Territories was intended to expand contacts with the people of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, the adoption of this strategy was followed by imposing restrictions on interaction between people of Tbilisi, Tskhinvali and Sukhumi and on activities of NGOs in the two republics.

In this climate of uncertainty Russia had no intention to bring up the agenda from before the August conflict within neither the European international politics arena nor the post-Soviet space. Moscow's response to the NATO military exercise in Georgia in May 2009 was rather sharp. Russia strongly objected to any Georgia – NATO interaction as if there had not been a war in August 2008 or a tragic lead-up to the conflict.⁶ For a year and a half the Georgian president was not welcomed in Europe and in Washington, which was an obvious sign of isolation – not of Georgia, but of its leader. Would it have been wise on Russia's part to act to end Saakashvili's isolation? These international political circumstances pushed Moscow to bide its time.

The authors of this paper suggest that there is no predetermined outcome in the further development of Russo-Georgian relations. The two countries are not doomed to confrontation. It took long time for a military conflict to break out and the diplomatic relations between two countries to break down. Today a number of obstacles, which appear insurmountable, remain hindering normalization of Russo-Georgian relations. Yet, resources for improving relations exist. Contacts between the societies of the two countries continue, and the political enmity has not affected the relations between the people of Russia and Georgia. Both sides share the impression that this ongoing estrangement is abnormal.

The changing political situation in Georgia in autumn 2012 brought the Georgian Dream opposition coalition to power. The new government of Bidzina Ivanishvili, and subsequently Irakli Garibashvili, has announced that one of its priorities is revising the political course of the country's previous leadership towards Russia. Despite the clear difficulties that the new Georgian government faces and will continue to face, a window of opportunity has opened to normalize relations with Russia.

⁴ "Georgia's Saakashvili Pledges Peaceful Solution to Dispute with Russia," official site of the European Parliament, 23 November 2010, <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/news-room/content/20101122FCS94327/7/html/Georgia%27s-Saakashvili-pledges-peaceful-solution-to-dispute-with-Russia> (in Russian).

⁵ Nestan Charkviani, "Georgian MFA: Moscow Meant to Misunderstand Saakashvili's Metaphorical Speech," *Voice of America*, 8 February 2011, <http://www.golos-ameriki.ru/content/nc-georgia-russia-2011-02-08-115589774/201972.html> (in Russian).

⁶ Yureva Darya, "Russian MFA Called the NATO's Clarifications 'Cheap,'" *Rossiiskaia Gazeta*, 23 April 2010, <http://www.rg.ru/2009/04/23/nato.html> (in Russian).

Georgia After the 2012 Elections

The opposition coalition Georgian Dream, led by entrepreneur and philanthropist Bidzina Ivanishvili, won the parliamentary elections on 1 October 2012, taking 55 % of the popular vote, which was 15 % more than what Saakashvili's United National Movement (UNM) party managed to achieve. Most importantly, the Georgian Dream victory was registered in most of the majority constituencies.

As a result of the negotiations between the leadership of the Georgian Dream and Georgia's president Saakashvili, Bidzina Ivanishvili was offered the post of prime minister. With the parliament's confirmation he received *carte blanche* to form a new government. Meanwhile, Saakashvili's term as president was due to end in January 2014. In late October 2012, Ivanishvili proposed that constitutional amendments that will make the prime minister an actual head of government take effect as soon as possible, but later abandoned his proposal.

Bidzina Ivanishvili came to power on the tide of Georgian voters' support. He was able to bring together all of the opposition, which none of his predecessors had managed to achieve. He is very popular within the country personally and enjoys boundless—by the Georgian standards—financial resources.⁷ All these characteristics make Ivanishvili an obvious leader of the ruling coalition.

At the same time a certain weakness is inherent in Ivanishvili's team. A number of the key governmental and parliamentary positions were taken by the Free Democrats party and the Republican Party. Both these parties are proponents of accelerated Westernization and Euro-Atlantic integration of Georgia.

It is impossible to disregard the fact that voters' expectations and the actual course set by the new government diverged. The Republican Party, which now largely controls the parliament, had never gained its success in elections independently before. In 2004 its members were elected as parliament members through forming a coalition with the UNM. Although the Republicans were criticizing Saakashvili's authoritarian rule vigorously, they did share the strategic orientation that the UNM had chosen. Like many liberals in the post-Soviet space, the Republicans are strong secularists and do not have a good relationship with the Georgian Orthodox Church. In this respect their position was similar to that of the president Saakashvili. Georgian Dream, in contrast, won the elections with unofficial, but poorly camouflaged support from the Church. This circumstance appears to have led to softening of the secularist Republican rhetoric.

Pre-election polls showed that voters favoring the opposition coalition are hardly unanimous in support for NATO, and that they object to sending Georgian soldiers to Afghanistan.⁸ Moreover, 32 % of Georgian voters favoring Georgian Dream saw NATO as “an aggressive military bloc,” 53 % agreed with the statement that Georgia's and

⁷ “The World's Billionaires: #293 Bidzina Ivanishvili,” *Forbes*, <http://www.forbes.com/profile/bidzina-ivanishvili>.

⁸ “Georgian Poll: The Popularity of Political Parties and the People's Attitude toward NATO” (Institute of Eurasia, 25 September 2012), <http://geurasia.org/rus/1305/qartuli-gamokitxva-politikuri-partiebis-reitingi-da-mosaxleobis-damokidebuleba-nato-sadmi.html> (in Russian).

NATO's interests diverge, and 88 % said that Georgia should not be sending soldiers to Afghanistan. Thereby they saw Ivanishvili's campaign pro-NATO rhetoric merely as a diplomatic gesture towards the US.

While the voters who doubt the wisdom of seeking the country's integration with NATO are underrepresented in the public discourse, the Georgian political elite continues to believe in the possibility of their country's Euro-Atlantic integration, following the model of the Central and Eastern European countries, including the Baltic states. They preserve this belief even though these countries now have to deal with the EU crisis and the decreasing US interest in Central Eastern Europe and post-Soviet affairs, which shifted to the instability in the Middle East. The new Georgian governing coalition may lose its support, because it is not considering any discussion of other means of ensuring Georgia's security and is not looking for any alternative course in the foreign policy. Avoidance of discussions of Georgia's security is accompanied by palpable frustration concerning the unattainability of the EU and NATO integration goals.

Despite Saakashvili's UNM defeat in the 2012 elections, the party has a relatively strong position in the parliament. A number of MPs on the UNM slate joined the majority in the parliament in October 2012 with no signs of fissures within the party. After October 2012 Saakashvili suffered a number of political setbacks. Some of his associates were removed from power and were arrested, like ex-prime-minister Ivane Merabishvili and ex-minister of defense Bacho Akhalaya. Saakashvili's hope for the electoral victory of a Republican candidate in the US presidential elections did not come to fruition. Nevertheless, until early 2014 he retained the power to appoint regional governors, kept his grip on the judiciary and still has control over his main media assets. The government and the parliamentary majority thus have to function in the conditions of antagonism with the opposition. October 2013 presidential elections showed that the UNM still plays a significant role in the Georgian politics when its candidate David Bakradze came second in the presidential race with comfortable 21 % of the popular vote.

Ivanishvili's victory spawned inflated expectations about the country's socio-economic development and the normalization of Russo-Georgian relations. In these circumstances, the prime minister had to act carefully trying to avoid the collapse of the coalition. Apparently, the unstable domestic situation in Georgia was hindering a breakthrough both in economic and foreign affairs. Consequently, the new government saw its special task in cooling the overheated expectations of voters without taking away their hope. At the same time, the leadership had to keep the support of these voters and retain its political initiative in opposing the UNM in both domestic and foreign affairs.

An important resource of the new Georgian government in its relations with Moscow was that there was no negative background with them. Mikhail Saakashvili, who lost his trust with the Russian leadership and saw no benefit in improving the situation, was an obstacle to the normalization of Russo-Georgian relations. His personal talent in quarreling with Moscow made him a poor peacemaker. Considering the importance of the "Russian question" to the Georgian audience, rapprochement with Russia highlighted the figures on the domestic political scene in Georgia who could be more capable of

reconciling with Moscow than Saakashvili. For its part, Russia was in no rush to make any overtures to Georgia, for the Russian leadership realized that in the pre-election conditions such moves could only strengthen Saakashvili domestically. Given his inability to come to agreement, any efforts would have been wasted.

Another resource of the new government concerning relations with Moscow is what can be called a *low expectations effect*. In other words, the bilateral relations are so troubled that any improvement will be seen as a huge success. Thus, despite the inflated expectations shared within the Georgian society, there was a general understanding that no quick resolution of the conflict could be reached. Moscow is guardedly optimistic about the actions of Zurab Abashidze, who was appointed as a Special Representative of the Prime Minister in Relations with Russia.⁹ All in all, with the new Georgian government refraining from anti-Russian rhetoric and actions, new possibilities for dialogue have opened up. And most importantly, these possibilities do not require the countries to reconsider their basic values or to make concessions unacceptable in their respective domestic political arenas.

It is vital that at the outcome of the elections the atmosphere, in which relations with Russia are discussed, has changed in Georgia. Politicians and nonprofit sector activists and experts, who have been pushing for the normalization of relations with Russia, no longer risk being politically isolated or labeled as “Russian spies.”

South Ossetia and Abkhazia

However the end goals for resolution of the Georgian-Abkhazian and the Georgian-Ossetian conflicts are perceived or the peace process in the 1990s and 2000s is seen, the current state of Russo-Georgian relations can only have a negative effect on this key aspect of Georgian policies. The status quo in Abkhazia and South Ossetia exists irrespective of whether regional and extra-regional powers recognize these regions or not. The longer this continues – the more permanent this situation becomes. The Abkhazian and South Ossetian issues cannot be resolved without Russia’s participation. Without a Russo-Georgian dialogue on this issue there are no prospects for resolution.

Russia does not recognize its military intervention in South Ossetia in August 2008 as an invasion. Instead, it insists that it carried out an operation to coerce Georgian leadership into ceasing its assault against South Ossetia.¹⁰ The Independent International Fact-Finding Mission paper on the conflict in Georgia (the mission of Heidi Tagliavini)

⁹ “Russian Foreign Ministry Made the Comment over the Appointment of Zurab Abashidze,” *Ist Channel* (Georgia), 2 November 2012, <http://1tv.ge/news-view/43587?lang=en> (accessed 27 June 2014).

¹⁰ “Dmitry Medvedev: Joint Press Conference with German Chancellor Angela Merkel,” official site of the President of Russia, 15 August 2008, http://archive.kremlin.ru/eng/speeches/2008/08/15/2259_type82912type82914type82915_205379.shtml.

recognizes that the hostilities began with Georgian shelling of Tskhinvali. However, the mission views Russia's response as overreaction.¹¹

Additionally, Moscow rejects the term 'occupation' used in relation to the status quo in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, arguing that it does not have any effective control on these two republics.¹² It is important to emphasize that the term "occupation" is inaccurate and not only from the legal point of view. It denies the very fact of the existing Georgian-Abkhazian and Georgian-Ossetian conflicts and suggests that the only thing happening is confrontation between Russia and Georgia – and that Russia is "occupying" Georgia's territories.

The key problem in the Georgian-Ossetian and Georgian-Abkhazian rifts is that Tbilisi views Russia as a leading player in these processes. However, no matter how much weight is ascribed to Moscow's influence, this perception hinders actual understanding of the situation. It leaves the necessity of Georgian peacemaking initiatives out of the equation. Furthermore, by labelling the entire situation a "Russian occupation" Tbilisi neglects the interests of the Ossetians and Abkhazians, who in Tbilisi's view do not have the right to an opinion.

Saakashvili's government was considerably dissatisfied with the necessity to make significant concessions to Sukhumi and Tskhinvali as a condition for strengthening the Georgian territorial integrity. It was also very difficult for Georgia to engage with the two regions as equal partners in negotiations. Against this background, Russia's neutral position in the peace process was seen by Tbilisi as anti-Georgian. In 2004, in violation of international agreements, Saakashvili chose to squeeze Russia out of the peace process and shift to the policy of "reintegration" of these republics by force. The goal of Saakashvili's foreign policy was to transform the Georgian-Ossetian and Georgian-Abkhaz conflicts into a Russo-Georgian one, and then to put the country within the context of the Russia-US confrontation. The tragic events of August 2008 revealed miscalculations and destructiveness of this kind of strategy.

Despite Saakashvili's actions, Moscow consistently supported the principle of Georgia's territorial integrity and until 2008 took part in CIS sanctions against Abkhazia and South Ossetia.¹³ Since the early 1990s Russia's position on the peace process remained unchanged. President Vladimir Putin elaborated this position during the escalation of the Georgian-Ossetian confrontation: "Russia ... is ready to do what it can do to bring peace and restore the territorial integrity of Georgia. We do not intend to speak for one side.

¹¹ "Report on the Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on the Conflict in Georgia," Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on the Conflict in Georgia, 30 September 2009, http://eu-un.europa.eu/articles/en/article_9045_en.htm.

¹² "'Occupied Territories' Term Inapplicable to Abkhazia, South Ossetia – Foreign Ministry," *Interfax*, 9 June 2012, <http://www.interfax.com/newsinf.asp?pg=8&id=338719>.

¹³ "Karasin on Withdrawal of Sanctions from Abkhazia," *Ajara TV* (Georgia), 18 March 2008, <http://ajaratv.ge/en/index.php?page=shownews&id=2083>.

We are ready to act as a mediator and a guarantor of any agreements that have been arrived at freely.”¹⁴

Tbilisi’s political line, which is based on viewing Russia as an “occupier,” not only sharpened differences between Russia and Georgia, but also engendered the inaccurate understanding of Sukhumi’s and Tskhinvali’s motivations. If we set aside Tbilisi’s responsibility for the South Ossetian and Abkhazian conflicts in the early 1990s, it is clear that Saakashvili’s government could not provide any valid answer to the question of whom Sukhumi and Tskhinvali see as their primary security threat. Nor was Saakashvili willing to give a clever answer to the question why the leadership in the two republics would not find the idea of Euro-Atlantic integration appealing.

The torpedoing of the peace process was accompanied by a propaganda campaign aimed at the West. The negotiating tactic used by Georgian diplomats under the leadership of the UNM was to embed US and EU observers in the peace process as a way to compel Russia to accept Georgia’s terms. Meanwhile, Tbilisi failed to notice that the observer mission did not guarantee significant engagement of Western states in the negotiating process. The European stance was that Georgia was “right” in its conflict with Russia. The EU countries refrained from the practical matter of peacemaking, refusing to get deeply involved or push for concessions from Moscow. While Saakashvili boasted of success, in reality he suffered a political loss that strengthened the status quo. This troubling circumstance made the opposition parties, who came to power in Georgia in 2012, reconsider Tbilisi’s policy towards South Ossetia and Abkhazia.

With Georgian Dream in power, Tbilisi recognized that the obstruction of the peace process with the governments of South Ossetia and Abkhazia would be deleterious to Georgia’s long-term interests. Members of the Georgian Dream coalition believed that if in the next 10 years Tbilisi does not offer a reasonable reintegration proposal, it will create the conditions for the international community (primarily the EU) to formalize Abkhazia’s status as a part of the Black Sea Region.¹⁵

The weight of stereotypes from the 1990s and the effective anti-Russian propaganda of the Saakashvili government had a considerable effect on how Georgians viewed the events of August 2008. The leader of Georgian Dream, new Prime Minister Bidzina Ivanishvili,¹⁶ described Russia’s actions in the Georgian-South Ossetian conflict as Moscow’s endeavor to “cross the Caucasus.” While recognizing Saakashvili’s government as the initiator of the conflict, only a slight minority in Georgia’s political establishment was willing to hear out Russia’s point of view, expressed by Dmitri Medvedev in

¹⁴ “V. Putin Conference at the Conclusion of a Meeting with the President of Ukraine, Leonid Kuchma,” official site of the President of Russia, 18 August 2004, <http://archive.kremlin.ru/text/appears/2004/08/75603.shtml> (in Russian).

¹⁵ Paata Zakareishvili, “Recognizing Alternatives,” Heinrich Boll Stiftung, <http://ge.boell.org/sites/default/files/downloads/Zakareishvili.pdf>.

¹⁶ “Ivanishvili: ‘Saakashvili’s Actions Allowed Russia to Occupy Our Territories,’” *Civil Georgia*, 24 October 2012, <http://www.civil.ge/rus/article.php?id=24054> (in Russian).

2011:¹⁷ “We are forced ... to recognize the international legal existence of [Abkhazia and South Ossetia] in order to protect them.” It is vital to mention that Russia took the path of recognition only after Saakashvili rejected Moscow’s ceasefire offer, which included the condition of providing international guarantees for the security of Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

In principle, Moscow does not exclude the possibility of a political union between Georgia, Abkhazia and South Ossetia (e.g., as a confederation). However, it could only be achieved under agreement of all the three sides. This stance was elaborated in a number of Medvedev’s statements during his presidential term.¹⁸ In his interviews with *Russia Today*, PIK TV and Ekho Moskvyy Radio Station in August 2011 Medvedev¹⁹ pointed out some scenarios of the future development on the situation: “I would be very happy if, say, the leadership of Georgia, Abkhazia, and South Ossetia were to sit at the negotiating table and think about how they were going to continue living together, how to create peace and the rule of law ... Russia will never be an obstacle to this.”

Georgian Dream leadership’s statements²⁰ indicate that any national or state initiatives for Abkhazia and South Ossetia will require actual support of Abkhazians and Ossetians. For Georgia to become democratic and to thrive, the past cannot be treated as a simple misunderstanding, triggered by historic mistakes that can be easily rectified. This motivates the Ivanishvili government to work hard on restarting a direct dialogue with the governments of these de facto republics.

Similarly, the Abkhazian and South Ossetian leadership are interested in normalizing relations with Tbilisi. First, the current state of relations between Russia and Georgia, Georgia and Abkhazia and Georgia and South Ossetia hinders the creation of a solid legal foundation for peace. Second, the Georgian population of Abkhazia—and especially that of South Ossetia—suffers because of the uncertainty of their legal status and the tough border-crossing regime. This regime is one of the reasons why integrating the societies of two new independent states and creating stable democratic political regimes there is difficult. Third, in practice both republics lose much as a result of the tension and uncertainty in their relations with Georgia. Specifically, tensions with Georgia hinder full use of the transit routes that unite Russia, Georgia, South Ossetia and Abkhazia.

We have reason to believe that a “small steps” strategy remains possible. Successful implementation of such a strategy can lay the ground for a discussion of strategic political solutions, including proposals that could possibly be the focus of such a strategy and that would be more easily accepted by all sides in this conflict.

¹⁷ “Dmitry Medvedev: Interview to *Russia Today*, PIK and Ekho Moskvyy Radio Station,” official site of the President of Russia, 5 August 2011, <http://kremlin.ru/news/12204> (in Russian).

¹⁸ “Dmitry Medvedev: Interview with TF-1 TV,” official site of the President the Russia, 26 August 2008, http://archive.kremlin.ru/appears/2008/08/26/2300_type63379type63380_205786.shtml (in Russian).

¹⁹ “Dmitry Medvedev: Interview to *Russia Today*, PIK and Ekho Moskvyy Radio Station.”

²⁰ “Ivanishvili: ‘Saakashvili’s Actions Allowed Russia to Occupy Our Territories.’”

The Georgian government's notion of Abkhazia and South Ossetia being "occupied" leads to Tbilisi's inability to accept their (disputably) legal and political standing as territorial entities. Tbilisi recognized them as political entities until August 2008 as Tbilisi, Tskhinvali, and Sukhumi remained signatories of the cease-fire agreements.²¹ Georgia's current position is weak. If Tbilisi chooses the course of peaceful resolution of these two conflicts, it will have to engage directly with the leadership of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. This means that recognizing the legal and political being of these two territories in some shape or form is inevitable.

In these circumstances it is necessary to separate the discussions of humanitarian issues (e.g., the status of peoples in the border region) from political considerations about the future of the region. The question of the quality and level of Russia's military presence in Abkhazia and South Ossetia can hardly be sustained. Connecting political and military issues with humanitarian ones means erecting an unnecessary diplomatic obstacle in solving humanitarian issues.

The gradual desecuritization of relations would make it possible to consider renewing social and economic ties between the sides. The best case scenario would be creation of a common space for the movement of people, goods, capital, and services between Georgia, Abkhazia, and South Ossetia – with the direct participation of Russia. Russia, too, would be one of the structural elements of this space.

In November 2012 new Georgian Minister for Reintegration Paata Zakareishvili proposed the resumption of railway communication between Georgia and Abkhazia.²² This initiative met objections both in Georgia and Abkhazia, which made Zakareishvili withdraw his proposal. In spite of the obstacles that the practical implementation of this plan faces, the resumption of the rail link could create a new impetus for positive economic and political processes in South Caucasus, which constitutes a common interest for the neighboring countries. Revival of the rail and other transport links in the region would not only be a symbol of normalization of relations, but would also encourage renewal of social connections between the sides. Negotiations on restarting rail links between Georgia and Abkhazia would shape a new form of Georgian-Abkhazian engagement. A new railroad negotiation process would be unconnected to the legacy of the 2008 conflict (even though existing Geneva negotiations are deeply connected with the war). This kind of political process would be no less important than its result.

²¹ "Agreement on Principles of Settlement of the Georgian – Ossetian Conflict (Sochi Agreement)," official site of the United Nations, 24 June 1992, <http://peacemaker.un.org/georgia-sochi-agreement92>; "Agreement on a Cease-Fire and Separation of Forces (Moscow Agreement)," official site of the United Nations, 14 May 1993, http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/1994/583.

²² "The New Government of Georgia Is a Chance for Russia to Normalize its Relations with Georgia," *Public Dialogues*, 30 October 2012, http://publicdialogues.info/en/Paata_Zakareishvili%3A_The_New_Government_of_Georgia_is_a_Chance_for_Russia_to_Normalize_Its_Relations_with_Georgia.

An important signal of change in Georgia's approach to Abkhazia and South Ossetia would be to repeal of the Law on the Occupied Territories.²³ A number of sections of that law hinder both economic development for Abkhazia and Ossetia and humanitarian cooperation between Russia and Georgia. In our opinion, legal regulation of interaction between Georgian citizens and residents of Abkhazia and South Ossetia can be better executed under other legal acts that are not based on counter-productive concept of "occupation."

Georgia's North Caucasus Policy

During Mikhail Saakashvili's presidency Georgia was conducting a *New North Caucasus Policy*. The latter consisted in efforts to destabilize the Russian Caucasus region by means of taking advantage of the existent contradictions between Moscow and other regional authorities. Among the core points of this policy were supporting the Circassian national movement and using Islamist organizations in the Russian republics of Dagestan, Chechnya and Ingushetia. The implementation of such a policy became possible after full control over the Georgian territory had been established by Tbilisi.

Russia recognizes that the Georgian state's effective control over the whole Georgian territory—except for the ex-autonomous republics of Abkhazia and South Ossetia—is a true achievement for the contemporary Georgia. During the Shevardnadze era (1992-2003) the absence of such control hindered cooperation between the two countries in the fight against terrorism in the North Caucasus. The large-scale destabilization of Georgia can create a situation, in which terrorist groups from the north side of the Caucasus would freely use Georgia as a base, despite the Georgian stance on the matter. Yet, Moscow's loss of control over the North Caucasus and its destabilization can significantly increase the range of threats, which Georgia has to deal with today. The overall population of Dagestan, Chechnya and Ingushetia is equal to the population of Georgia and grows rapidly.

The main result of this policy for the Georgian government is that North Caucasus intellectuals no longer harbor disdain for Georgia, which was a result of the 1992-1993 unsuccessful Georgian war with Abkhazia. Activists from Circassian ethnic organizations were delighted by Georgia's recognition of the "Genocide against Circassians" during the Caucasian War.²⁴ Meanwhile, those who support the Russian government qualify this stance by saying that Georgia must first recognize the genocide against the Abkhazians and Ossetians. But this position appears to be more of an obeisance to Moscow than a sincere one. Both opposition and pro-government ethnic Circassian organizations see the Russo-Georgian antagonism as a possibility to maneuver between the two sides, improving their own political status and strengthening their image in the media:

²³ "The Law of Georgia on Occupied Territories," official site of the Office of the State Minister of Georgia for Reconciliation and Civic Equality, 23 October 2008, <http://www.smr.gov.ge/docs/doc216.pdf>.

²⁴ "Circassian Genocide Documents," *Circassian Genocide*, www.circassian-genocide.info/Documents/English.pdf.

“Since Russia won’t talk to us, we’ll talk with Georgia,” “Moscow should have recognized the genocide earlier than Georgia,” and “Poland and the Baltic states now recognize the genocide we have suffered.” Russia reacted firmly and with emotional restraint to the recognition of the “Circassian Genocide” by the Georgian Parliament.²⁵ The Russian government’s unwillingness to discuss this issue with Circassian ethnic organizations weakens the latter’s position.

If the cost of cooperation with Georgia—as well as with the American Jamestown Foundation—extends beyond joint conferences and the erection of monuments, it could be prohibitively expensive for the Circassian activists. The activists’ attempts at securing foreign financing for their efforts have been unsuccessful. Both pro- and anti-Russian Circassian ethnic organizations are financed domestically by regional governments and Circassian businessmen with no traces of Georgian participation.

Circassian ethnic activists have expressed dissatisfaction at the Tbilisi Center for Circassian Culture’s attempts to expand its activity to the Chechen and Ingush peoples. These attempts were seen as a bid to combine the peaceful and secular Circassian opposition with the armed and Islamic opposition. Circassian activists of Kabardina-Balkariya—who in association with the Center for Circassian Culture have been Georgia’s primary North Caucasus partner in the campaign for the recognition of the “Genocide”—treasure their secular status. At the same time, the principles of the New North Caucasus Policy, being a major irritant for Moscow in a sensitive area, are pushing the Georgian government to alliance with Islamist groups in the North Caucasus. Proofs of such alliance have appeared in the Russian and Georgian press, and the Russian intelligence agencies have also pointed to this alliance in their statements.²⁶ The most indicative incident was Georgia’s neutralizing of an armed Islamist group in the Lopota Gorge in August 2012, where Georgian citizens turned out to be among the rebels.²⁷

Even though Georgia’s parliament recognition of the “Circassian Genocide” is perceived in Russia as an extremely unfriendly move, this kind of alliance is not a critical threat to the security of the North Caucasus. However, if Tbilisi continues this course, especially considering its ambiguous relationship with the North Caucasus terrorist underground, it will further complicate Russo-Georgian relations. Georgia’s actions make one doubt how responsible Georgia’s political elite are and call into question the country’s European and Christian identity. Any improvement of Russian-Georgian relations is unlikely unless Tbilisi clarifies its approaches in this matter – both in political rhetoric and practical steps.

While the current state of Russo-Georgian relations creates no new threats to the North Caucasus security, lack of cooperation between the two countries to achieve a

²⁵ Nikolay Silaev, “Ethnicities and Politics in the North Caucasus: ‘The Circassian Issue’” (Moscow: The Caucasus Research Resource Centers (CRRC), 16 October 2013), <http://georgiamonitor.org/upload/medialibrary/986/986100753f91d53739c00177f0f0d8eb.PDF>.

²⁶ Anastasiya Kashevarova and Yuliya Tsoy, “Tamerlan Tsarnaev Was Recruited by a Georgian Fund,” *Izvestia*, 24 April 2013, <http://izvestia.ru/news/549252> (in Russian).

²⁷ “Two Georgian Citizens Among Gunmen Killed in Clash at Russian Border,” *Civil Georgia*, 3 September 2012, <http://www.civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=25171>.

long-lasting stability in the region is a negative factor. Ultimately, the lack of such cooperation has pushed Russia to strengthen its Caucasian borders. Moreover, the opaque manner, as Georgia sees it, in which some elements of Russia's new regional security project have been implemented, has led Tbilisi to doubt Moscow.

Apparently, there are no obstacles for the new Georgian government to renounce its support for terrorist groups in the North Caucasus, and conditions are ripe for Moscow and Tbilisi to start the creation of an information exchange system on the eastern international border between them. Such cooperation will not only strengthen mutual security along this border, but could also constitute the climate to sowing the first seeds of trust between the security agencies of the two countries.

Georgia's economic and humanitarian ties with the regions of the North Caucasus can start a new and positive life, if Tbilisi chooses cooperation with Moscow over annoying or bypassing it. There is an objective need for creating these forms of regional engagement that would engage intellectuals, civil society activists, and journalists from Moscow, Tbilisi, and the regions of the North Caucasus and Southern Russia. This cooperative interaction would reflect the historical traditions of the region and the need for more information about one another – a need that is felt on both sides of the Main Caucasus Range. Subsequently, discussions of means of regional economic integration could follow. Prospects in this sphere include creation of a common space for the movement of people and goods, security, education, and culture.

NATO and Regional Security

Georgian analysts share the common impression that the Rose Revolution 2003 was followed by an “authoritarian modernization.”²⁸ A specific feature of Saakashvili's modernization experiment was to subordinate all branches of government to the president. Under Saakashvili's rule, libertarian thinking in economic policy was mixed with the executive's tight control of social and cultural initiatives in Georgia's life. The sociocultural experiment in raising a generation of “free” Georgians, i.e. with Western values and anti-Russian sentiments, led the government to launch a massive anti-Russian campaign. The consolidation of a part of the Georgian society on the grounds of Western values helped to entrench the view of Russia's involvement in the conflicts in South Ossetia and Abkhazia as anti-Georgian.

One problem with the sociocultural experiment was that Georgia's neighbor is Turkey. On the one hand, the two countries share a long history of military, political, religious and ethnic antagonism that lives on today. Historically, this adversarial climate was never of benefit to Georgia and at times even threatened the Georgian people. On the other hand, Turkey, which is a NATO member since 1952, shares its political orientation with Tbilisi, namely Euro-Atlantic integration. Taking into account common anti-Turkish sentiment among Georgians, the UNM government decided to skirt the issue.

²⁸ Kenneth Yalowitz, Ivlian Haindrava, Ghia Nodia, and Shorena Shaverdashvili, “Lessons Learned from 20 Years of Independence and Statebuilding: Georgia,” *Carnegie Europe*, 28 November 2011, <http://carnegieeurope.eu/publications/?fa=46090&reloadFlag=1>.

Tbilisi's Euro-Atlantic integration propaganda substituted geographic context of Georgia's security threats. This propaganda artificially placed Georgia among the Central and East European states, which had been united for the past 20 years by a shared political trajectory (from the Warsaw Pact to NATO) and a shared perception of an ostensible Russian threat to their security.

Among the striking qualities of the UNM government was its intention to break the tradition of state power in Georgia in particular and in the Caucasus in general. Given that everyone in the cabinet was younger than Saakashvili, a significant part of their education and professional biography took place outside of Georgia. The high level of confidence of the elite surrounding Saakashvili was based on ideological solidarity and great team spirit. UNM officials would unabashedly boast that their government was "compact, mobile, and highly skilled in handling certain issues."²⁹

The Ministry for European and Euro-Atlantic Integration was one of the key elements in the UNM government. The main task of this ministry consisted in developing state reform standards by means of adapting the American model of liberal democracy for Georgia. It was also responsible for ensuring the implementation of the "homework" that its Western mentors provided. This government body often misled the West, creating the image of Georgia's successful advancement towards democracy.

It was able to do so as the government had the political initiative in domestic policy and dominated the airwaves. Statistically, almost 80 % of Georgians received news via television with the three main TV channels being government-controlled. The massive propaganda campaign based on half-truths led to significant support for seeking NATO membership among the public. This campaign did not convey the rationale and goals of such a process. Opposition politicians believed that the Saakashvili government created a "virtual Georgia" in the consciousness of its citizens.³⁰ As the September 2012 mass riots against torturing prisoners of the Gldan Prison demonstrated, such a delusional picture of reality can lead to inflated self-confidence, the public's overblown expectations of the government and, as a consequence, wild fluctuations in the general societal mood when the government proved its inability to meet these expectations.

This misreading of the external environment and overestimating the availability of resources necessary to achieve the foreign policy goals led Georgian diplomacy to a dead end. The UNM leadership appeared to have no distinguishable goals other than European and Euro-Atlantic integration. Notably, Georgia's institutional state structure has gained many characteristics inherent to Western countries. For instance, the Georgian Ministry of Foreign Affairs does not have a separate department for relations with Russia, which are dealt with within the department for CIS affairs.³¹ While the UNM

²⁹ Thomas de Waal, *Georgia's Choices: Charting a Future in Uncertain Times* (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2011), http://carnegieendowment.org/files/georgias_choices.pdf.

³⁰ "Bidzina Ivanishvili's Address to Politicians, Media and the Public," *News Georgia*, 12 October 2011, <http://www.newsgeorgia.ru/politics/20111012/214234359.html>.

³¹ "Departments," official site of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Georgia, www.mfa.gov.ge/index.php?lang_id=ENG&sec_id=37.

would say it was ready to reestablish diplomatic relations with Russia, it did not know how to accomplish this goal. Using the argument that “Russia is giving contradictory signals,” the government arrived at the paradoxical conclusion that to create order in its relations with Russia, Georgia must join NATO.

In the face of its failures vis-a-vis Russia, the UNM-led Georgia’s main declared policy goal was the “democratic mission” in the Caucasus and the CIS countries in general. In this context the strategic partnership with Azerbaijan was linked by Georgia’s Foreign Ministry with the assertion that the West saw Baku and Tbilisi as two elements of the same initiative. In Tbilisi’s view the results of the Euro-Atlantic process for Georgia would over time be carried over to Azerbaijan. This logic did not take into consideration Azerbaijan’s wish to be neutral and the possibility of Georgia becoming the target of influence for Turkey.

Basically, under the UNM lead the Georgian government lost its main skill – the ability to negotiate. Thus, it was limited to two roles: the supplicant or the victim. With Georgian diplomacy high dependency on the opinion of its Western partners, the government’s political line became very unsteady. The UNM preferred easing the diplomatic process with Brussels, which did not force Tbilisi into any concessions, to the tense Russo-Georgian, Georgian-Abkhazian, and Georgian-South Ossetian negotiations.

The UNM reacted especially sensitively to the West’s inattention or its direct criticism of the Georgian government. The steady decline in international support for the political course of Saakashvili’s government coincided with the decrease in international financial assistance. For 22 months after the Georgian-South Ossetian Conflict, President Saakashvili was not hosted by any of the European leaders. Many Western politicians realized that the *carte blanche* that the UNM had for the regime was doing Georgia a disservice.³² This caused doubts as to the sincerity of Saakashvili’s democratization, his military capacity building and regional policy initiatives.³³ Brussels was especially concerned that the Saakashvili government’s irresponsible actions in August 2008 could lead to a full-blown confrontation between NATO and Russia. Taken together, these concerns led to reducing the priority of the Georgian dossier in policy-making circles in Brussels.

With the full recognition of the fact that the challenges in respect to Abkhazia’s and South Ossetia’s status as well as Georgia’s membership in NATO cannot currently be resolved, it is reasonable to talk about the following possibilities for discussion of these issues.

The point is not that Russia opposes Georgia’s European integration, for the geopolitical pluralism in the post-Soviet space, including in the Transcaucasus, is now a reality that came with the independence of the ex-Soviet republics. Like many other post-Soviet countries, Georgia sees the West as a source of modernizing influences, investments and

³² Michail Vignanskiy, “Georgia Should not Become a Bone of Contention Between the West and Russia,” *Izvestiya*, 26 September 2012, <http://izvestia.ru/news/536213> (in Russian).

³³ SPIEGEL Staff, “Did Saakashvili Lie? The West Begins to Doubt Georgian Leader,” *Der Spiegel*, 15 September 2008, <http://www.spiegel.de/international/world/did-saakashvili-lie-the-west-begins-to-doubt-georgian-leader-a-578273.html> (in Russian).

technologies. Russia also shares this views of the West with one difference – it has no illusions about the ability of external factors to exert any significant influence on its own process of socio-political modernization. Western influence is weak in Russia because of its geographical size, its military and political power, and its historical traditions. It is worth mentioning that Georgia's socialization in the context of contemporary Europe historically took place through cultural borrowing from Russia.

There are two interconnected principles that are important to Moscow. First, Georgia's "European" or "Western" orientation should not automatically become an anti-Russian one. In other words, the principle of geopolitical pluralism should be applied to Russia as well. Yet, since the late 1980s, Georgia's foreign policy has been based on colliding the West and Russia. Second, Georgian "European" or "Western" orientation should not mean installation of NATO's military infrastructure on the Russian borders.

Having identified the "Western" choice with being anti-Russian, Georgia's former ruling elite operated under the assumption that Russia's foreign influence will fade or at the least will not grow. However, Russia is clearly not in a decline. The bet on Russia to weaken made the success of the Georgian strategy dependent on factors that are not in Tbilisi's control. In the end, this bet gets in the way of Georgia to benefit from Russia's economic growth. These are benefits that Russia's neighbors enjoy, namely the business groups in Azerbaijan, Armenia, and Kazakhstan.

The radicalism of the UNM's state experiment in Europeanization has weakened the sense of regional identity among Georgians and alienated Georgia from its Caucasian neighbors. This alienation has been especially significant in Georgian-Abkhazian and Georgian-Ossetian relations. Tbilisi's Atlantic rhetoric resulted in a firm belief of Tskhinvali and Sukhumi that the EU and NATO were indulging the aggressive plans of Saakashvili's government. This seriously complicated Georgia's NATO membership efforts. Georgia wanted to join the organization with its pre-war borders, because it still considers Abkhazia and South Ossetia parts of the country's territory. Joining NATO would have required the assent from all the peoples of Georgia.

Meanwhile, NATO is not seriously considering the question of how to integrate Georgia into the organization, because given the differences in views of the goals of its member states it is experiencing its own internal crisis. The possibility of having to apply Article 5 of the NATO Charter against Russia eliminates the likelihood of Georgia's joining the organization under the current status quo. While Brussels does not reject the possibility of Georgian integration, it is taking no noticeable action to create the conditions for bringing it about. NATO, in its turn, appears to expect these conditions to be created later. In the meantime, NATO has suggested that Tbilisi continues its operational cooperation with regional NATO members, most importantly with Turkey, which in the past few years has been seeking to strengthen its military and political influence in the region, especially along its borders.

Under these circumstances, it seems unwise for Tbilisi to tie its future to exclusive engagement with NATO. Ironically, the only state that can take effective measures in regard to the long-running threats to Georgia's security and dampen Tbilisi's ongoing sense of homelessness caused by its Muslim neighbors – is Russia.

However, in the current situation, characterized by the lack of diplomatic relations, contradictions on the status of Abkhazia and South Ossetia and mutual distrust, a rapprochement between Russia and Georgia on the grounds of a common approach to the regional security is unlikely.

Meanwhile, a certain change in the US and EU stances on Georgia has become obvious. First, in conditions of its tangible financial deficiency Washington's attention is concentrated on the Middle East and Asia-Pacific regions. The military experience in the Middle East has made the US leadership realize the importance of stability in the process of democratic proliferation around the world.³⁴

Second, the publication of materials by Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on the Conflict in Georgia in 2008 also led to a certain decrease in significance of Georgia in the US foreign policy.³⁵ A possibility of a large-scale military conflict with Russia as a result of the Georgian provocation has never been a plan for Washington. In that period for the first time American analytical publications voiced strong and founded criticism concerning Georgian participation in NATO.³⁶ This was partly a result of some lobbies' efforts in informing the American elite on Saakashvili's government crimes.³⁷

Third, the North Atlantic leadership is sharing the impression of a lessened ability to manage world affairs, which were formerly managed by NATO members. And the rise of Bidzina Ivanishvili's party on the Georgian political arena is one of the signs of this reduced ability from the US point of view. And during 2012–2013 Washington was watching the Georgian Dream government policies on equitable treatment of the UNM figures and revival of ties with Russia with a certain degree of incomprehension and suspicion.

According to the Wikileaks archives, US diplomacy was turning a blind eye to the national peculiarities of Georgia and was unable to comprehend the motives of its domestic policies.³⁸ In practice it led to miscalculations in assessment of political development in Georgia. For instance, in the days of the upcoming presidential elections in 2012, misguided by the poll results provided by the National Democratic Institute, the US embassy was expecting the UNM to win and the Georgian Dream to form a strong

³⁴ "Remarks by President Obama in Address to the United Nations General Assembly" (The White House, Office of the Press Secretary, 24 September 2013), <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2013/09/24/remarks-president-obama-address-united-nations-general-assembly>.

³⁵ "Report on the Independent International Fact-Finding Mission on the Conflict in Georgia."

³⁶ Doug Bandow, "Georgia's Dangerous Slide Toward NATO," *The National Interest*, 26 April 2013, <http://nationalinterest.org/commentary/georgias-dangerous-slide-toward-nato-8403>; Doug Bandow, "NATO's Georgia Nightmare," *The National Interest*, 9 August 2013, <http://nationalinterest.org/commentary/natos-georgia-nightmare-8860>; Doug Bandow, "No, NATO Shouldn't Let Georgia In," *The National Interest*, 22 August 2013, <http://nationalinterest.org/commentary/no-nato-shouldnt-let-georgia-8932>.

³⁷ Boris Mezhev, "Saakashvili's Regime Terrors Were Shown in the US Congress," *Izvestia*, 24 October 2013, <http://izvestia.ru/news/559496> (in Russian).

³⁸ "Saakashvili's Inaugural Address: Hitting the Right Notes. Embassy Tbilisi Unclassified Cable," *Wikileaks Cable Gate Archive*, 22 January 2008, <http://wikileaks.org/cable/2008/01/08TBILISI86.html>.

opposition. In his interview for the *New York Times* Tedo Japaridze, who was at the moment of the election campaign responsible for international relations in Ivanishvili's party, noted that during his contacts with the American embassy the latter was interested in knowing the stance of the Georgian Dream in case of their defeat.³⁹ According to Japaridze, the US did not consider a slight possibility of Ivanishvili's victory.

After Georgian Dream had won the elections, the US witnessed some untypical for Tbilisi, and therefore suspicious, foreign policy moves. Washington was confused by the change that had happened in the Georgian politics, and it switched its attention from the Caucasus to the Middle East decreasing its financial support for the regional governments by one quarter. The support for Georgia was reduced from 85 to 68.7 million dollars. Retaining its interest in Tbilisi's Euro-Atlantic political orientation, the US was deviating from accelerating the process of Georgia joining NATO. And with the intention of preventing any conflict between Russia and Georgia, Washington wished to preserve Tbilisi's pro-American stance. Therefore, having seen some of Ivanishvili's political actions as symptoms of an undesirable turn of events and having been a target of Saakashvili's lobbyists, the US political elite started sending warning signals to Tbilisi through influential media.⁴⁰

For the last eleven years the Euro-Atlantic integration has been the main priority for the Georgian foreign policy, yet there is no sign of any upcoming success in this direction. NATO-Georgian and the EU-Georgian relations have, obviously, exhausted their potential for political breakthroughs. With the foreign policy orientation of the Georgian government remaining with the EU and NATO, Tbilisi has realized that its step-by-step Euro-Atlantic integration is no longer suitable for Georgia. This may be concluded from the failure to achieve any practical results in the NATO-Georgian dialogue in the form of some solid security guaranties or economic integration. The macroeconomic effect of the EU-Georgian free-trade zone and its impact on Georgian producers remain unclear.

Western investments in the Georgian economy have always been local, and the Georgian Dream government does not expect them to grow into a massive influx. With the unfavorable results of the previous government's economic policies, Bidzina Ivanishvili and Irakli Garibashvili have been rather skeptical of Georgia's advancement in international ratings of investment climate, foreign business opportunities, etc.⁴¹

This may be the reason why Tbilisi today does not see any benefits for Georgia in the US and EU policies of promoting democracy and curbing the Russian influence in the post-Soviet countries. The Saakashvili government was an important component of these policies for the previous Georgian president was among the strongest proponents

³⁹ Ellen Barry, "Georgian Leader Emerges as an Enigma," *New York Times*, 8 October 2012, <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/10/09/world/europe/georgian-leader-bidzina-ivanishvili-emerges-as-an-enigma.html>.

⁴⁰ Denis Corboy, William Courtney, and Kenneth Yalowitz, "Justice or Vengeance?" *The New York Times*, 26 November 2012, <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/11/27/opinion/global/justice-or-vengeance.html>.

⁴¹ Yuriy Roks, "Georgia Has Lowered Its Rating by Itself," *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*, 28 January 2013, http://www.ng.ru/cis/2013-01-28/7_gruzia.html (in Russian).

of the Western political model both regionally and globally. The West expected the same zeal for westernization from the new Georgian leader. However, the new government seems reluctant even to participate in discussions concerning democratization of the region, and this is perceived by the Western leadership as a return to authoritarianism. Tbilisi does not aspire to associate itself with the Western and Central European states, who were the fiercest supporters of Saakashvili's political stance. Apparently, the new Georgian leadership has realized that aligning with Poland, Ukraine and the Baltic states, which have historically shared an anti-Russian stance, does not lead to any success.

As the priority of the Euro-Atlantic orientation in the Georgian foreign policy has been gradually shrinking, Tbilisi has been active in developing its relations with neighbors, who may be significantly influential as far as the Georgian economic wealth is concerned. Prime Minister Ivanishvili preferred to do it in person. In 2013 in Davos he held meetings with his Russian counterpart D. Medvedev and some Russian business figures, and went to visit Azerbaijan, Armenia and Turkey.

Georgia-Russia and Georgia-EU: A Choice of Identity

Among the most vital issues for Georgia today is finding its path in economic development while trying to secure its specialization in the world market. Deciding between the EU and Russia to be its main economic partner, Tbilisi is not making a pragmatic choice, but a choice of its values and identity. This explains why the increasing vagueness of Georgian membership in the EU has brought up the formula: "moving towards European standards and values is an achievement in itself." Georgian experts have been persistent in trying to establish a pragmatic basis for the economic union with the EU, pointing out the flaws of Saakashvili's European integration policy. For instance, Georgian economist Vladimir Papava has claimed that the UNM's Georgia, in spite of promoting its European orientation, was developing Singapore's economic model, which led the country away from the European economic model – and the EU itself.⁴²

Nevertheless, apart from the European orientation, the Georgians see some other options.⁴³ The formula "Georgia is Europe" was being imposed during Saakashvili's presidency, but it did not gain absolute approval among the Georgian society. As time passes Tbilisi may realize that democracy, free market and high standards of governance, although vital as they may be, are not everything a country needs for decent development. They are important instruments, but they cannot become an end in themselves. Thereupon, Russian international strategy sets a good example of running its own course towards a common political and economic future with Europe. Unlike Tbilisi, Moscow is guided by pragmatism and the intention to preserve its leverages in its integration with

⁴² Vladimir Papava, "Georgian Economy in Search of a Model for Development," *Mir Peremen* 3 (2013): 54.

⁴³ Zaza Shatirishvili, "National Narratives and New Politics of Memory in Georgia," *Small Wars & Insurgencies* 20:2 (June 2009): 391–399.

Europe. In fact, Russia is not an alternative to the EU, for Russia itself is aiming at developing ties with the EU to become its equal partner.

In November 2013 the EU and Georgia initialed an Association and a Free Trade Agreements, which was a symbolic achievement of the current Georgian political elite. However, for the EU this step did not come as a recognition of the Georgian European identity, but marked the line between Europe and Georgia. Similarly, the EU signed Association Agreements with such different countries as Algeria, Chile, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, South Africa, etc. with Mexico and the Palestinian Administration, apart from the European Andorra, Iceland, Norway and Switzerland, as members of the Free Trade Zone. Negotiations to join the Zone are currently in progress with Columbia, Peru, South Korea and a number of African and the Eastern Partnership states.

It is vital to understand that the EU producers entered the Central and Eastern European markets to witness their own economic growth for twenty years by means of replacing local manufacturers. Accordingly, by entering the markets of post-Soviet states the EU is expanding the same policy of exploiting consumer resources of the newly joined countries. In these circumstances, it is not unfounded to expect the cheaper EU products to hinder the recovery of the Georgian manufacturing. Any Georgian leadership that plans to develop the country's manufacturing, but not transit or services, will have to take measures to protect the internal market. According to the legal approach, which is popular with Georgian experts, the mere existence of international institutions is a guarantee of a favorable regulation of the global trade processes for all the participants. Meanwhile, the policies of some of the larger states prove them wrong, with the US, Japan, China, Germany or Russia seeking preferences for their own producers within the international trade regimes.

As far as Abkhazia and South Ossetia are concerned, Russian diplomacy has noticeably lowered its vigor in promoting the international recognition of the two republics. Their membership in the Eurasian Customs Union does not look like a real prospect.⁴⁴ However, absence of the wide international recognition does not influence the Abkhazian or South Ossetian status, whose leaders persistently claim that the Russian guarantees of their status are comprehensive.

Georgia realizes that no power in the world is willing to bear the considerable expenses of forcing Russia to renounce the recognition of the two republics. At the same time Tbilisi continues to push forward its stance on the situation in Abkhazia and South Ossetia on different international platforms, yet with no remarkable results. As much as the US and the EU support the Georgian stance, these influential partners of Georgia will not make or try to convince Russia to change its position. Furthermore, when during the WTO negotiations an issue of transit on the Abkhazian part of the Russian border arose, Washington virtually made Tbilisi accept the Russian conditions. And the voting

⁴⁴ "Vladislav Surkov: We Are Overcoming Difficulties That South Ossetia Previously Met," *PEC Information Agency*, 4 December 2013, <http://cominf.org/en/node/1166500441> (in Russian).

in the UN General Assembly on the resolutions concerning the two republics, which ended well for Georgia, has not had any practical result.

While the Geneva talks have brought significant contribution to ensuring security in the two conflict zones, they are hardly capable of achieving a full-scale settlement. Partly this is caused by the Georgian insistence on Russia recognizing itself a party to the conflict in August 2008 and refusal to sign the Geneva declaration draft on abstaining from the use of force.

Another cluster of differences between Russia and Georgia concerns the future of the European security system. Tbilisi is a strong proponent of NATO enlargement and is seeking membership in the Alliance. At the same time Russia, while recognizing Georgia's right to choose allies, sees a threat to its security in the process of NATO's approaching the Russian borders. And this threat does not only consist in arranging the Alliance's military infrastructure by the Russian borders, for Moscow also fears its expulsion from the European security system.

Despite the promise made to Georgia during the NATO Bucharest summit in 2008 to accept the country into the Alliance, no exact dates have been set and no Action Plan for its membership has been presented. Further expansion of NATO on the CIS countries, namely Ukraine and Georgia, was initiated by the George W. Bush Administration and approved by the newly joined Central and Eastern European members, while many of the older members of the Alliance, especially France and Germany, were rather skeptical about this. In the end the stance of the latter became one of the reasons for these plans to fail. Subsequent Barak Obama's Administration paused the process of enlargement without making any binding promises.

The major part of the Georgian political elite acknowledge the vagueness of the NATO membership for their country; however, this issue is still on the agenda. As a matter of fact, Tbilisi refuses to consider any other mechanisms of ensuring their national security, claiming this an endeavor to violate the principle of freedom to choose alliances. This claim has become a "red line" in Georgia's relations with Russia.

Georgian experts tend to overestimate the prospects of their country's membership in NATO and the EU. This overestimation is applied both to the possibility of joining the two blocs, despite the unsettled question of Abkhazia's and South Ossetia's status that hinder NATO membership, and the real value of the guarantees that Georgia may gain as a member of the Alliance. There is another side of this issue, which is mostly neglected by these experts. NATO membership can make Georgia one of the possible targets for a strike in the Russian military planning and the Russian military presence in Abkhazia and South Ossetia is likely to be expanded. Experts also seem to ignore the fact that moving towards NATO membership will require strengthening military, strategic as well as economic and cultural ties with Turkey, which is considered unfavorable by a large part of the Georgian society.

What needs to be emphasized is that there is no room for any kind of bargain in the Russo-Georgian collision. There is no need for Russia to make concessions in order to make Georgia abandon its strive for NATO membership, for the probability of Tbilisi to succeed in this is rather insignificant. There is no leverage at Georgia's disposal to force

Moscow to reconsider its stance on the recognition of Abkhazia's and South Ossetia's independence – and the failure of Saakashvili's North Caucasus Policy experience proved this. There is no urgency for the US and NATO in investing extra resources to secure Georgia's interests, for Tbilisi is showing its interest in strengthening cooperation with them anyway. These patterns ensure predictability and stability of Russo-Georgian relations, and enable Moscow and Tbilisi to interact without touching upon security issues.

Through eliminating tensions on the Georgian policies in the North Caucasus, Russo-Georgian relations may witness desecuritization. In the midterm perspective this change will open new prospects for development of the region by means of activation of cross-border economic cooperation and gradual deregulation of goods and human flows across the Russo-Georgian borders.

A certain degree of desecuritization may also be expected in Georgian relations with Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Involvement of the societies of the two republics in the joint programs implemented by Moscow and Tbilisi will shift Georgian-Abkhazian and Georgian-South Ossetian interaction from the status and security agenda to some issues of practical cooperation.

Most importantly, Russia cannot afford to pause its relations with Georgia. Otherwise, some other powers, who have regional interests, will take its place. For instance, Turkey has been intensifying its economic and political presence in Georgia. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, relations between the two historic competitors—Russia and Turkey—have gained positive dynamics mostly because they ceased sharing the border. With the new border shaping in the Caucasus, however informal it may be, this course of events can hardly be seen as favorable. Moreover, Georgia can return to being used as—what the George W. Bush Administration considered—an anti-Russian foothold. The worst-case scenario for Russia's inaction is Georgia's gradual weakening and depopulation, which may turn the latter into the space that every state and non-state actor willing to destabilize the vulnerable Russian South might use in their interests.

The “Color Revolutions” and “Arab Spring” in Russian Official Discourse

Yulia Nikitina *

Introduction

The “color revolutions” in the post-Soviet space were initially understood to mean the Rose Revolution in Georgia (2003), the Orange Revolution in Ukraine (2004) and Tulip Revolution in Kyrgyzstan (2005). The one feature these events share is considered to be the non-violent nature of the regime change resulting from mass protests. The 2010 revolution in Kyrgyzstan may also be relegated to this group of cases: although the revolution was not entirely peaceful it nonetheless led to a change in the country’s leadership. Somewhat less clear are regime change attempts or mass protests, for example the situation in Andijan (Uzbekistan) in 2005 or the mass protests and riots in Moldova in 2009. It is still unclear whether the power shift in Ukraine in February 2014 should be considered a “color revolution;” there is also no precise definition of the concept of the “Arab spring,” which is usually thought to include the mass upheaval and protests, more often not peaceful, that led (or did not lead) to regime change in a number of countries of the Arab world starting in late 2010. Despite the lack of consensus among political leaders and experts regarding terminology, on the whole the terms “color revolutions” and “Arab spring” have caught on and as a rule are used without further explanation in Russian official discourse in the expert community and in the media.

Russia’s most recent version of its Foreign Policy Concept, dated 18 February 2013, contains no mention of “color revolutions” or “Arab spring” either in the list of threats or in the section on regional priorities. The previous version also did not contain an official position on the problem of revolutions in the post-Soviet space. On the eve of the NATO summit of 4-5 September 2014 in Great Britain, information appeared in the Russian news media that Russia would adopt a new edition of its Military Doctrine by the end of 2014, and that an interagency commission had been created under the Office of the Russian Security Council to draft it. In an interview, the Secretary of the Security Council of Russia Mikhail Popov stated that the new version was needed due to the emergence of new challenges and threats to Russia’s security, which, in addition, “were manifested in the events of the “Arab spring,” in the armed conflict in Syria, and in the situation in and around Ukraine.”¹

Why did Russia not include the problem of revolutions in its concept documents on foreign policy and security? This is thought to be connected to the fact that prior to the

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¹ “RF Security Council: Russia Will Update Its Military Doctrine by Late 2014,” *RIA Novosti*, 2 September 2014, <http://ria.ru/interview/20140902/1022334103.html> (in Russian).

2014 crisis in Ukraine Russia considered revolutions to be a purely internal matter and did not deem it necessary to state its position regarding events that did not go beyond the sovereignty of those countries where revolutions took place or mass protests occurred. Despite the absence of revolutions as problems addressed in the foreign policy conceptual documents, Russian presidents Vladimir Putin and Dmitry Medvedev, as well as Ministry of Foreign Affairs officials—most notably foreign minister Sergey Lavrov—repeatedly stated Russia’s position regarding the “color revolutions,” the events of the “Arab spring,” the Ukrainian events of 2014 and other various mass protests that did not escalate into revolutions or lead to regime change. This article presents an overview of official Russian discourse from the 2003 Rose Revolution in Georgia to the Ukrainian crisis of 2014, as well as events of the “Arab spring.”

The “Color Revolutions” of 2003–2005 in the Post-Soviet Space

There is an opinion extant among experts that the Russian leadership’s primary fear regarding the “color revolutions” is the spread or deliberate export of revolutions to neighboring countries, including Russia. However, in his 2005 interviews Vladimir Putin identifies other problematic consequences of “color revolutions:”

My greatest concern personally is not that some kind of tumultuous events are occurring there, but that they go beyond current law and the constitution. We all need to understand what democracy means, to include proper, good law and the ability to comply with and live by that law.²

For Russia the problem is not that something will change in neighboring states as a result of the color revolutions and that relations will have to be built anew, because in the final analysis all leaders in the post-Soviet space, both before and after the revolutions, have basically been pragmatic in their relations with Russia. The main concern is that problems are not being resolved within the framework of a constitution and existing laws but rather through revolutions and “street democracy.”³

Following national laws may be considered a major theme in the official Russian discourse on the problem of revolutions. Revolutions are a destabilizing factor because they call into question the legitimate means of settling differences between the government and the civil society. Vladimir Putin believes that the main objective in the post-Soviet space should be to habituate citizens to adhere strictly to the law, because “democracy cannot develop in isolation from democratically adopted laws.”⁴ Non-parliamentary methods of waging the struggle should be interdicted in order to avoid subverting the governmental structures and legal systems of post-Soviet states, keeping in mind how young they are and their internal political and economic situation.⁵

² Interview on ‘Radio Slovensko’ and Slovakian television company STV, Official website of the President of Russia, 22 February 2005, <http://kremlin.ru/transcripts/22837> (in Russian).

³ Ibid.

⁴ Interview on German television channels ARD and ZDF, Official website of the President of Russia, 5 May 2005, <http://kremlin.ru/transcripts/22948> (in Russian).

⁵ Ibid.

The reason for the opposition's success in the "color revolutions" lies in systematic errors by the government, in particular the authorities' failure to establish "strong democratic institutions" that would have guaranteed democratic procedures and stability. These systemic mistakes resulted in the government being distanced from the society and losing its trust, which allowed the opposition to take its place.⁶

Russian leaders point to external as well as internal causes of the "color revolutions." In 2004 Putin named "attempts to address political problems in an extralegal fashion" and "creation of a system of permanent revolutions" the main problem of the post-Soviet region. In Vladimir Putin's opinion, decisions to start revolutions are made from without, based on a certain political expediency for the countries making the decisions and not for the countries where the revolutions take place. Assistance to democratic development may occur on its own account, but it must not be in the form of revolutions, because the results will only be "endless conflicts." Thus, the Russian president disputes the methods of democratization utilized by Western countries, but not democratization itself. The recipe for development of post-Soviet states according to Putin: get used to living by the law; plus, certain rules and procedures should come to fruition within the society.⁷ Note that the Russian president does not say these rules necessarily have to be democratic. He merely emphasizes that they must be rules and laws worked out in a given specific country with account of its unique features, not rules that are borrowed or brought in from outside.

In the West, Russia's position on "color revolutions" is perceived as a determination to maintain authoritarian regimes in the post-Soviet states and unwillingness to allow outside players into the region of its priority interests. However, in 2005, when the issue of "color revolutions" was still being actively discussed in political circles and academia, Russia's deputy minister of foreign affairs Grigory Karasin stated that due to globalization, eschewing competitiveness in the post-Soviet space would hardly be an option at this juncture. As a result, Russia needs to boost its ability to compete and try to find balance with its Western colleagues in the framework of well-understood rules of competition. Given its own vital interests in the post-Soviet region, Russia does not believe that other international players cannot have their own interests in the region. And the only means of interaction among the various players and the post-Soviet states themselves should be honest competition and contention of ideas and concepts rather than power politics.⁸ The deputy minister considers not only the "color revolutions" but information

⁶ Interview of I.S. Ivanov, secretary of the Russian Federation Security Council, in the journal *Strategiya Rossii* (Strategy of Russia) 4:16, Official website of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 5 May 2005, http://mid.ru/BDOMP/Brp_4.nsf/arh/258F32B8F33C9BF2C3256FF80021BDD0?OpenDocument (in Russian).

⁷ Press conference for Russian and foreign journalists, Official website of the President of Russia, 23 December 2004, <http://kremlin.ru/transcripts/22757> (in Russian).

⁸ Full text of interview of deputy minister G.B. Karasin of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs in *Rossiyskaya gazeta*, Official website of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 16 August 2005, http://mid.ru/BDOMP/Brp_4.nsf/arh/2DF9AF16C578661CC325705F0029B036?OpenDocument (in Russian).

campaigns and political pressure on existing governments to be methods of forcible “democratization” (in his article Karasin uses the term in quotation marks to emphasize the problematic nature of these processes). The results of such “democratization” are destabilization of the situation in the region with a potential increase in extremism.⁹

The growth of extremism as a consequence of revolution or widespread unrest presents a problem mostly for Central Asia, which may be considered a separate case in terms of “color revolutions” in the post-Soviet space. Vladimir Putin attributed the first Kyrgyz revolution of 2005 to the weakness of the government and accumulated social and economic problems, and lamented that political issues were being resolved extralegally.¹⁰ President Medvedev was in power in Russia during the second Kyrgyz revolution of 2010; he also provided his assessment of both revolutions – 2005 and 2010. Medvedev also names the population’s discontent with the social and economic situation in the country as the main cause of the revolutions. In the opinion of the Russian president, the second revolution occurred because the country’s new leadership essentially recreated the previous ineffective system of government based on clan ties and unfettered business and as a result was unable to address existing social and economic problems.¹¹

The External Factor

It is important to note that the description of the Kyrgyz revolutions in president Medvedev’s speech does not mention the external factor as a destructive phenomenon, which differentiates Medvedev’s position from Putin’s. Dmitry Medvedev acknowledges that he had to enter into consultations with the president of Kazakhstan and the president of the United States in order to agree on the peaceful resignation of Kyrgyz President Kurmanbek Bakiyev. This is because without it the situation would evidently have developed toward bloodshed and destabilization, going as far as threatening to split the country in two and start a civil war: “Not because we wanted to intervene—it is, after all, a sovereign matter of another country—but because it was necessary in order to prevent bloodshed.”¹² Medvedev took pains to emphasize that after a provisional government emerges its task would be to secure the legitimacy of the people and see to the fate of its own state.

Before the Kyrgyz revolution of 2010 Russia played a similar role of mediator in the Rose Revolution in Georgia in 2003. Let us recall that as the Russian foreign minister Igor Ivanov acted as a mediator in Georgian president Eduard Shevardnadze’s negotiations with the opposition, which resulted in Shevardnadze’s announcing his resignation in order to avoid bloodshed. That said, Ivanov believes that if the change of leadership

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Press conference on results of U.S.-Russian talks, Official website of the President of Russia, 25 March 2005, <http://kremlin.ru/transcripts/22883> (in Russian).

¹¹ Dmitry Medvedev answers Russian journalists’ questions, Official website of the President of Russia, 16 April 2010, <http://kremlin.ru/news/7479> (in Russian).

¹² Ibid.

in Georgia had occurred under the Constitution it would have been more “civilized” and better for the stability of the region as a whole. The biggest plus in the regime change that took place in 2003-2004 was its peaceful nature, without violence or bloodshed.¹³

A repetition of the revolutions in other post-Soviet countries is possible, Medvedev believes, if the government loses touch with the people. To avoid this it is necessary to “competently deal with governing one’s own country.”¹⁴ Central Asia’s path of development is not revolution, but evolution.¹⁵

Not all post-Soviet leaders share the approaches of the Russian leadership that despite the existence of outside influence internal causes are still the main factors in the occurrence of mass protests. For example, it was this very outside factor that Uzbekistan’s President Islam Karimov used to explain the tragic events in Andijan in May 2005, in a meeting with Vladimir Putin one month later. Mr. Karimov characterized the “color revolutions” as specially arranged “operations” carried out within the CIS. In Karimov’s view, in Andijan “the scriptwriters and directors of the operation relied on and utilized those religious, extremist and radical forces that had at one time been called terrorists and extremists by those same directors and scriptwriters, and with whom they had so successfully fought in Afghanistan and are fighting today in Iraq.”¹⁶ Commenting on this pronouncement by Karimov about Andijan, Vladimir Putin only stated that prior to the events in question Russia had indeed had information that fighters from bases in Afghanistan had penetrated into territory adjoining Uzbekistan, and that this information was relayed to the leaders of the countries where the fighters from Afghanistan were concentrated. However, Vladimir Putin did not directly agree with Karimov’s version of the events in Andijan, calling them “complex and tragic.”¹⁷

Ukraine 2014

The causes of the revolutionary situation in Ukraine, in Vladimir Putin’s opinion, are corruption and stratification, and moreover this state of affairs began building “from the first days of Ukraine’s independence.”

¹³ Transcript of address by Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs I.S. Ivanov at the concluding press conference of the third meeting of the Committee on a strategy for Russian-Polish cooperation, 2737-27-11-2003, 26 November 2003, Official website of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, http://mid.ru/BDOMP/Brp_4.nsf/arh/073E7199C30DC77B43256DEB002AED86?OpenDocument.

¹⁴ Dmitry Medvedev answers Russian journalists’ questions, 16 April 2010.

¹⁵ Transcript of press conference for Russian and foreign journalists (31 January 2006), Official website of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, <http://kremlin.ru/transcripts/23412> (in Russian).

¹⁶ Beginning of meeting with Uzbekistan President Islam Karimov, Official website of the President of Russia, 28 June 2005, <http://kremlin.ru/transcripts/23063> (in Russian).

¹⁷ Ibid.

To our great regret, over all the years of its independence Ukraine has never been able to really overcome its ongoing political and governmental crisis. Its most recent exacerbation has led to an armed takeover in Kiev.¹⁸

In March 2014 the Russian permanent representative to the OSCE, A. Kelin, set forth a detailed understanding of the situation: the basis for the protest movement in Ukraine was accumulated discontent with corruption, ineffective governance and poverty.¹⁹ However, this situation was exploited by radical forces – “nationalists, neo-Nazis, Russophiles and anti-Semites” who had set the stage for a coup d’etat. The West actually helped these radical forces when it supported “Maidan.” Now, Western countries are “very nervous, since their latest geopolitical experiment has led to such unexpected consequences” and because they “do not want to admit that the cause of the crisis is not Russia, but their own irresponsible actions.”²⁰

The “Arab Spring”

Lavrov calls the Arab spring “an expected surprise” – predictable because of the accumulated social and economic problems in the countries of the region and unpredictable because of it encompassing several countries and due to the speed with which events developed. The problems that provoked the “Arab spring” were the low standard of living and income and unemployment among educated young people as well as a loss of connection with reality by ruling regimes that had been in power for decades.²¹

In the assessment of the Russian leadership the causes of the “Arab spring” were peoples’ craving for social and economic modernization, the important factor here being the independent nature of these processes, “without outside pressure and based on strict adherence to state sovereignty.”²² In a meeting with Russia’s clergymen Dmitry Medvedev described the official Russian position on the “Arab spring” thusly: the striving for democracy by peoples of all countries where revolutions have taken place. This is un-

¹⁸ “Vladimir Putin answers journalists’ questions on the situation in Ukraine,” Official website of the President of Russia, 4 March 2014, <http://kremlin.ru/news/20366> (in Russian).

¹⁹ “Speech by Russian Federation Permanent Representative A.V. Kelin at a meeting of the OSCE Permanent Council, Vienna 624-21-03-2014,” Official website of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 20 March 2014, http://www.mid.ru/brp_4.nsf/newline/DB7DECF7467D64F044257CA2003EB675 (in Russian).

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ “Interview of Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs S.V. Lavrov by moderator of the program ‘Aktual’nyj razgovor’ V. Solovyov, 3 Kanal television company, 323-13-03-2011,” Official website of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 13 March 2011, http://mid.ru/BDOMP/Brp_4.nsf/arh/E35AC8110082ABCBC3257852004AF20E?OpenDocument (in Russian).

²² “Message to King Muhammed VI of Morocco, Official website of the President of Russia 9 March 2012, <http://kremlin.ru/news/14735> (in Russian).

derstandable and normal, because some overthrown regimes could indeed be called “old and rotten.”²³

It’s also important to analyze the “Arab spring” position of Vladimir Putin, who occupied the post of prime minister during this period of events in the Arab world. He directly states in his pre-election article of 2012 that the toppled regimes were authoritarian, and he stresses that at first Russia’s reaction was positive because there were expectations of positive democratic changes. This assessment tells us that Russia was not interested in maintaining authoritarian regimes. Russia’s negative reaction was not to the revolutions themselves, although we will reiterate that analysts often pointed to Russia’s concerns that the revolutionary wave might spill over into the post-Soviet region, and primarily to the countries of Central Asia. The negative reaction had to do with how the West reacted to the “Arab spring” processes, particularly intervention in support of one party in the conflict, which Vladimir Putin characterized as “itching for a fight.”²⁴

In the Russian leadership’s view, outside intervention by the international community is necessary only to “put the situation on a political track” by supporting a national dialog and national cohesion between the interested parties and to bring an end to violence without outside intervention in internal processes.²⁵ On the issue of Syria, for example, it is acknowledged that the president of Syria was unable to fully satisfy the demands of the protestors; he reacted with belated and insufficient measures. However, in order to execute reforms amenable to all and bring them to a conclusion the Syrians themselves must come to the negotiating table to determine their own future.²⁶

Analyzing the situation in Egypt connected with President Hosni Mubarak transferring power to his vice president and then to the Supreme Council of the Armed Force, Sergey Lavrov stressed that this transfer was done under the existing constitution of Egypt, that is, these events were lawful. The case of Libya is regarded in Russian official discourse as an unconstitutional shift in power. According to Lavrov, after Muammar Gaddafi’s regime was overthrown Russia’s Western colleagues regard the event in Libya as a model of revolution for the future. This is not to Russia’s liking, as there was intervention in internal affairs and a violation of international rights, while initially the countries of NATO, in Lavrov’s interpretation, were declaring that revolution and regime

²³ “Meeting with Muslim clerics,” Official website of the President of Russia, 19 November 2011, <http://kremlin.ru/news/13592> (in Russian).

²⁴ Vladimir V. Putin, “Russia and a Changing World,” *Moskovkiye novosti*, 27 February 2012, <http://mn.ru/politics/20120227/312306749.html> (in Russian).

²⁵ “Interview of Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs S.V. Lavrov by moderator of the program ‘Aktual’nyj razgovor’ V. Solovyov, 3 Kanal television company, 323-13-03-2011.”

²⁶ “Interview of Russian Foreign Minister S.V. Lavrov on “Sky News Arabia” television channel, 1547-18-08-2012,” Official website of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 18 August 2012, http://mid.ru/BDOMP/Brp_4.nsf/arh/A5A5CC43241A074544257A5E0036546E?OpenDocument (in Russian).

change should be accomplished by the Libyan people themselves, without help from outside forces.²⁷

Some contradiction can be seen between the Russian understanding of the “color” revolutions and the “Arab spring” as being controlled and instigated from without and the simultaneous acknowledgement that real problems existed in the countries where such revolutions took place. And Vladimir Putin believes those real problems in Arab countries to be quite serious – tyranny, poverty and lack of future prospects. In 2014 the Russian president’s explanation is that the feelings of popular discontent “were simply used cynically.”²⁸ That is, following this logic, without outside interference a discontented populace would have chosen a different—more legitimate and constitutional—means of expressing its discontent.

We shall note, however, that in Sergey Lavrov’s view, comparing the “color revolutions” and the “Arab spring” is likely to be counterproductive: he sees more differences between the two phenomena than common features. The main difference is in the causes. In the Middle East internal social and economic problems are the source of the people’s discontent. In post-Soviet states the internal factor played a less substantial role than the external.²⁹

In the opinion of the Russian leadership the “Arab spring” resulted in violence and civil war rather than development. There was no upturn in the population’s well-being, but only chaos, unrest, and an exchange of some political groups for others. The main concern for Russia is that the “Arab spring” might result in a rise to power by radicals or extremists with whom it will be much more difficult to work.³⁰ The specific feature of the region where the “Arab spring” took place is its strategic significance for many great powers due to its energy resources and problems related to international terrorism and extremism.³¹ There is a threat of Islamization when extremists are trained and sectarian and interreligious discord aroused under the banners of religion.³² That said, Lavrov opines that Islam and democracy are fully compatible, which one can see from the ex-

²⁷ “From answers by Russian Foreign Minister S.V. Lavrov to listeners’ questions on live radio broadcasts on *Golos Rossii*, *Radio Rossii*, and *Ekho Moskvy*,” 1604-22-10-2011, Official website of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 21 October 2011, http://mid.ru/BDOMP/Brp_4.nsf/arh/7180386FFEE0DFB4C325793100329482?OpenDocument (in Russian).

²⁸ “Address by President of the Russian Federation,” Official website of the President of Russia, 18 March 2014, <http://kremlin.ru/news/20603> (in Russian).

²⁹ “Interview of Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs S.V. Lavrov by moderator of the program ‘Aktual’nyj razgovor’ V. Solovyov, 3 Kanal television company, 323-13-03-2011.”

³⁰ “Interview with Russian television channels,” Official website of the President of Russia, 26 April 2012, <http://kremlin.ru/news/15149> (in Russian).

³¹ “Interview of Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs S.V. Lavrov by moderator of the program ‘Aktual’nyj razgovor’ V. Solovyov, 3 Kanal television company, 323-13-03-2011.”

³² Interview of State Secretary-Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of Russia G.B. Karasin in *Rossijskaya gazeta*, 269-13-02-2013, Official website of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 13 February 2013, http://mid.ru/BDOMP/Brp_4.nsf/arh/73B1A52BB4EA19FA44257B110053048C?OpenDocument (in Russian).

ample of Turkey, and to a certain extent, Iran.³³ Then again, democratization of the region and revolution will not solve regional problems, in particular the problem of Middle Eastern reconciliation.³⁴

The Problem of Terminology: Revolutions or Coups?

The problem of qualifying mass protests and power shifts arises in official Russian discourse: the choice is between the terms “revolution” and “coup d’etat.” The main points at issue come up in the cases of Syria and Ukraine.

As for Syria, when asked by a journalist in a 2012 interview to qualify the situation in that country (the choices being: revolution, civil war or global plot against the regime), Sergey Lavrov replied that under the International Committee of the Red Cross definition it was an armed conflict. He does not believe that one can talk about an outside plot in this case; there is some outside influence, but not a plot.³⁵ Another Russian foreign ministry representative, in turn, rejected a journalist’s proposed definition of “pre-revolutionary situation” and described the situation in Syria as a “complex and difficult domestic conflict that certainly could escalate into civil war.”³⁶ Syrian opposition members who came to Moscow in 2012 tried to represent the conflict with the ruling authority as a revolution against the regime. The Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, in turn, argued that it would not be possible to appeal to the UN Security Council with that qualification of the events, because revolutions are outside the Council’s frame of reference.³⁷

Events in the post-Soviet region may also have various interpretations. In 2005, former minister of foreign affairs and Secretary of the Security Council of Russia Igor Ivanov offered his assessment of events in Georgia, Ukraine, and Kyrgyzstan, calling them regime change by nondemocratic and unconstitutional means.³⁸ In the opinion of Sergey Lavrov, the Rose Revolution in Georgia and the Orange Revolution in Ukraine

³³ “Interview of Russian Foreign Minister S.V. Lavrov on *Sky News Arabia* television channel,” 1547-18-08-2012, Official website of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 18 August 2012, http://mid.ru/BDOMP/Brp_4.nsf/arh/A5A5CC43241A074544257A5E0036546E?OpenDocument (in Russian).

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Briefing by Russian MFA official spokesman A.K. Lukashevich, 9 February 2012, Official website of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, http://mid.ru/BDOMP/Brp_4.nsf/arh/D7608E8B38C01A864425799F00457374?OpenDocument (in Russian).

³⁷ Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs S.V. Lavrov answers questions from media, Moscow, 1461-29-07-2012, Official website of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 28 July 2012, http://mid.ru/BDOMP/Brp_4.nsf/arh/FA48DE4DD410067544257A4A0022112C?OpenDocument (in Russian).

³⁸ Interview of I.S. Ivanov, secretary of the Russian Federation Security Council, in the magazine *Strategiya Rossii* (Strategy of Russia).

were essentially the same sort of coups d'état as the 1917 October Revolution.³⁹ Putin characterizes the Ukrainian revolution of 2014 as a “coup d'état with the use of force.”⁴⁰

The reasoning of the Russian leadership is this: if what occurred in Ukraine in February 2014 is a revolution and not an unconstitutional shift in power, then a new state appears with which Russia has signed no treaties,⁴¹ and thus any references to the 1994 Budapest Memorandum make no sense, because it was signed with a different Ukraine. Another dilemma is that if the West recognizes the coup after 21 February 2014 as being a lawful expression of the will of the people, in spite of the obvious violations in procedures for the transfer of power, then the events in Crimea and the referendum to join Russia should all the more so be acknowledged as the will of the people. One cannot accept one and deny the other. Either these events are qualified as a coup d'état and unlawful annexation, respectively, or both events are lawful.⁴² However, it bears noting that this logic has an embedded contradiction: Russia recognized the legality of the referendum in Crimea and did not recognize the legality of the power shift in Kiev.

Misapprehension of Western Logic

For the Russian leadership the logic of western countries' actions to advance democracy through various forms of support for revolutions elicits a host of conceptual issues.

Can Revolution Be Considered a Democratic Phenomenon?

For example, in 2005 Vladimir Putin asked a question about western countries' approaches to introducing democracy in the post-Soviet space: “...if democracy doesn't work in post-Soviet countries—as some believe—then why introduce it there? And if we implement it there—these principles of democracy—then why revolutions?”⁴³

The main error in judgment by those who attempt to intervene from outside is to impose standards not appropriate to the way of life, culture and traditions of these peoples,

³⁹ Transcript of Russian Foreign Minister S.V. Lavrov's answers to questions during meeting with members of the Council on Foreign Relations,” 1531-06-10-2008, New York, 24 September 2008, Official Website of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, http://mid.ru/BDOMP/Brp_4.nsf/arh/22D0E42DE56D4830C32574DA003217E2?OpenDocument.

⁴⁰ St. Petersburg International Economic Forum (23 May 2014), Official Website of the President of Russia, <http://kremlin.ru/news/21080>.

⁴¹ Vladimir Putin answers journalists' questions on the situation in Ukraine (4 March 2014), Official website of the President of Russia, <http://kremlin.ru/news/20366>.

⁴² Interview of Foreign Minister of Russia S.V. Lavrov on *Voskresnoye vremya* (Sunday Times), Moscow, 697-30-03-2014 (30 March 2014), Official website of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, http://mid.ru/BDOMP/Brp_4.nsf/arh/04E1EF8C06E4409044257CAB0031A789?OpenDocument.

⁴³ Interview on *Radio Slovensko* and Slovakian STV television, Official website of the President of Russia, 22 February 2005, <http://kremlin.ru/transcripts/22837>.

which leads not to the expected result in the form of democracy, but to chaos, violence and further overthrows of government.⁴⁴

The opinion that the “color revolutions” led to the triumph of democratic forces has gained a foothold among western experts and politicians. The Russian side disputes this logic. In an interview on the “color revolutions” in Georgia and Ukraine, Secretary of the Russian Security Council Ivanov asks a fair question: “How can the victory of democracy be possible if key democratic principles are violated in the process of achieving that victory?”⁴⁵ Lavrov points out that a rollback of democracy has occurred in post-revolutionary countries, a fact recorded even by western research centers, Freedom House, for example.⁴⁶

Why Overthrow Leaders and Change the Regime?

Yet another important aspect that causes misapprehension by the Russian side is the West’s attitude to national leaders deposed in the course of the Rose Revolution. For example, regarding the Georgian revolution and the West’s support Vladimir Putin expressed the opinion that Eduard Shevardnadze was also not a pro-Russian president of Georgia. Western countries actively supported him and thus the question arises: “If he had to be removed via revolution one might ask: who were you supporting?”⁴⁷

A similar position by the West may be observed regarding the Syrian conflict. In Russia’s opinion, in contrast to the Syrian opposition President Assad agreed to accept all the initiatives proposed by the international community (the League of Arab States peace initiative, the Kofi Annan plan, the UN Observers Mission and the Geneva Communiqué).⁴⁸ That is, here one sees that same logic, incomprehensible to Russia: the president makes concessions but the pressure on him and support of the opposition continues.

Russia has the very same perception of the change of regime in Ukraine after Yanukovich signed the agreement with the opposition on 21 February 2014 in the presence of representatives of the European Union. In Vladimir Putin’s opinion the opposition could have easily come to power in a legal manner, without a coup, because Viktor

⁴⁴ Address by President of the Russian Federation, 18 March 2014, Official website of the President of Russia, <http://kremlin.ru/news/20603>.

⁴⁵ Interview of I.S. Ivanov, secretary of the Russian Federation Security Council, in the magazine *Strategiya Rossii* (Strategy of Russia).

⁴⁶ Article by S.V. Lavrov, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Russia: “International Relations in a New System of Coordinates,” *Rossiyskaya gazeta*, 8 September 2009, Official website of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, http://mid.ru/BDOMP/Brp_4.nsf/arh/FEEF22A8FCA033A7C325762B0021D9AF?OpenDocument.

⁴⁷ Interview on German television stations ARD and ZDF, 5 May 2005, Official website of the President of Russia, <http://kremlin.ru/transcripts/22948> (in Russian).

⁴⁸ Interview of Russian Foreign Minister S.V. Lavrov on *Sky News Arabia* television channel, 1547-18-08-2012, Official website of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 18 August 2012, http://mid.ru/BDOMP/Brp_4.nsf/arh/A5A5CC43241A074544257A5E0036546E?OpenDocument.

Yanukovich had accepted all their terms. The question arises: what is the point of a coup?⁴⁹

Similar actions by the West lead the Russian leadership to conclude that for the West there is essentially no such concept as loyalty, since even leaders who make concessions are overthrown as a result of revolutions. That is, supporting the West's position does not provide a given leader any guarantee against revolution or regime change.

Is It Even Possible to Reach Agreement with the West?

A phrase that Vladimir Putin uttered at the St. Petersburg Economic Forum in 2014 is very telling. It had to do with Russia's desire to come to agreement with the West on the Agreement on Association of Ukraine: "I haven't seen such snobbism for a long time. They simply stopped talking to us and said: 'It's none of your business.'"⁵⁰

At the same time that it refuses to discuss Russia's interests, the West, in Vladimir Putin's understanding of the matter, imposes sanctions against Russia with the objective, among others, of exacerbating Russia's internal problems. The Russian leadership remains unclear on the mechanisms western countries are relying upon to achieve this exacerbation of Russia's internal problems. The most obvious variant is a worsening of Russia's social and economic position due to the sanctions, which might provoke discontent among the population. A second variant that Putin is considering involves "actions by a fifth column – various traitors to the nation."⁵¹

Vladimir Putin set forth his overall understanding of western countries' strategy at a meeting of the Security Council devoted to the issue of national sovereignty that took place on 22 July 2014:

...more and more often in the world today one hears the language of ultimatums and sanctions. The very concept of national sovereignty is becoming eroded. Undesirable regimes, countries that pursue their own policy or simply stand in the way of someone's interests, are being destabilized. For that purpose the so-called color revolutions are set in motion; if one were to call things by their real names they are simply coups, provoked and financed from outside.

Of course, the focus is on problems within the country. There are always enough problems, especially in unstable states, failed states, and states with difficult regimes. Of course there are always problems; we just don't understand why those problems should be exploited for the total destabilization and breakdown of countries, which we often see lately in various regions of the world.⁵²

⁴⁹ St. Petersburg International Economic Forum, 23 May 2014, Official website of the President of Russia, <http://kremlin.ru/news/21080>.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Address by President of the Russian Federation, 18 March 2014, Official website of the President of Russia, <http://kremlin.ru/news/20603> (in Russian).

⁵² Meeting of the Security Council, 22 June 2014, Official website of the President of Russia, <http://kremlin.ru/news/46305>.

The West's way of acting is through the financing of radical, nationalist, neo-fascist and fundamentalist forces, at least that is just how it happens in the post-Soviet region, in the opinion of Vladimir Putin. Elections that take place after a coup are merely a cover for those who financed the overthrow.

Thus, the West's actions seem to the Russian leadership to be a combination of unwillingness to seek agreement with Russia, despite its readiness for discussion and concessions, and destabilization in the form of sanctions or support of the Russian opposition. Strictly speaking, it was this very anxiety about outside influence on internal Russian political processes—which formed after the first wave of “color revolutions”—that led to passage of the so-called Foreign Agents Law of 2012, which stipulates special registration of non-profit organizations that engage in political activities and receive monetary resources and other property from foreign sources. Does such a position by the Russian leadership mean it is unwilling to engage with the opposition honestly? No, it means it is unwilling only to engage in dialog with a Western-sponsored opposition.

Revolution as a Phenomenon

“Color revolutions” fit into the overall context of globalization when the boundary between domestic and foreign is gradually blurred. Such revolutions, although they take place within a country, are “actively fueled” from outside.⁵³ And without this external “heating,” according to Lavrov, it's possible there would not have been any revolutions at all. In general, revolutions result in a power shift. And the destabilizing effect extends both to domestic policy and to international relations.⁵⁴ An ambipolar system of international relations used to lend stability to those relations. After this bipolarity disappeared, the law of the strong replaced international law. This is exactly how the countries of the West, led by the United States, operate, based on faith in their own exceptionalism and sense of being chosen.⁵⁵

The Russian understanding of the West's position leads to the conclusion that no one touches countries with established sovereignty and the threat of “color revolutions” initiated from without exists only for “young” states: “The national institutions of fledgling states should be treated with an exceptional degree of care, otherwise there is chaos, and that is what we are observing in Ukraine.”⁵⁶ One should act solely in a constitutional

⁵³ Address and Q&A by S.V. Lavrov, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Russia, during discussions at the Youth Education Forum, Seliger, 27 August 2014, Official website of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 1988-27-08-2014, http://mid.ru/brp_4.nsf/0/7CF0446902F9584544257D410064D1C8.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Address by the President of the Russian Federation, 18 March 2014, Official website of the President of Russia, <http://kremlin.ru/news/20603> (in Russian).

⁵⁶ St. Petersburg International Economic Forum, 23 May 2014, Official website of the President of Russia, <http://kremlin.ru/news/21080> (in Russian).

manner, since the post-Soviet space has still fragile political structures and a very weak economy.⁵⁷

From the sidelines the condemnation of revolutions may be perceived as a hindrance to historical development and progress. Vladimir Putin expressed the opinion that progress is inevitable and cannot be stopped artificially. However, it cannot be pushed artificially either, because otherwise the result is “chaos and disintegration,” as in Iraq and Libya, for instance. The recipe is “a careful attitude toward history and toward the traditions and culture of a people.”⁵⁸ What the West calls democratic transformation in countries where operations were conducted and a power shift occurred, are in Putin’s opinion “lifeless, dead schemes,” that “do not work outside of historical and cultural context,”⁵⁹ because “democratic transformation must occur in a civilized manner, without outside intervention.”⁶⁰

Sergey Lavrov expresses Russia’s approaches in a similar fashion: democratic countries should not change revolution into a means of promoting democracy,⁶¹ and imposing “its own recipes for internal change” on other countries leads to the creation of hot spots and destabilization of international relations in general.⁶²

Revolutions in a Historical Perspective

Revolutions find a place in official Russian discourse both in international and historical contexts. The Russian leadership refers to Russia’s own experience in the 20th century as well as the experience of western countries.

To substantiate the thesis that it is undesirable to intervene in the process of contemporary revolutions, Sergey Lavrov draws a parallel with revolutions that have occurred in developed western countries:

...after 1789 in France, as after the American War of Independence, the people of these countries themselves—both in France and in the United States—addressed their problems and sought common ground after bloody wars and clashes, but they did reach agreement

⁵⁷ Vladimir Putin answers journalists’ questions on the situation in Ukraine, 4 March 2014, Official website of the President of Russia, <http://kremlin.ru/news/20366> (in Russian).

⁵⁸ Meeting of the Council on International Relations, 3 July 2014, Official website of the President of Russia, <http://kremlin.ru/news/46144> (in Russian).

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Meeting with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, 25 June 2012, Official website of the President of Russia, <http://kremlin.ru/news/15728> (in Russian).

⁶¹ “Transcript of Russian Foreign Minister S.V. Lavrov’s answers to questions during meeting with members of the Council on Foreign Relations,” 1531-06-10-2008.

⁶² Speech by Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs S.V. Lavrov at the IIIrd Moscow Conference on International Security, Moscow, 23 May 2014, 1256-23-05-2014, Official website of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, http://mid.ru/BDOMP/Brp_4.nsf/arh/EA36B450E08027D744257CE10031D9B8?OpenDocument (in Russian).

and found a political order that to this day at least provides them with normal and even good development in the modern world.⁶³

Thus, the historical experience of the West, in Russia's view, should have brought western political leaders to the idea of non-intervention, because the developed countries of the West have had the opportunity to independently tread the path of national reform. In turn, the countries of the West, apparently based on that same historical experience, are making the opposite conclusion: they know for themselves that the processes of change move very slowly, so they are endeavoring to accelerate historic changes by offering ready-made recipes for democratization.

In official Russian discourse, however, revolutions are depicted not as the road to emancipation and prosperity, but as tragedies:

At the root of all tragedies of the 19th and 20th centuries lay a crisis of European society, whose traditional foundations were destroyed as a result of endless revolutions, when the entire world fell victim to what Zbigniew Brzezinski called the "civil war within the West." A sustainable model of economic and social development—socially oriented, with universal suffrage and anchored on a substantial middle class—could be established only amid the dead end of a "cold war" and its geopolitical imperatives and upon a new technological footing.⁶⁴

In Russia's understanding the result of the Great French Revolution and the October Revolution was intolerance among the newly ruling revolutionaries, who rid themselves of their comrades in the name of "purity of the faith."⁶⁵ Lavrov stresses that the experience of Russia, whose history has "enough revolutions," can hardly be regarded as an example to follow because it always involves bloodshed and as a result the country always ends up being left behind in its development.⁶⁶

For Russia, revolutions are a rupture in history. In order to discover meaning in the Russia's development as a nation, Putin believes, one must forget about these breaks of 1917 and 1991 and perceive the history of Russia as an unbroken thousand-year his-

⁶³ Interview of Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs S.V. Lavrov by moderator of the program 'Aktual'nyj razgovor' V. Solovyov, 3 Kanal television company, 13 March 2011, Official website of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 323-13-03-2011, http://mid.ru/BDOMP/Brp_4.nsf/arh/E35AC8110082ABCBC3257852004AF20E?OpenDocument (in Russian).

⁶⁴ Lecture by Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs S.V. Lavrov: "On the subject and method of modern diplomacy" as part of the "Golden Collection" of the journal *Mezhdunarodnaya zhizn* (International Life), 12:11 (17 September 2009), Official website of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, http://mid.ru/BDOMP/Brp_4.nsf/arh/1169CB7A7B8A6228C325766C0046E102?OpenDocument (in Russian).

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Interview of Russian Foreign Minister S.V. Lavrov on 'Russia Today' television channel ("Spotlight" program), Moscow, 3 February 2011, Official website of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 125-05-02-2011, http://mid.ru/BDOMP/Brp_4.nsf/arh/D3E2DF348EBE84FEC325782E005EA6CF?OpenDocument (in Russian).

tory.⁶⁷ In another speech Putin calls the events of 1917 and 1991 “national catastrophes of the 20th century, when we twice experienced the breakdown of our nationhood.”⁶⁸ The Russian president describes the consequences of these events as follows:

As a result we have suffered a devastating blow to the nation’s cultural and spiritual code and have been confronted with a breakdown of traditions and historical unity, with demoralization of the society, and with a deficit of mutual trust and responsibility. Many of the serious problems we face have their roots in this. Responsibility to ourselves, the society and the law is, after all, a foundational matter both in the law and in daily life.⁶⁹

It is interesting to note that the Russian leadership perceives the process of the breakup of the Soviet Union as a revolution. Shortly after his election to his first term as president, Vladimir Putin gave an interview to the French newspaper *Figaro* in October 2000. In that interview Putin explained to French journalists that beginning in the mid-80s what was occurring in the USSR was perestroika, which in the early 90s essentially became a revolution. Putin understands revolution to be a dismantling of existing state institutions, after which there begins a creative process, a consolidation of institutions on a new and democratic basis.⁷⁰ In another interview to the French press Putin called the events of the 1990s a “bloodless revolution.”⁷¹ Russian foreign minister Sergey Lavrov also describes the events of the 1990s as a “truly democratic revolution without any shades of color (a hint at the “color revolutions” not being truly democratic) after which Russia was considered “one of the best countries with a democratic regime.”⁷² Then again, in the West’s understanding Russia lost the title of “leading democracy” when Vladimir Putin came to power in 2000.

Conclusions for Russia’s Domestic Policy

The lessons Russia learned from the “color revolutions” of 2003–2005, according to Igor Ivanov, Secretary of the National Security Council of Russia, are that more intensive dialog is needed between Russian government and society.⁷³ Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Grigory Karasin draws a similar conclusion from the events of the “Arab

⁶⁷ Message from the President to the Federal Assembly, 12 December 2012, Official website of the President of Russia, <http://kremlin.ru/news/17118> (in Russian).

⁶⁸ Meeting of the Valday International Discussion Club, 19 September 2013, Official website of the President of Russia, <http://kremlin.ru/news/19243> (in Russian).

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Interview in French newspaper *Figaro*, 26 October 2000, Official website of the President of Russia, <http://kremlin.ru/transcripts/21634> (in Russian).

⁷¹ Interview on French television channels *TF-1* and *France-3*, 23 October 2000, Official website of the President of Russia, <http://kremlin.ru/transcripts/21643> (in Russian).

⁷² Transcript of Russian Foreign Minister S.V. Lavrov’s answers to questions during meeting with members of the Council on Foreign Relations, New York, 24 September 2008, Official website of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 1531-06-10-2008, http://mid.ru/BDOMP/Brp_4.nsf/arh/22D0E42DE56D4830C32574DA003217E2?OpenDocument (in Russian).

⁷³ Interview of I.S. Ivanov, secretary of the Russian Federation Security Council, in the journal *Strategiya Rossii* (Strategy of Russia).

spring.”⁷⁴ Karasin believes that society is changing and becoming more demanding; it can no longer be engaged “using the templates of the 70s, 80s and 90s.” Young people need a social path upward, otherwise they become susceptible to provocation.⁷⁵

How was the Russian leadership’s position on “color revolutions” and “Arab spring” reflected in the attitude toward the mass protests of late 2011 and early 2012? In Putin’s opinion, the majority of the protesters were patriotically inclined people for whom the president, in his words, has “profound respect,” because they are interested in changing Russia for the better. Putin has a negative attitude toward the views of those protesters who could be classified either as “anarchists” or as wishing for the defeat of their own country (in 2014 Putin referred to them with the term “traitors to the nation”). The president stressed that he was offended by seeing the protesters wearing symbols (white ribbons) that, as he said, were developed abroad,⁷⁶ which demonstrates his certainty of the existence of an external factor in the mass protests. In a live television call-in show on 15 December 2011 during the protests themselves, Vladimir Putin even expressed the opinion that some protesters were paid to participate, commenting that the color revolutions were “tried and tested schemes for destabilizing a society.”⁷⁷

What conclusions relevant to internal Russian policy can be drawn from the unfolding of events in Ukraine in 2014? In Vladimir Putin’s opinion, the misconduct of ultra-radical and terrorist elements must be curbed on the one hand, and on the other, this must be done without creating restrictions for civil society, which as in the past must have a range of lawful means of presenting grievances to the authorities. In doing so, Putin called for avoiding political solutions that would constrain civil liberties, so that the authorities would not create an “ivory tower” for themselves by using the Ukrainian events as a pretext.⁷⁸

Conclusion

On the one hand, Russia’s official approach to revolution as a phenomenon is driven by its experience with nationhood and revolutions in the 20th century; on the other hand it is a reaction to the approaches of the West to supporting opposition forces in the course of revolutionary changes. Russian leaders believe that every young state has a right to its own path of trial and error without intervention from outside. Only then will citizens of young states learn responsibility and parliamentary forms of politics and acquire the

⁷⁴ Interview of State Secretary-Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of Russia G.B. Karasin in *Rossijskaya gazeta*, 13 February 2013.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Meeting with participants of the “Seliger-2012” forum, 31 July 2012, Official website of the President of Russia, <http://kremlin.ru/transcripts/16106> (in Russian).

⁷⁷ A special program: “A conversation with Vladimir Putin. Continued” was broadcast live on television channels *Russia 1*, *Russia 24* and *RTR-Planeta* and on radio stations *Mayak*, *Vesti FM* and *Radio Rossiya*, 15 December 2011, Official website of the Prime Minister of Russia, <http://archive.premier.gov.ru/events/news/17409> (in Russian).

⁷⁸ Meeting with members of the Council of the Chamber of the Federation Council (27 March 2014), Official website of the President of Russia, <http://kremlin.ru/news/20645> (in Russian).

skills of interacting with authority in the framework of constitutionally established rules rather than by the laws of “street democracy.” Third party intervention in revolutionary processes does not lead to accelerated democratization but only destabilizes the situation and leads to internal conflicts, because the exported version of democracy does not take into account the internal conditions, traditions and history of the country in which attempts are made to institute the principles of western democracy. The Russian official formula is not revolution, but evolution, under which the government and civil society conduct dialog to resolve social and economic problems that inevitably arise in any recently formed state.

Russian Politics in Times of Change: Internal and External Factors of Transformation

*Denis Alexeev**

The first few months of 2014 brought an unprecedented collapse of the Russian Federation's image on the world stage, the worst since the end of the Cold War. The events in Ukraine and the reaction to them by a significant number of countries in the international community, quickly demoted Russia to that group of countries whose foreign policy provokes harsh condemnation. For the first time in decades, international sanctions have been put in place against Russia, adopted by a large number of the world's largest countries, *de facto* downgrading Russia to the rank of a rogue state; these sanctions are intended to exert pressure on the elite, who are responsible for implementing certain foreign policy decisions. For many experts, the events are associated with a new and sudden sea-change in Russia's foreign policy. However, it appears to us that the current stage of cooling relations with the West is a logical consequence of the way in which the Russian state was constructed in recent years; in fact, a different scenario could hardly have been anticipated. This article presents the author's view of the mechanisms and logic that shaped Russia's foreign policy course, which has evolved through several iterations in the last three years. The below analysis could facilitate a fuller understanding of Russian motives in international relations, and help find opportunities and mechanisms for dialogue between Russia and the West.

Vladimir Putin's new presidential term, which began in 2012, was typified by a significant transformation of Russia's foreign policy, both with respect to neighboring states, and world politics in general. The majority of pundits tend to link this transformation with domestic, social processes in Russia itself, an increasingly active public and a qualitative transformation of the Russian elite. However, we consider that Russia's current foreign policy concept is a complex combination of three factors, which are both foreign and domestic:

- A. The evolution of the political system, which took place as a result of competition between different groups within the Russian elite, over the past 3-5 years. As a result of these processes, Russia's political spectrum has a complex structure, which includes liberal-economic, conservative-political and oligarchic elements. Competition between these groups is a major factor behind the complex character of Russia's current foreign policy.
- B. The Eurasian economic and political integration project which, in the mindset of Russian leaders, is the key to Russian development in the 21st century. Success or failure in implementing the giant steps required to re-integrate post-So-

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viet space is seen as the main indicator of the effectiveness of the Russian political system today, and its foreign-policy strategies.

- C. The international security situation, which features a wide range of uncertainties and threats in the Middle and Far East, as well as Central Asia and Afghanistan.

We consider it important to analyze how much the above factors influence current Russian foreign policy, and then ascertain how much each factor can influence policies. This analysis will offer answers to key issues about the dominant factors in foreign policy decision-making in today's Russia, e.g. whether policy-making is reactive or proactive, and what transformations the next few years will bring.

The Russian Elite

To answer the questions raised, we must first determine the structure of the Russian elite today. This stratum can nominally be divided into two, deeply inter-connected segments. The first is a hierarchy: the distribution of economic and financial influence and interests within a ruling class that took shape during the first presidential terms of President Putin. The second is the values of the members of the elite who occupy the country's political governance system.

The Russian elite, taken in general, are fairly well understood. Between 2000 and 2010, four main groups of influence emerged in Russia. The first included Putin's so-called "inner circle," friends and colleagues from St. Petersburg and the uniformed services. All these individuals, to one degree or another, gained control over the state's largest industrial assets and basic commodities, including the lucrative energy sector. This group of Russia's modern elite has been fairly well studied by experts and analysts, and consists of a complex system of family and clan-type bonds, the result of which is control over key economic sectors, such as energy extraction and heavy industry, which are the mainstay of the state budget. These figures were the first to be targeted on USA and EU sanctions lists.

A large part of the modern political elite is made up of the uniformed services in the Russian state system. This includes representatives of the ministry of defense, the FSB and the Interior Ministry, which maintain strong ties with Putin's inner circle, but which have no direct influence on capital flows. Rather, they offer greater stability for the new system for distributing economic influence and state authority in the country, including political stability. In response, the state guarantees this group broad authorities and opportunities, including inflated spending on these sectors via a multi-layer system of preferences, financial support and other forms of state sponsorship.

It is noteworthy that a large number of bureaucrats and civil servants have experience as officers in the army, navy and special services; this is directly related to the collapse of the USSR and the restructuring of the army and the special services, when approximately 300,000 former officers were re-integrated into civilian roles. According to research by Olga Kryshnanovskaya's Center for the Study of the Elites, by 2003 the por-

tion of former officers who were appointed to federal and regional agencies was almost 35%.¹ This ratio was further boosted during Putin's presidency.

The third group to claim significant economic interests in the country is that of major Russian oligarchs of the "first wave" including the owners of big business, who obtained their companies through privatization in the early 1990's. This group was largely placed under the control of the state using various forms of political pressure. Criminal charges against Yukos and the fate of Mikhail Khodorkovsky clearly demonstrate that the oligarchs who do not accept the limits imposed by new political realities are doomed to vanish, together with their capital. However, despite the fact that most Russian oligarchs are integrated into Russia's current state system, they represent a fairly powerful and independent lobby group, which could strongly influence the authorities in certain areas of domestic and economic policy.

Another noteworthy group represents liberal-economic interests. The rise of this group is associated with President Dmitrii Medvedev's decision to include a young generation of liberal technocrats into the elite. This group includes the economic and financial staff of the cabinet of ministers, the leadership of the Central Bank, certain parts of the Russian scientific elite, including the Russian Academy of Sciences and the leadership of the country's leading universities. However, this subsection of the Russian elite has limited influence over foreign-policy decision-making, and is bound to operate within certain limitations imposed at a higher level. Nevertheless, the role of this group is significant because, paradoxically, the Russian economic model is fundamentally liberal, and therefore must be governed according to such principles. All attempts by the president's administration to introduce elements of a social state into this liberal model, as a rule, meet with resistance from the liberal-economic block, where it is well understood that high social commitments will undermine the performance of the current Russian economy and will slow economic growth. Therefore, Putin and his administration are often forced to heed the recommendations of the government's liberal-economic block.

In our classification, we have omitted members of the political elite in the Russian regions. Without a doubt, amongst regional leaders there are a fairly large number of influential political figures; however there are reasons not to take into consideration their role in determining the country's foreign policy. During the establishment of the Russian state in the 1990's, as the influence of the central authorities dwindled, the predominant model of relations in the construction of political governance in Russia was that of regional, clientelist relations which, as a rule, were an authoritarian symbiosis of regional political authority and business that depended upon it. In many ways, such a model was a result of the Soviet, party-based governance system.² In the absence of an ideological factor and as Moscow's influence over the regions contracted in 1991-1998, relations between the center and the periphery became less well-defined. However, when Presi-

¹ *Ol'ga Kryshstanovskaya*, "Putin's Regime: A Liberal Militocracy," *Pro et Contra* 7:4 (2002): 158-180.

² Sergey Biryukov, "The All-Invasive Clientella," *Svobodnaya Mysl* 7 (2012): 32-33.

dent Yeltsin left power, this trend was reversed. Reinforcing elements of state governance into a single “vertical of power,” Putin essentially deprived the regional elites of any tangible role in guiding Russia’s foreign policy.

Interestingly, the process of excluding the regional elite from the federal political space took relatively little time. As studies by the Sociology Institute of the Russian Academy of Sciences have shown, in 2004, as construction of the “vertical of power” began with the cancellation of gubernatorial elections and reinforced control from Moscow over regional processes, politicians in the regions expressed their discontent, citing a growing conflict between the center of the constituent members of the federation.³ By 2006, however, surveys and studies by the same institute show that moods amongst the regional elite had undergone an abrupt change. The absolute majority of regional leaders supported the initiatives of the Kremlin and advocated the need to reinforce the “vertical of power” – they had learned to derive economic and political benefit from the new system of distributing authorities.⁴

We can thus state that, given the focused policies of the federal center, just 2-3 years are needed to change the character and structure of the Russian political elite. This fact is important to bear in mind, in comparison with the re-formatting of the Russian elite that started in 2012. This latter process deserves closer analysis.

Without dwelling in detail on the individual members of different parts of the Russian national elite, we can establish the key fact that during the years that Putin has been in power, this elite has expanded, acquiring its own independent interests and clients in political parties, various levels of trade and commerce, as well as society, and now has become a complex system of contradictions, interests and influence. Within this system, confrontations and conflicts of interests can occasionally arise. As a rule, these are resolved at the level of the single, central figure in the system – the President. Putin’s position as a moderator in the complex system of the elite’s political and economic interests gives him a dual role. On the one hand, the president is able to control processes inside the state, without allowing any single player, or group, to reinforce their position enough to dominate the political playing field. On the other hand, he is forced to duck and weave in decision-making—for both domestic and foreign policy—which can force him to make very difficult choices. In other words, the president is a hostage of the very political system that he has taken many years to create.

The continuing expansion of the elite has led to major fragmentation and division into segments and groups of interests.⁵ At the same time, there is a growing conflict between society and the elite, which was clearly demonstrated in a wave of public interest in the opposition forces in Russian politics, 2011-2012. The result of mass meetings by the opposition, whose leaders, believe the Kremlin, had certain connections with the

³ A.E. Chirikova, “The Vertical of Power in the Assessments of Regional Elites: Dynamics of Change,” *Politicheskie issledovaniya* 6 (2008), p. 101.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 105.

⁵ “Politburo 2.0 on the Eve of the Reset of Elite Groups,” Report January–February 2013 (Minchenko Consulting, 19 February 2013), available at http://minchenko.ru/netcat_files/File/Politburo_full.pdf (in Russian).

West, was, ultimately, the deciding factor behind the selection of political ideas and values to guide the Russian political leadership. In our opinion the harsh reaction, suppressing the most active members of opposition organizations and political associations, was the first step towards transforming the overarching principle behind Russia's foreign policy course. For the Russian authorities, this signal launched two new processes: the discrediting, in mass consciousness, of the very idea of a liberal opposition, and the "nationalization of the elite."

Pressure exerted by the Russian authorities on the opposition can be explained as an attempt to secure a certain level of social and political stability within the state. This trend was always typical for the Soviet and Russian political systems. Crafting a restricted space for political institutions and parties, in which the system faces no domestic threats, has long been the reality in Russia, including after the collapse of the USSR. Reinforcement of the "vertical of power," despite the falling level of control over the regions, is seen by Moscow as one of the notable achievements since the end of Boris Yeltsin's presidency. The "color revolutions" in a number of post-Soviet republics convinced the Russian ruling class that control over the political process in Russia will guarantee some degree of immunity against social upheaval in society. The absence of genuine political competition and the predictability of elections are perceived as some of the most important elements in the Russian political space. This fact explains the slow development of civil society institutions and low political activity by citizens of today's Russia. It is for this reason that we focus not on Russian society, but on a narrow political stratum that has monopolized the political space in Russia.

The "nationalization of the elite" in this construct is a new element that determines the character of Russian foreign policy and requires more detailed analysis. This form of nationalization refers to a set of laws, adopted by the State Duma in 2012 and 2013, which banned civil servants from holding financial assets or real estate in other countries. This movement was nominally linked to a program to fight corruption, but was actually of uttermost political significance. The Magnitsky affair, worsening relations between the USA, the EU and Russia, highlighted a large number of strategic risks flowing from the deep integration of a large number of Russian civil servants into the economic systems of Europe and America. This fact inspired not only dissatisfaction amongst the population, but, from the viewpoint of Putin's team, made the Russian political class potentially vulnerable if confrontations with the West were to become more acute.

Another reason for this attempt to consolidate the ruling class around the Russian state system was the result of the 2012 presidential elections. It is no secret that Putin's return to power as president provoked negative emotions amongst a large majority of Western politicians and observers. Understanding this, Putin took the steps he could to minimize any possibility to exert pressure on him via the Russian elite, via their economic and financial interests in the West. Considering the views of Putin himself, and the confidence of many figures in his circle that any past or possible future political changes in the post-Soviet space were actually funded, to some degree, by the West, this should be considered as a defensive maneuver.

In addition, in his statement to the Federal Assembly of December 2012, Vladimir Putin particularly underscored the need to return the country's economic elite from offshore zones into Russian jurisdiction.⁶ Thus, a parallel process of nationalization of Russia's economic elite can also be observed. This was triggered by the events surrounding the economic crisis in Cyprus, as well as the sudden deterioration in the health of the Russian state budget. For whatever reason, stimulating a repatriation of Russian capital was seen by the Kremlin as way of minimizing possible geopolitical risks associated with increasing external pressure.

Naturally, such a nationalization of the elite cannot take place overnight. Nevertheless, the trends forming since 2012 overwhelmingly suggest that Russia is preparing to deflect possible challenges emanating from deepening political and economic clashes between itself and the West. Certainly, Russia will be unable to cut its far-reaching bonds with the world economy, or end its role as one of the largest exporters of fossil fuels. The European Union will also remain Russia's leading economic partner, although the process of withdrawing the elite from direct economic contact with the external world is seen within the Kremlin as a sort of insurance policy against direct pressure. It is also worth remembering the example of federal reform and the construction of the "vertical of power" starting in 2004, which included a complete overhaul of the hierarchical subordination of the regions to the central authorities in Moscow. Given a targeted policy, the Kremlin could completely rebuild the political system in the same 2-3 years. In other words, in 2014-2015 we will probably witness the completion of a new reshaping of the Russian elite, resulting in a new Russian foreign policy.

This simplified view of Russia's current foreign policy as a function of the domestic processes in the country portrays the policy as a defense mechanism. The logic behind such a defensive reaction follows the tradition of tension between East and West. The stronger positions of traditionalists/statists within the Russian ruling class, and the nationalization of that group, should reduce the geopolitical risks arising from a deeper confrontation with the West – a confrontation that has clearly deepened since the end of 2012. The culmination of the confrontation between the West and Russia in 2012 could be considered the adoption of the Magnitsky Act by the US Congress and certain European states, as well as laws adopted by the Russian State Duma in retaliation. Generally speaking, this is the moment when work really began to introduce systemic policies to generate a "new" social values' foundation for relations with the West. This was what prompted the Russian political system to gradually prepare for a possible deterioration of political relations with Europe and the USA.

The way that post-Soviet states developed after the collapse of the USSR and during the economic and political disintegration of the early 1990's generated a particular kind of psychological complex amongst powerful circles. This mindset is one of constant fears of external attacks on the sovereignty that evolved in Russia over the past two dec-

⁶ Verbatim record of the Statement of the RF President V. Putin to the Federal Assembly, *Rossiyskaya Gazeta*, 12 December 2012, available at <http://www.rg.ru/2012/12/12/stenogramma-poln.html> (in Russian).

ades. This background was the launch pad for an important process in Russian foreign policy: the rapid adjustment of Russia's system of national values.

Two results of the political transformations that began in Russia in 2012 can be identified. First, the nationalization of the ruling class—with an emphasis on maximum loyalty to the political system—and the victory of a traditionalist, pro-state group, over the liberal wing of the Russian elite. Second, the shaping of a new set of guiding national values. A new system of conservative values was finally established, and began to be actively driven into mass consciousness. It can be defined as “new Russian conservatism.” The main theses of Russian conservatism were formulated by Vladimir Putin in a number of speeches, including an interview given to the American Associated Press, where he called himself a “pragmatic conservatist,”⁷ and a statement to the Federal Assembly in December of 2013. According to Putin, there are

more and more people who support our position of protecting traditional values, which for thousands of years have been the spiritual and moral foundation of civilization, of every people: the values of traditional families, a proper human life, including a religious life, not just a material life, but also spiritual, the values of humanism and diversity in the world. Of course, this is a conservative position. But, using the terms of Nikolai Berdyaev, “the essence of conservatism is not that it hinders movement upwards and forwards, but that it prevents movement downwards and backwards, towards chaos and darkness, a return to primitive existence.”⁸

It is noteworthy that today's version of Russian conservatism remains highly abstract in the interpretations given by Russian leaders. Far too great an emphasis is placed on universal values (equality, justice, the family and spirituality) which in Russia are always considered conservative, although they are inherent to almost any modern ideology. However, in the most general terms, the essence of “new Russian conservatism” can be defined as a combination of patriotism and traditionalism, as well as supporting the unbroken continuity between modern Russia and the historical roots of Russian statehood (the Tsarist Empire and the USSR). This concept also includes the ambition for Russia to regain its status as a leader in the post-Soviet space, and an independent player on the world stage, by the reinforcement of its military/political and economic influence in Eurasia. Thus, Russian conservatism bears very little relation to the concept of conservatism itself. Here, we agree with Vladimir Petukhov, head of the Center for Complex Sociological Studies at the RAN Sociology Institute, when he claims that there are actually very few conservatives in Russia in the usual meaning of the word: “What we see in current Russian politics is a combination of traditionalism and statism; moreover, this takes forms that are typical for the Soviet understanding of the state.”⁹

⁷ Exclusive interview with Vladimir Putin to *Perviy kanal* TV and the *Associated Press*, 4 August 2013, available at <http://www.1tv.ru/news/social/241135>.

⁸ Statement of the RF President V. Putin to the Federal Assembly, 12 December 2013, <http://kremlin.ru/news/19825> (in Russian).

⁹ Verbatim record of the Statement of Vladimir Petukhov at the Round Table “Project to create conservative man for today's Russia; social realities and prospects” (The International

An important peculiarity of the new Russian conservatism is the extraordinary combination of expansionism and isolationism. The dualist division of the world into West and East remains one of the key components of the new ideological doctrine. Meanwhile, the current Russian elite is seeking new ways to demonstrate its intention to prevent the values system of the West penetrating traditionally Eurasian space, and isolate itself from the destructive influence of Western values. At the same time, the promotion of proprietary values and ideological constructs in adjacent states is an integral part of foreign policy.

Another element of the new Russian conservatism is the reinforcement of the ruling elite's special social status. An interesting thesis was offered by Leonid Polyakov, professor of the Applied Political Science Faculty of the Higher School of Economics: Russian conservatism is the tradition of seeking power.¹⁰ In other words, from the Russian viewpoint, this ideology is generally intended to reinforce the political mechanism that guarantees that the existing state governance structure remains in power. This is the source of the very Russian concept of the political "Party of Power" – the force that dominates the political system of the country, the ideology of which is dedicated to maintaining the *status quo* in and around the country's power structures.

This new construct of values and ideology is penetrating mass consciousness, but to drive it deeper, the powerful are taking pains to reformat Russia's domestic information and social space. For example, concrete steps have been taken to strengthen control over the mass media. The RIA-Novosti news agency was reformed, then replaced by the International Information Agency Russia Today, against a backdrop of pressure on a number of independent media outlets. New laws curtail the freedoms of NGOs, public movements and civil society institutions, while also establishing the concept of "foreign agents." Those in power believe that such steps will create an information space capable of injecting previously-approved values and ideological constructs deep into the worldview of the majority of Russians.¹¹

A striking example of the insemination of this new ideological imperative into the consciousness of the politically amorphous majority was the creation, at the end of 2011, of the ONF movement – the Pan-Russian National Front, which brought together several hundred public associations, including the political party United Russia, and was intended to galvanize large swaths of the populace around the ruling elite, personified by Vladimir Putin, in the run-up to the 2012 presidential elections. This strategy was necessary because the ruling elite had largely exhausted its previous ability to mobilize voters: the "administrative leverage" of United Russia. The ONF manifesto states the need to "unite around common values that are the core of our national character and the moral

Foundation for Socio-Economic and Political Studies (The Gorbachev Foundation), 15 May 2014), http://www.gorby.ru/userfiles/02_petuhov_red_.pdf (in Russian).

¹⁰ Leonid Polyakov, "Five paradoxes of Russian conservatism," *Otechestvenniye zapiski* 17:2 (2004), available at www.strana-oz.ru/2004/2/pyat-paradoksov-rossiyskogo-konservatizma (in Russian).

¹¹ "The President Headed on a Course for Conservatism," *Nezavisimaya gazeta*, 30 December 2013, available at http://www.ng.ru/politics/2013-12-30/3_conservative.html (in Russian).

basis of our life. This is the desire to live by truth and justice, in harmony with our conscience. This means love for our Motherland, this means serving Russia. We are convinced that the bedrock of patriotic values generates the energy for cooperative action.”¹² It is clear from such language, that the ideological platform of new Russian conservatism is now being downloaded into public consciousness in the form of propaganda clichés, and with some success.

To summarize the domestic policy that influences the foreign policy of today’s Russia, we must underscore several key issues. First, the re-formatting of the Russian elite and articulating a new platform of values and ideology are two parallel processes, that kicked off at the end of 2011, as the ruling elite was busy consolidating its hold on power. Russia’s foreign policy doctrine is driven by the fundamental ambition to protect the current political system from external influence. In other words, one of the key motivations of the Russian elite is protection from the actions of agents outside the system, who could diminish the power of the state or otherwise weaken the political system. This phenomenon is not new to recent Russian history; similar trends could be seen in 2004-2007, following the chain of post-Soviet states that experienced political regime change. This most recent iteration includes both ideological and political aspects. Meanwhile, the logic behind Russia’s relations with the outside world has evolved, and it has become more important to consolidate Russian society around the ruling elite. The Ukrainian crisis, contrary to popular opinion, has not fundamentally impacted Russian policies – it has merely accelerated and reinforced trends that were identifiable long before the crisis broke.

The Eurasian Integration Project

The international context, inasmuch as it influences Russian foreign policy, can nominally be divided into two strata. The first is the Russian strategy to achieve the objectives of Eurasian integration. The second stratum consists of processes in world politics, which influence economic and military/political security in the world, and in regions adjacent to Russia.

The project of Eurasian integration has, in recent years, been one of the highest priorities on the Russian foreign-policy agenda. This project should be understood to include not only Russia’s ambition to wield greater political and economic weight in the post-Soviet space; this is an issue of long-term strategic development – in the opinion of the Russian ruling class and Vladimir Putin, this strategy answers the challenge to find a place for Russia and her closest allies in the complex, competitive environment of the multi-polar world of the 21st century. There are a number of reasons why this project should be considered separately from the domestic politics of the day. First, the Russian idea of re-integrating the post-Soviet space has a long history, and has gone through a

¹² “Manifesto of the Pan-Russian National Front,” adopted 12 June 2013, available at <http://onf.ru/structure/documents/manifest> (in Russian).

series of transformations over the past 15 years.¹³ The EEU, the CSTO and the SCO, as well as several other integration structures, and the way in which they function, are all the result of a fairly complex, sometimes failing attempt by Russian politicians to bind political motivation to an economic foundation. Second, Russia's long-term economic development potential is seen by experts as a function of the ability of post-Soviet states to create a common market, becoming an efficient link in a chain of cooperation stretching from the growing East (India and China) to Europe. Third, many post-Soviet states have their own reasons to jump onto the bandwagon: these are not to do with Russia's foreign influence, but rather the home-grown strategies of certain republics in Central Asia and the South Caucasus, which already face the same challenges – domestic, foreign, political and economic.

Nevertheless, by placing great political hopes on successful Eurasian integration, the core actions of Russian foreign policy are aimed at tackling possible barriers to the project. It is from this viewpoint that we should examine the influence of the post-Soviet space on the Kremlin's foreign policy. Moscow sees the Eurasian project as surrounded by harsh competition, which explains the rather jittery, rough-handed response when Russia has suspected—rightly or not—that a foreign or domestic player is attempting to slow down the project.

However, the idea of Eurasian integration across the CIS has no direct competitors. The integration projects that have now been launched and are being implemented (the Customs Union, EurAsEC, SES and CSTO) have constituted such a broad and deep effort, that any alternative cooperative project that could theoretically be initiated by an external player would be unable to compete – at least, in the foreseeable future.

This does not mean the project has no hidden traps and obstacles to negotiate – these all exist, and are significant. The situation in Ukraine fully justified Russia's fear that major economic partners could be drawn, relatively easily, into integration with competing economic powers.

Russia's hurried "gathering of lands" across the post-Soviet space into the basket of such economic and political unions is seen by American policy and analysis circles as grounds for concern, regardless of party or ideological leanings. In April of 2012, *The National Interest* published an article by Jeffrey Mankoff, deputy director of the Washington-based CSIS. In his opinion, the centripetal tendencies sponsored by Russia are dangerous, because they will, most likely, deprive targeted countries of the ability to independently forge foreign policy, instead following Russia on a whole series of critical international issues.¹⁴ In America, this fact has triggered the suspicions of both experts

¹³ For more details on the stages of post-Soviet integration, see Teodor Lucian Moga and Denis Alexeev, "Post-Soviet States Between Russia and the EU: Reviving Geopolitical Competition? A Dual Perspective," *Connections: The Quarterly Journal* 13:1 (2013): 41–51, available at <http://connections-qj.org/article/post-soviet-states-between-russia-and-eu-reviving-geopolitical-competition-dual-perspective>.

¹⁴ Jeffrey Mankoff, "What a Eurasian Union Means for Washington," *The National Interest*, 19 April 2012, available at <http://nationalinterest.org/commentary/what-eurasian-union-means-washington-6821>.

and officials. State Secretary Hillary Clinton, in a December 2012 speech, declared that the USA would strive to “slow or prevent” Eurasian integration, seeing in this process some elements of a resurrection of the USSR.¹⁵

Such statements by American experts and politicians give Moscow every reason to believe that America will take all opportunities to hinder any integration projects in Eurasia, despite the fact that Americans recognize the major economic dividends of integration between former Soviet republics, underscoring the “colossal advantages” of a common market, with free movement of goods and people. “The restoration of regional specializations, as they existed in the former USSR, will create the opportunity to emphasize the comparative advantages the republic boasts, in the face of international competition.”¹⁶ In such circumstances, the conclusions drawn by the Kremlin can be expressed as follows: America wants to hinder integration in the post-Soviet space, because it wants to deny Russia and her allies the benefits of such association.

As regards the European Union, the Kremlin considers that the activities and capabilities of the EU, as an independent force in the region of the former USSR, are more restricted than those of the USA. It is for this reason that the pressure the EU placed on Ukraine over the signing of the association agreement was seen by Russia as part of the West’s overarching strategy to frustrate Russia’s integration project. If we assume this is Moscow’s line of thinking, Russia’s abrupt reaction and the tendency to accuse the West collectively for all the difficulties on the path to Eurasian integration appear wholly logical. Moscow thinks that Brussels and Washington will concentrate the brunt of their efforts to prevent integration not on countries that have already expressed the desire to deepen integration, but rather on states that are of great interest to Russia, but which are still hesitant to take the plunge (Ukraine, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan).

An important idiosyncrasy of the Russian approach to politics in the post-Soviet space is the paradoxical determination to classify any hindrance to consensus-building with neighboring countries not as foreign-policy errors or miscalculations, but as sabotage by foreign agents – primarily the EU and the USA. This phenomenon has its origins in the post-Soviet psychological complexes of the Russian elite, and a geopolitical bias in viewing most processes unfolding anywhere in the world.

Without any doubt, there are states in the post-Soviet space which have a very negative attitude to the integration projects proposed by Moscow. Leaders and experts in these countries have repeatedly published critical statements targeted at Russian initiatives.¹⁷ However, Moscow is convinced that these republics will not be able to

¹⁵ Charles Clover, “Clinton Vows Thwart New Soviet Union,” *Financial times*, 6 December 2012, available at www.ft.com/intl/cms/s/0/a5b15b14-3fcf-11e2-9f71-00144feabdc0.html#axzz3C4y5Vkp.

¹⁶ Mankoff, “What a Eurasian Union Means for Washington.”

¹⁷ “The Eurasian Union or Western Privileges (a review of the Georgian press and comments by Georgian experts),” *InoSMI*, 19 April 2012, available at <http://inosmi.ru/caucasus/20120419/190807068.html> (in Russian); “Will the Eurasian Union solve the problems of the post-Soviet republics?,” interview with Professor Fikret Sadykhov, Azerbaijan, *Xinhua News Agency*, 1 December 2011, available at <http://russian.people.com.cn/95181/7662225.html> (in

independently influence integration processes in Eurasia, though they could make their territories and political resources available to support Russia's competitors.

In such a situation, Moscow's priority is to make the prospects of Eurasian integration economically attractive to her neighbors. Such tactics have been used by Moscow with success in the past, with the Customs Union, since 2012. One Kazakhstan publication, *Respublica KZ*, writes: "Russia is forced to create integration structures not only on terms of parity, but based on endless concessions. Russia is already giving Kazakhstan and Belarus more money, in the form of duties, than would be the case if the customs union members would settle accounts with Moscow in terms of real imports. Yet Moscow is ready to go further; for the sake of getting a quick signature on the agreement over the Eurasian economic commission, Russian negotiators swapped their categorical insistence on balanced voting in the SES (the RF has 57 % of the vote) for equal representation of the parties. I.e. one country – one vote. If Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan join the Customs Union, the RF's weight on the Eurasian commission will shrink from 1/3 to 1/5."¹⁸ Russia is also ready to invest heavily in member states; in May of 2014, for example, the decision was made to invest ca. 1.5 billion USD in infrastructure projects in Kyrgyzstan simply to allow the country to become an effective member of the EEU. For comparison: the annual goods trade between Russia and Kyrgyzstan is about 2 billion USD. Experts estimate that the Russian budget will lose around 1.5 billion USD each year to its membership in the single customs space between 2015 and 2017.¹⁹

There can be no doubt that the most important partner, in terms of the economic and political prospects for post-Soviet reintegration, both for the political leadership as a whole and Putin in particular, is Ukraine. It was here that, starting in 2012, we saw the attempts of the EU and Russia to offer alternative strategic paths to seduce Yanukovich's indecisive government to pursue either Eurasian or European integration. For the Kremlin, however, the pivotal moment was the change in political leadership. Here, Russian leaders see the color-revolutions scenario again, that had already taken place at the beginning of the 2000's. Considering the Moscow's phobias, discussed above, with respect to the strategies of America and the EU to squeeze Russia out of its own sphere of critical interests, such an abrupt, even vehement Russian reaction is easy to explain. We believe that Putin decided that, in the Ukrainian issue, the West has crossed a red line, infringing the unwritten consensus between Russia, the USA and the EU: to not use tools of political pressure and forced regime change in competition for influence in the post-Soviet space. We think that it was the violation of this *status quo* that explains the decision to annex Crimea and support the separatist movement in South-East Ukraine.

Russian); David Trilling, "Uzbekistan's Karimov Lashes Out at Putin's Union," *Eurasia Net.org*, 9 December 2011, available at <http://www.eurasianet.org/node/64666>.

¹⁸ Aleksandr Karavaev, "The Vertical of Eurasia," *Respublika KZ*, 15 November 2011, available at <http://www.respublika-kaz.info/news/politics/18610> (in Russian).

¹⁹ Yana Milyukova, Petr Netroba, and Yulia Zabavina, "Russia buys the loyalty of allies issuing credits and forgiving debts," *RBK daily*, 12 August 2014, available at <http://rbcdaily.ru/economy/562949992116488> (in Russian).

The framework of this article does not presuppose an analysis of the events, or an assessment of the actions taken by any party to the conflict. However, the author considers that Russian leaders sincerely believe that interference by force, the annexation of Crimea and support for separatism in South-East Ukraine are the most appropriate defensive moves in reaction to Yanukovich being overthrown and the change in Ukraine's political course with support from the EU and America. They see this as the only possible way to protect the critical national interests of Russia in Eurasia. In this way the motivations behind Russia's foreign-policy strategy, in the context of interests in the post-Soviet space, also have a place in the formula of defense against external sabotage. The defensive tactics deployed are becoming more decisive, and causing more deaths. The Kremlin believes that this loss of human life is justified, as it was the opponent who deliberately raised the stakes in this competitive game. The events of 2008 in Georgia clearly demonstrated that Russia is ready to use military force when its strategic and geopolitical interests are in question. The events in Ukraine are in many ways a repeat of the Georgian scenario, with the key difference that Ukraine occupies geopolitical space that is far more valuable to Russia. Therefore, the decisiveness with which Russia commits to defend her interests will be far greater.

This circle of ideas is completed with the fact that implementing the integration strategy in the post-Soviet space is one of the core priorities in Russian foreign policy. The Eurasian Union, as the Kremlin's national project, is not merely a solution to the challenge of Russia's economic and political development; it is also a means of survival for Russia, as a visible player on the international arena. Such logical constructs as these can be seen to underpin the understanding that Putin and his circle share of the long-term foreign-policy strategy that the Russian Federation should implement.

In our opinion, the weakest link in Russia's Eurasian integration concept is the unwillingness to accept that problems in building relations with neighboring countries actually result from Russia's own diplomatic errors and miscalculations. Moscow persists in trying to find evidence of a geopolitical confrontation with the West. This is why any *rapprochement* between America, Europe and former Soviet republics appears to torment an over-sensitive Kremlin. The situation along Russia's borders offers a defensive motivation for Russian behavior and the desire to seek protection from foreign influence, which Russian leaders see as unfriendly. The behavior of a "besieged fortress" and the tendency for self-isolation, which have incurred economic and political costs for the country in the past, are now once again at the heart of Moscow's foreign policy.

The International Security Situation

An analysis of the factors that dictate Russian foreign policy would be incomplete if we did not also mention the broader international context, which is also important to understand the logic and content of Russian foreign policy. The way Russia sees itself in international relations is noticeably influenced by the general lack of certainty about how international relations are going to develop. The appearance of new threats and challenges due to the highly unstable situation in world security has produced discrepancies in how key world players assess these processes. However, one must recognize that the

international context has a far lesser impact on the nature of Russian foreign policy, and affects only some areas. Primarily, this concerns new global players, such as the BRICS countries, and the modernization of the of the country's defense potential.

Differences in how the nature and degree of current threats in Eurasia are assessed became a noticeable phenomenon as early as June 2008, when the newly-elected Russian president, Dmitry Medvedev, offered European partners a new "Pan-European Security Treaty" which included a rejection of the principles of "Atlanticism" in ensuring stability in Europe. Based on the contents of the document, it appears that Russia proposed suppressing the role of NATO as a main guarantor of the regional security architecture, and introducing new elements that would give non-members of NATO certain rights and guarantees of participation in the decision-making process.²⁰ Predictably, these initiatives were brushed aside by NATO countries and Russia's efforts to weaken American influence on European security issues proved pointless. Subsequent events in Georgia, in August of 2008, exacerbated yet further the disagreements between Russia and her Western partners.

The "reset" of relations between Russia and the USA, launched in 2009, was intended to reduce tensions between the two countries, but the results fell far short of those hoped for. Unfortunately, the large number of disagreements, ranging from the Iranian nuclear program to missile defense in Europe, remained a major disappointment even to the optimists, while plans to usher in an era of closer relations could not be fully implemented. This confirmed the thesis that Russia-USA relations are fundamentally cyclic, and periods of convergence are interspersed with inevitable, and protracted, periods of chilled relations.

The Arab Spring added greater uncertainty to international security; the wave of democracy in the Islamic world crashed to produce expanding circles of extremism and radicalism in Syria and Iraq. The Libyan and Syrian crises clearly showed that in time of political uncertainty, the factor of force in international relations continues to remain a priority. The Arab Spring taught the Russian leadership that they had correctly ascertained the basic elements of the international situation. The change of political elites in Libya, Egypt and a number of other states failed to stimulate a thirst for democracy in the region. Conversely, it detonated a new cycle of conflicts and catalyzed extremist and radicalist movements. It deepened mutual mistrust between Russia and the West, as well escalating debates about how the international community should respond to modern challenges.

Aware of the growing number of conflict hotspots in the world, Moscow considers that the only way to fill the gap in international security is to reinforce multi-polarity. The appearance of alternative centers of gravity that counterbalance the West, such as China, South America, India and Russia itself must, thinks the Kremlin, be a guarantee that political consensus will be sought for a wide range of modern challenges to international security at the UN and other international organizations.

²⁰ Draft *European Security Agreement* (in Russian), available at www.kremlin.ru/news/6152.

Russia's vested interest in supporting a global, multi-polar architecture can also be seen in the way she is bolstering her own military-political might. This was the focus of a campaign that began in 2011 to supersize Russian defense spending to 20 billion rubles by 2020. The state armament program, or GPV 2020, is far-reaching and ambitious, aiming to renew 70-85 % of the army, navy and air force. Some analysts and columnists have warned that the Russian program is too complex to implement, while the deadlines are too tight for the objectives listed.²¹ But even partial success will significantly boost Russia's military potential. Interestingly, the launch of the program was not connected to the worsening of Russia's relations with the West; it was initiated long before the reset was eventually abandoned, and preceded the events in Ukraine. In recent years, Russia has also strived to minimize the dependence of the military on foreign technology. Experts consider that these efforts have borne fruit – sanctions against the Russian military-industrial complex and limits on defense cooperation have had relatively little impact.

However, we believe that Russian policies with respect to key international problems often reflect events within or near Russia. This is the true context for interactions with major centers of gravity across the globe. Nevertheless, Russia's efforts in key international security issues are linked to the desire to reinforce its status of an independent center of influence on international security. The mentality of the Russian elite is still dominated by the complex that Russia must maintain its status of a great power.

* * *

The above analysis of current Russian politics prompts several conclusions. First, the Russian political system has begun another stage in the development of its system of values and ideology. In recent years, political reforms created a set of filters, associated with preserving the particular nature of the Russian political system today. The process of “nationalization” of the elite continues to strengthen this system, diluting bonds with the West that are based on ideology or values. We can state with great confidence that if the current system of power distribution holds in Russia, this political course will also remain in place for an extended period of time. A far-reaching information and propaganda campaign to shape public opinion in Russia has given Vladimir Putin a high popularity rating and massive support for his policies with respect to Ukraine and the West. All this supports the thesis that the escalation of tension in the region is highly likely to persist.

Meanwhile, the new format of political priorities and values is presented by the Russian authorities as a response to unfriendly attempts by Russia's partners to undermine the current system of state power in Russia, impinging on the interests of that system. Yet, Russia is not necessarily turning into a military dictatorship; this is not only far from reality – it would actually be impossible, given the way in which Russian state and society have developed. Russia's actions are consistent with the logic of reinforcing the

²¹ Yuriy Fedorov, “The State Armaments Program-2020: Power and Industry,” *Security Index* 19:4(107) (2013), available at <http://www.pircenter.org/media/content/files/12/13880454280.pdf> (in Russian).

country as a full-fledged pole of gravity in the new hierarchy of international relations. The whole process is colored, however, by Russia's idiosyncratic view of the ways and means by which objectives are achieved. Russia continues to believe in *realpolitik* as a foundation of the world order of today and continues to see international relations through the prism of geopolitics, while being simultaneously blinkered by the baggage of Soviet and Russian history.

Russia is actively advocating for its Eurasian integration project, but the obstacles on this path also influence the flavor of Moscow's foreign policy. Decisiveness in the use of force and the uncompromising assertion of national interests at various international fora is becoming a long-standing attribute of Russia's integration strategy. If a mutually-acceptable and sustainable consensus between Russia and her partners cannot be found for interactions pertaining to Eurasia, there is a danger of sliding into a protracted conflict, which could be a source of serious problems both for Russia and her neighbors in Eastern and Western Europe.

The current developmental phase of Russia's new foreign policy and the worsening of relations with the West are not, however, anything fundamentally new. All the same phenomena could be observed in Russia's relations with the West in the late Soviet period. A classic example is the 1999 NATO operation in Yugoslavia, Kosovo, and then Georgia in 2008. Each of the previous crises could be solved with mutual compromises and adjustment of the political course by both parties to the conflict. The difference in the latest conflict is that Russia's range of military and political capabilities has expanded, creating the dangerous illusion that she is capable of effectively withstanding pressure from the West for long periods of time. This particular conflict is also complicated by the larger international situation, peppered with new threats to international security. Greater risks lead the parties back to the logic of "stand-off" of the Cold War, which is counterproductive and dangerous when faced by common threats such as terrorism and extremism, currently snowballing in North Africa and the Middle East.

Will the West and Russia be able to find an acceptable balance of interests in this situation? Some form of political consensus between Europe and Eurasia is probably going to be vital. The experience of the failed "reset" must be taken into account in the quest for a new format for relations between Russia and her partners in the West and the East. There can be no doubt that, in this new conflict, Russia is a far weaker opponent than the consolidated Western bloc that includes the EU and the USA. Therefore, it will be easier and more appropriate for Western partners to propose a comprehensive political program to end the crisis; this would also become a roadmap for Russia and Ukraine. This approach could reduce the level of disagreement. Perhaps a deeper understanding of the logic, idiosyncrasies and driving forces in Russian foreign policy will help find the solution to this puzzle.

The Ukrainian Crisis and its Effect on the Project to Establish a Eurasian Economic Union

Marina Lapenko *

Foreword

A continuing transformation of the post-Soviet space is presently underway as it sheds the last elements of its common Soviet past. New geopolitical and spatial configurations and integration associations are being created, with a new set of players and development priorities appropriate to today's international situation and the new challenges.

The ideological dogma of "fraternal allied republics" is being replaced by the pragmatism of national interests and a desire to take a rightful place in the system of world economic ties. The topic of integration and choosing an integration vector is a central theme in the foreign policy of each new independent state.

The project to establish the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU) is one of the most important Russian integration initiatives since the breakup of the Soviet Union. The objectives and tasks of a new integration group, as well as the makeup of the integration core and potential participants, have now been determined.

However, until recently the question of Ukraine's participation has remained unresolved. The strategic choice between European and Eurasian integration was to a large extent the main cause of the crisis in Ukraine, and although the crisis has not yet been resolved, several diametrically opposed viewpoints on the influence of the Ukrainian crisis on the course of Eurasian integration have already formed among the community of experts. Here are a few of them:

- the Ukrainian crisis is not currently affecting the process of Eurasian integration at all;
- the Ukrainian crisis and the worsening of relations with the West may provide a new impetus and incentive to develop Eurasian integration, as well as accelerate the creation of the EEU;
- the Ukrainian crisis is exerting serious influence on Eurasian integration, but Ukraine is already lost for integration into the EEU;
- the collapse of the government in Ukraine is regarded as a challenge to Eurasian integration.

In our opinion, any given point of view on the degree of influence the Ukrainian crisis has had depends on what level is taken as the basis of analysis – the geopolitical or the intra-regional.

The present article provides an analysis of the process of developing Eurasian integration in a geopolitical context. The Ukrainian crisis is examined as an integral part of

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geopolitical rivalry and competition between two integration projects – European and Eurasian.

The Background and Contours of Creating the Eurasian Economic Union

Over the years of their independence allied republics have created several integration associations both in the economic and military and political spheres. The most effective of them is the Eurasian Economic Community (EurAsEC), which may ultimately become the Eurasian Union.

The term “Eurasianism” and “Eurasia” are becoming dominant in political and intellectual discourse of the late 20th and early 21st century. However, these concepts are not new for purposes of defining the geographical and cultural space of the former USSR. Classic eurasianism was created in the 1920s in works by scholars and philosophers of the Russian migration, and its roots lie in the philosophical and cultural tradition of 19th century Russian thought.

The first Eurasianists—N.S. Trubetskoy, G.V. Vernadsky, P.P. Suvhinsky, G.V. Florovsky, and especially P.N. Savitsky—made a substantial contribution to understanding the role and place of Eurasia as a middle continent. After the end of the Second World War the idea of Eurasia continued to be developed, and particularly richly in the works of L. N. Gumilev.

In the 1990s after the breakup of the USSR, a process of rethinking classic Eurasianism or the establishment of neo-Eurasianism began in the works of Russian scholars and political leaders. The neo-Eurasianist project appeared in the works of A.G. Dugin as a widescale geopolitical doctrine that went beyond conventional geographic boundaries.¹

Aside from A. Dugin, who is considered a leader and main theoretician of “right neo-Eurasianism,” attempts to develop the Eurasianism concept have been made by proponents of “left-wing neo-Eurasianism” (S.G. Kara-Murza, I. Tugarinov, R. Vakhitov and others) and representatives of “liberal” or “democratic neo-Eurasianism” (S. Stankevich, G. Popov, L. Ponomarev).²

It bears noting, however, that the chief distinguishing characteristic of neo-eurasianism of the 1990s was that it represented mostly ideological constructs and originated with opposition politicians, and as a result could not be implemented in reality.

¹ Alexandr G. Dugin, *The Fundamentals of Geopolitics. The Geopolitical Future of Russia* (Moscow, 1999) (in Russian); Alexandr G. Dugin, *The Eurasia project* (Moscow: Put Rasii, 2004) (in Russian); Alexandr G. Dugin, *The Eurasian Way as a National Idea* (Moscow: Partiya Evraziya, 2002); Alexandr G. Dugin, “The Eurasian View,” *Geopolitika* (Geopolitics) 13 (2002), 15-26.

² For more details on the three areas see: A.G. Mustafin, *Evolution of the eurasian idea: From the classical to the modern “practical” eurasianism. The eurasian idea in a new world* (Astana, 2011), 120-133.

This was at a time when the idea of establishing a Eurasian Union, voiced by President Nursultan Abishevich Nazarbaev of Kazakhstan, had a perfectly real chance of coming to fruition. However, it proved to be premature.

On 29 March 1994, during an official visit to the Russian Federation, President Nazarbaev visited the M.V. Lomonosov Moscow State University. It was in his address to the faculty and students there that the idea of creating a Eurasian Union was first proposed. Nazarbaev proposed creating within the territory of the CIS a “qualitatively new integration association – the Eurasian Union of States.”

It is no mere chance that I announced this idea in a lecture hall of the M. V. Lomonosov Moscow State University. I appealed directly to the intellectual elite of the entire Commonwealth with the firm resolve to rouse the process of multi-faceted integration out of the torpor in which it found itself two years after creation of the CIS.

I said candidly that the CIS is not meeting the objective requirements of the day and is not providing for the integration of the member states so sorely needed by our people. For that reason the need to establish a new interstate association that would operate on more clearly defined principles has come to a head.³

He saw the Eurasian Union as an association of states based on principles of equality, non-interference in one another’s domestic affairs, and respect for the sovereignty and inviolability of national borders. The basis for integration is economic pragmatism.

Nazarbaev proposed creating national bodies within the Eurasian Union that would function on the basis of consensus, taking into account the interests of each member country, and would possess clear-cut and real authority, but without handing over any political sovereignty.

Nazarbaev’s project was received positively among the political and intellectual elite of Russia, but nonetheless its practical realization was deferred due to complex internal political processes taking place in the Russian Federation at the time.

For his part, N. Nazarbaev remained a supporter of the idea of preserving Eurasian integrity and began to consistently incorporate the idea in Kazakhstan’s foreign and domestic policy. He set forth the core content of the project to create a Eurasian Union in numerous addresses, articles and books.⁴ On Nazarbaev’s initiative the Eurasian National University, bearing the name of L.N. Gumilev, was opened in Astana.

As for the region-wide level, the idea of Eurasian integration was partially realized in the year 2000 in a project to create the Eurasian Economic Community.

The creation of the EurAsEC in a format of five countries—Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia and Tajikistan—was a crucial point in the practical application of Eurasian integration. In just 12 years an intricate structure of mechanisms in various di-

³ Nursultan A. Nazarbaev, “The Eurasian Union: From an idea to the history of the future,” *Izvestiya*, 25 October 2011, available at: <http://izvestia.ru/news/504908> (in Russian).

⁴ For example: Nursultan A. Nazarbaev, *The Eurasian union: ideas, practices, perspectives, 1994–1997* (Moscow: *Fond sodeystiya razvitiyu social'nyh i politicheskikh nauk*, 1997) (in Russian); Nursultan A. Nazarbaev, *A strategy for independence* (Almaty: Atamura, 2003) (in Russian); Nursultan A. Nazarbaev, “The Eurasian economic union: theory or reality,” *Izvestiya*, 20 March 2009, <http://personal.akorda.kz/ru/category/statyi/152> (in Russian).

mensions of the integration process was formed, the most effective of them being a Customs Union (CU) comprised of Belarus, Kazakhstan and Russia.

On 9 December 2010 the presidents of the three participant nations of the EurAsEC Customs Union signed a declaration in Moscow to establish the Single Economic Space (SES). This formalized their desire to “establish a Eurasian Economic Union for the purpose of providing for harmonized, complementary and mutually advantageous cooperation with other countries, international economic associations, and the European Union.”⁵

In late 2011 the idea of Eurasian integration found new expression in concrete initiatives. On 4 October 2011, *Izvestiya* published an article by V.V. Putin entitled “A new integration project for Eurasia: the future being born today.” Later, articles by A. G. Lukashenko, “On the fortunes of our integration,” and N.A. Nazarbaev, “The Eurasian Union: from an idea to the history of the future,” were published. On the whole, these publications by the leaders of three countries reflected similar approaches to the creation of a Eurasian Union.⁶

Most experts initially reacted to V.V. Putin’s evoking the Eurasian theme as a good public relations move in an election campaign. However, it later became clear that this appeal to the idea of Eurasian integration was not mere chance and had profound and objective underpinnings; it reflected a review of lost opportunities and Russia’s transition to a new level of interaction with the near and far abroad.

In his article, Putin stated the main objective of integration processes in the Eurasian region – creation of a Eurasian Union. The basis for the new integration association was to be the Customs Union and the Single Economic Space, the “Eurasian triumvirate.” In response to V.V. Putin’s article the leaders of Kazakhstan and Belarus expressed their ideas about development of Eurasian integration.

A comparative analysis of these publications makes it possible to identify some common positions of the leaders of the three countries regarding the development of Eurasian integration:

1. The main objective of integration is to create a robust and globally competitive economic union.
2. The Eurasian Union as a new regional association, not as a restoration of the USSR.
3. The Eurasian Union as an open project and as part of Europe-wide integration projects.

⁵ Declaration on the formation of a single economic space, available at: http://news.kremlin.ru/ref_notes/802 (in Russian).

⁶ Vladimir Putin, “A new integration project for Eurasia – a future being born today,” *Izvestiya*, 3 October 2011, available at: <http://izvestia.ru/news/502761> (in Russian); Aleksandr Lukashenko, “On the fate of our integration,” *Izvestiya*, 17 October 2011, available at <http://www.izvestia.ru/news/504081> (in Russian); Nursultan A. Nazarbaev, “Eurasian union: from an idea to the history of the future,” *Izvestiya*, 25 October 2011, available at <http://izvestia.ru/news/504908> (in Russian).

4. The Eurasian Union as a new geopolitical project and integral part of a new world order.

Nursultan Nazarbaev's article "The Eurasian Union: from an idea to the history of the future" may be regarded as the culmination of a unique discussion of what a new integration union should be. No major departures from the ideas expressed by the Russian prime minister and Belarusian president are to be found.

That being said, in his article the president of Kazakhstan highlights the points that jibe with the interests of his country and with his personal position on the issue of developing integration in Eurasia:

- development of Eurasian integration solely on an evolutionary and voluntary basis without any artificial acceleration of the process;
- a multi-vector approach to integration involving the participation of post-Soviet countries in various regional organizations as well as the possibility of creating interstate associations other than the EurAsEC, first and foremost a Central Asian Union;
- creation of EurAsEC as a competitive global economic association;
- formation of EurAsEC as a self-sufficient regional financial association, and establishment of a Eurasian national unit of account – ENUA;
- broad public support as an indispensable condition for creating the EurAsEC;
- the need to locate executive bodies of the new association in Astana, which "would be a rightful sign of gratitude to Kazakhstan as the initiator of the idea of Eurasian integration."⁷

Thus, the idea of creating the EEU was born in addresses by leaders of the Eurasian triumvirate, although it had completely objective internal and external underpinnings.

The development of mutual relations among Russia, Kazakhstan and Belarus allow us to say that these three countries are gradually developing integration based on a common scheme and have already achieved significant results. The single customs territory of the Customs Union of Russian, Belarus and Kazakhstan began functioning on 1 July 2011. The next important phase was the three states' decision to move on to the SES as of 1 January 2012. Thus it is only logical that the next stage of Eurasian integration should be an economic union.

Aside from internal motivations to move toward creating the EEU, the situation in the world (global financial crisis, intensification of the struggle for spheres of influence and so forth) and geopolitical rivalry in the post-Soviet region substantially affected this process.

The economic situation and increased competition necessitated reconsideration of the approach to further development of the post-Soviet space. It was gradually realized that the establishment of ties to the wider world must be based on a foundation of stabil-

⁷ Nazarbaev, "Eurasian union: from an idea to the history of the future."

ity within the integration association itself, to include political and economic stability and security.

For a long time the Russian Federation lacked a clear strategy in its relations with the newly independent states. Statements that the countries of the CIS were a priority area of the Russian Federation's foreign policy were of a declarative nature and did not correspond to the real state of affairs (in reality there was shrinking mutual trade, insufficient attention was being given to the near abroad, the Russian elite was distancing itself, humanitarian and educational programs were being cut, etc.).

All of this led to Russia, by many parameters, losing its role as political leader and chief trading partner of the CIS countries. The weakening of Russian positions led to a number of initiatives by the United States, European Union, China, and Turkey to establish their own spheres of influence in the post-Soviet space and implement competing projects.

For example, the European Union initiated the adoption of a Central Asian Strategy and an Eastern Partnership Program. The United States is seeking to implement a project for the rebirth of the Great Silk Road and has significantly increased its military presence in Central Asia. Turkey is lobbying for the idea of a union of Turkic-speaking states. China is the main trading partner of many countries in the post-Soviet region and also one of the most active investors.

Many Russian politicians have come to believe that successful processes of economic and political integration with the former Soviet republic may result in Russia re-establishing its influence, becoming a world center of power, and filling the vacuum in Eurasia that formed after 1991.

Thus, Eurasia has gradually become a vital strategic area of Russian foreign policy. As for the other participants, Belarus and Kazakhstan, the new integration project has also served their interests. Despite existing real difficulties, a legal and regulatory framework for Eurasian integration required for the signing of the Eurasian Economic Union Treaty by 1 January 2015 was to be produced in 2013–2014.

Structural Principles and Tasks of the Eurasian Economic Union

The main principle of structuring the new integration union was declared to be the principle of equal rights and voluntary participation. The union is comprised of three sovereign states, autonomous subjects of international relations with their own set of interests, development goals and objectives, current priorities, and history of relations with other countries.

A second vitally important principle is the national nature of the new integration association. Considering the experience of the CIS, the EU, and NAFTA, no one denies the importance of this principle for ensuring the effectiveness of integrating groups.

In this regard the agenda includes creating within the future EEU a sufficiently flexible integration model capable of establishing a balance of all parties' interests and a correlation of sovereignties not from the standpoint of quantitative parameters—volumes and sizes of economies, territory, and population—but qualitative characteristics.

Some experts in Belarus and Kazakhstan believe the countries are joining in this association for the very purpose of more effectively defending their sovereignty. “That is why such methods as domination, forcing things through, ignoring one another and one-sided neglect, blackmail and intimidation are unacceptable. They only increase skepticism and ultimately give rise to the urge to leave the association. Work in this integration association should be built on principles of respect for the sovereignty of each member of the association and on meticulous and careful activities aimed at achieving a mutually acceptable consensus on a democratic basis.”⁸

The successful development of an economic union will inevitably raise the issue of a political union, which is the highest form of an integration association. The most daunting task will be to find a political formula of integration that on the one hand does not infringe upon the national sovereignty of the member states of the future union, and on the other hand would make the new association a capable player in international relations.

It is for this very reason that the question of creating a robust mechanism for taking decisions and seeing them through to execution, the formation and development of Eurasian national institutions, continued rapprochement, and the harmonization of national laws are all of the utmost importance.

The main task of the EEU is to build a competitive economic union. The path forward for building this new association as proposed by the leaders of Russia, Kazakhstan, and Belarus is based on the economic component and must address such shared tasks as modernization and the formation of a sustainable and competitive social and economic system that will create the conditions for increased stability and an improved standard of living for the population.

In addition, the future union must facilitate its member states’ transition to an innovative development path, and the Eurasian region must become a place of innovation and a powerful technological leap forward. Aside from economic aspects the project should also have a geopolitical aspect that all members of the project will have a stake in developing.

Many experts are quite optimistic about the geopolitical implications of the idea of creating the EEU not only as a model of regional integration but as a political project to create a multipolar world.

For example, in the opinion Leonid Vladimirovich Savin, editor-in-chief of the information and analysis publication “Geopolitika” [Geopolitics] and managing director of the “Eurasian Movement” International Public Movement, “The formation of the Eurasian Union, along with other integrational processes in other parts of the world will be a movement toward creating a multipolar (polycentric) world. The sooner a Eurasian Union is created, the sooner the states comprising it, as well as other countries that are

⁸ A. Amrebayev, “President Nazarbaev’s concept of an “open Eurasian integration model and current issues of Kazakhstan’s national identity,” *Kazakhstan in global processes* 2 (2012), 47.

making their own strong contribution to shaping a new world order, will be able to come out from under the hard power or soft power influence of the United States.”⁹

So the idea of a Eurasian Union can be viewed both from an economic and geopolitical perspective in the context of shaping a new world architecture. The geopolitical aspect of creating the Eurasian Union involves many important issues: the project’s spatial characteristics and the question of interaction with other regional integration associations such as the European Union and the Asia-Pacific Region.

Russian–Ukrainian Relations and Ukraine’s Potential Participation in Eurasian Integration

Russian–Ukrainian relations after the breakup of the USSR developed erratically: from confrontation to cooperation and back to confrontation. The most difficult issues in the bilateral relationship were always Sevastopol and Crimea, and the status of the Russian-speaking population and the Russian language in Ukraine. The regional division of Ukraine, the particular features of how Ukrainian nationhood evolved, and issues of identification have been of great importance.

A negative type of identification developed in Ukraine along the lines of “We are Ukrainian because we are not Russian,” and as a result there occurred a reevaluation of the shared imperial and Soviet past, falsification of the historical heritage, and mythologization of some historical periods (a vivid example is the written history of the forced famine), which not only negatively affected relations with Russia, but, more importantly, caused a split in Ukrainian society itself. However, the geopolitical situation surrounding Ukraine has played a no less important role in the development of bilateral relations.

After the breakup of the Soviet Union Ukraine occupied an important geostrategic position and possessed a solid base in terms of human and material resources. For this reason all the leading world players had an interest in cooperating with the new Ukrainian state.

Ukraine was chosen by the United States as its main partner in the European part of the CIS, and its breaking away from the integration process and distancing itself from Russia became a primary issue for the USA and NATO in the post-Soviet space. As Brzezinski famously said: “Without Ukraine Russia is unable to regain the capabilities of a super power.” Proceeding from that we see attempts by the United States to bring Ukraine into NATO and to facilitate the coming to power of pro-Western politicians during the “Orange revolution” and “EuroMaidan.”

The European Union also demonstrated a particular interest in developing cooperation with Ukraine inasmuch as the country came under the European Neighborhood Policy and represented an important transit territory, a promising market and a source of resources.

⁹ Leonid Savin, “The formation of an Eurasian geopolitical context,” *Kazakhstan in global processes 2* (2012): 34–44, 39, available at <http://2010-2013.iwep.kz/uploads/files/Magazine/2-2012.pdf>.

However, the Ukrainian leadership's initial plans for rapid integration into the EU did not materialize. The only thing upon which Ukraine could rely after implementation of the Eastern Partnership Program began was an Association Agreement (planned for late November 2013) and no more. The EU signed similar agreements with many countries, such as Algeria or Egypt, for instance. And even such an agreement was frowned upon by Russia and was considered an attempt to enhance the EU's geopolitical influence in the post-Soviet space.

Russia in turn was interested in integrating Ukraine in the Customs Union (CU)/ Single Economic Space (SES) and then in the Eurasian Union. Ukraine's participation is exceptionally important in order to strengthen the capabilities and influence of the Eurasian Union. In the opinion of most Russian experts, first, the new union would be incomplete without Ukraine and, second, Ukraine would not have to choose between European and Eurasian integration vectors.

The official position of Kiev and President V. Yanukovich during the time Eurasian integration was being stepped up was to display interest in the EEU project and in the need to study the practical results, but nothing more than that. In Kiev's view, only a special form of development of cooperation between Ukraine and the future Eurasian Union under the "3+1" plan would be possible in the near term. However, public opinion polls showed that 50% of the population of Ukraine supported Eurasian integration.¹⁰ Thus, the Ukrainian leadership was faced with the need to make a strategic choice between European and Eurasian integration models.

With all the democratic character of the declared objectives in the Eastern Partnership program, the EU pursued completely pragmatic and strictly defined objectives – deliveries of energy resources (primarily from Ukraine's nuclear industry and uninterrupted supplies of Russian gas through Ukrainian territory), the extension of cooperation and economic ties, and an increase in the scientific and cultural dialogue. And, in addition, the conclusion of an association agreement, which would have inevitably entailed serious negative consequences in Ukraine's relations with countries of the CU/SES.

First of all, after Ukraine signed an association agreement with the EU it would become impossible not just to join the Customs Union, but also to maintain a relatively liberal customs regime in its trade with members of the CU/SES, which would lead to a steep drop in mutual trade volumes. Secondly, this could result in a dismantling of scientific and technical cooperation in the space and aviation industries and in shipbuilding, and in the introduction of restrictions on delivery of Ukrainian animal products to the Russian market.

It is for this very reason that attempts to bring Ukraine into the free trade zone with the EU were harshly criticized by leaders of the Russian Federation. In late September of 2013 the RF State Duma passed a declaration which characterized the EU's aspiration to include Ukraine in a "zone of its exclusive interests" as "neo-imperialist ambitions." The conditions for participation of CIS countries in the Eastern Partnership Program

¹⁰ Eurasian Development Bank integration barometer – 2013, http://www.eabr.org/r/research/centre/projectsCII/integration_barometer/?id_16=32343.

were termed “semi-colonial dependency.” The document also stated that if Ukraine signed the Association Agreement it would certainly lose some of its autonomy, which would make its economic partnership with members of the CU more difficult.¹¹

In the first half of 2013 the decline in mutual trade between Ukraine and Russia accelerated due to problems that had arisen in their trade and economic relations. This resulted in a marked reduction in the volume of Ukrainian industrial output.

Economic problems on Ukraine’s way to signing an association agreement with the EU were also intensifying because the European Union had in fact ignored repeated Ukrainian requests for financial aid. In particular, virtually no compensation was offered for Ukraine’s very costly transition to European standards and regulations.

In these conditions the decision taken by the Ukrainian government on 21 November 2013 to suspend preparations for signing the association agreement with the EU was perfectly logical. In a statement on the matter, the decision was explained by the necessity of “taking measures for the national security of Ukraine” and “more detailed study” of steps to restore “lost areas of trade and economic relations with the RF and other CIS countries.”¹²

After the Ukrainian government’s November decision the leaders of the political opposition organized mass protests in Kiev, Lvov and a number of other Ukrainian cities demanding to continue the country’s path to “Euro-integration.” The protests, which often took extremely radical forms and were aimed not so much at supporting association with the EU as changing the political power in the country, continued even after the end of the European Union summit in Vilnius. Nonetheless, it was the issue of Association with the EU and the creation of an all-inclusive free trade zone that provoked the Ukrainian crisis and exacerbated both internal and external tensions.

Due to the lack of political will on the part of Ukrainian President V. Yanukovich and the nonviability of key institutions of state power the Ukrainian crisis gradually became systemic and was transformed into a civil confrontation.

“EuroMaidan” and the ensuing government overthrow in Ukraine facilitated the strengthening of openly anti-Russian authority in Kiev and Ukraine’s moving toward geopolitical control by the USA and the EU, which came to be regarded as a direct threat to the security of the Russian Federation. This was in fact the reason for Moscow’s severe reaction to the Ukrainian crisis and Russia’s subsequent actions to return Crimea.

The referendum in Crimea and the subsequent return of Sevastopol and Crimea to the Russian Federation as federation subjects occurred in accordance with international norms and served the national interests of Russia as well as being an expression of the Crimean people’s right to self-determination. However, it was also something of a fork in the road for Russian-Ukrainian relations.

¹¹ Transcript of 20 September 2013 meeting, <http://transcript.duma.gov.ru/node/3921/>.

¹² Ordinance of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine of 21 November 2013, # 905-r., <http://www.kmu.gov.ua/control/ru/cardnpd>.

With the beginning of the “Crimean phase” of the Ukrainian crisis, the opinion that the accession of Crimea and Sevastopol to Russia would have a greatly negative effect on processes of Eurasian integration became widespread among western and liberal Russian analysts. The desire to support the Russian speaking population and attempts to return historic lands caused particular consternation. Many foreign publications published articles on the expansionist nature of Russia’s foreign policy, which after the “annexation” of Crimea was aimed at accession of Northern Kazakhstan.

This reaction was more propaganda than objective analysis, but it did have a certain negative influence. Such publications as *EurasiaNet* sought to form an aggressive and imperialistic image of Russia, discredit the very idea of Eurasian integration and its image, and depict the President of the Russian Federation as a “schemer and militant mischief maker.”

A lot of work was being done in social networks as well. The main objective was to present the CU and the EEU as a direct threat to the sovereignty of Kazakhstan (and of other Central Asian countries). These efforts were being made mainly in the Kazakh-language segment of the social networks, since this part of the population, who consider themselves to be nationalists and patriots, has the most opponents of integration with Russia.

The Non-Governmental Organization “Berlek-Edinstvo” [Berlek-Unity] prepared a report just for this topic entitled “Post-Maidan Lines of Eurasian Integration.” The report’s authors conclude that nationalists speak of Eurasian integration in the language of colonial discourse. The authors note the following aspects as being among the most negative points being played up in nationalist sources. First, Russia’s post-crisis loss of the authority that had allowed it to exert soft power in Kazakhstan in the form of developing the “Russian world” (language, culture, history). Second, the authoritarian, superficial and corrupt nature of Eurasian integration that does not allow for active discussion of the advantages and disadvantages of Kazakhstan’s participation in these processes in the society. Third, Russian protectionism, which is not inclined to allow Kazakhstan products into Russian markets.¹³

Nonetheless, despite this information attack the official position of Kazakhstan and Belarus—and that of other potential participants in Eurasian integration—regarding Crimea’s and Sevastopol’s accession was rather restrained.

On 18 March the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Kazakhstan recognized the Crimea referendum, thus coming out in support of Russia. On the same day, the presidents of Russia and Belarus had a telephone conversation in which they noted the “importance and historical significance of the reunification of the peninsula with the Russian Federation that occurred today in full compliance with the virtually unanimous will of the peo-

¹³ Analytical report: “Post-Maidan contours of Eurasian integration: transformation of constraints and prospects” (Ufa, Bashkortostan, Russia: Center for Geopolitical Research, 11 September 2014), <http://berlek-nkp.com/doklady/2282-analiticheskiy-doklad-postmaydannye-kontury-evraziyskoy-integracii-transformaciya-ogranichiteley-i-perspektiv.html>.

ple of Crimea.” So, there was no criticism or condemnation on the part of the main allies in the Customs Union.

The potential candidates—Kyrgyzstan and Armenia—also reacted to the reunification of Crimea and Russia with approval.

On 20 March the Kyrgyzstan Ministry of Foreign Affairs stated: “...the results of the Crimean referendum of 16 March of this year represent the will of an absolute majority of the population of the Autonomous Republic. And this is also an objective reality, regardless of whatever antithetical assessments have been made of the referendum.”¹⁴

The president of Armenia stated his position during a telephone conversation with the president of the Russian Federation. In summary, the sides stated that the referendum in Crimea was the latest example of the exercise of peoples’ right to self-determination through the free expression of their will.

Thus, only Western or pro-Western Russian and Kazakhstan analysts, whose purpose is to discredit the Russian position and Eurasian integration, are talking about a negative effect of the reunification of Russia and Crimea on the process of Eurasian integration. On the whole, despite the most heated phases of the Ukrainian crisis, the Eurasian integration project is proceeding according to plan, but the struggle for Ukraine continues.

The next important stage in the development of the Ukrainian crisis was the proclamation of the Donetsk and Lugansk People’s Republics in the South-East and their unification into Novorossiia. The self-identification of so-called Novorossiia has deep historical, socio-economic, cultural, ethnic and political causes. But the geopolitical aspect unquestionably plays an important role. The further political and socio-economic development of Ukraine and the validity of Ukrainian statehood, as well as the entire future security architecture of Europe, depends on the outcome of events in the South-East. Russia’s support of the protests in the South-East was and is a way of compelling the Kiev authorities to compromise and guarantee the geopolitical aspect, including the neutrality of Ukraine.

Russia’s position on Crimea and Novorossiia was the basis for a geopolitical challenge from the West. Even in this situation, however, the Russian Federation proved to be capable of continuing the establishment of the Eurasian economic union.

The Post-Brussels Period of the Ukrainian Crisis and Prospects for the Development of Eurasian Integration

On 29 May in Astana a historic document was signed – the Treaty on the Establishment of the Eurasian Economic Union. This treaty is the basic document to establish the EEU in order to continue to deepen cooperation; to remove barriers to the free movement of

¹⁴ Statement of the Kyrgyz Republic Ministry of Foreign Affairs of 20 March 2014, http://www.mfa.kg/vistupleniya/zayavlenie-ministerstva-inostrannih-del-kirgizskoi-republiki-ot-20-marta-2014-goda_ru.html (accessed 15 August 2014).

goods, services, capital and labor; and to pursue a coordinated and agreed (unified) policy in key sectors of the economy.¹⁵

The European Union in turn continued deepening the integration with post-Soviet republics. Despite the unresolved Ukrainian crisis, a package of documents on economic association between the EU and three countries of the former USSR—Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia—was signed in Brussels on June 27.

New geopolitical realities—the signing of association agreements between the EU and three eastern partners (Georgia, Moldova, Ukraine) and the signing of the Eurasian Economic Union Treaty by the presidents of Russia, Kazakhstan and Belarus—effectively form a new Europe-wide agenda and intensify geopolitical rivalry.

In the opinion of Sergey Glazev, having delegated part of their sovereignty to the European Commission Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia can no longer be participants in either the Customs Union or the Single Economic Space. This is a significant loss, he believes, from the standpoint of expanding opportunities for cooperation, including with the European Union itself, by the way.¹⁶

Aside from openly infringing upon the national interests of Russia in the post-Soviet space, the European Union, under pressure from the United States, for the first time in the current period of relations moved to institute economic sanctions and pushed the Ukrainian leadership to do so as well.

The breaking of economic ties between Russia and Ukraine may have a negative effect on the economic development of the Russian Federation, but any such negative effect will not be long lived.

Some conclusions can already be made. In an environment where deliveries from Ukraine are being cut back if not completely stopped, as is the case with cooperation in the military technology sphere, Russian companies in the relevant sectors have boosted production, which has had a positive effect on industrial growth. The positive effect of banning deliveries to Russia of products from the Ukrainian military industrial complex can only increase in the future. The need to completely move the production of all critically important goods and components to Russian Federation territory will force the state and state-owned companies to increase investments in creating new production capacities and modernizing old ones. This will lead to an increase in industrial output, and mostly in high tech.

For example, Russian companies are already prepared to independently produce cruise missile engines, helicopter engines and gas turbine units. A program to develop the Strategic Rocket Forces already does not call for participation by any Ukrainian

¹⁵ Treaty on the establishment of the Eurasian Economic Union, <http://www.stanradar.com/news/full/10195-polnyj-tekst-dogovora-o-sozdanii-evrazijskogo-ekonomicheskogo-sojuza.html> (in Russian).

¹⁶ Glaz'ev: "With the signing of an agreement with the EU Ukraine will cease to be a full-fledged partner for Russia," <http://regnum.ru/news/fd-abroad/belarus/polit/1702070.htm> (accessed 10 August 2014); "Glaz'ev acknowledges that the Customs Union has lost Ukraine," *Fakti*, 25 June 2014, <http://fakty.ictv.ua/ru/index/read-news/id/1519781> (in Russian).

manufacturers. All new Russian rockets will be produced completely in Russian engineering facilities.

The institution of economic sanctions by Western countries and Ukraine with respect to agricultural products can actually be regarded as a chance for Russia to develop its own agricultural sector and as an aspect of extending Eurasian economic integration.

The First Forum of the Regions of Belarus and Russia was held in Minsk in early June. Issues related to the effective development of the two countries' agro-industrial complexes were discussed, this being a vital condition for food security. The forum resulted in adoption of a protocol containing specific recommendations on key areas of the development of the agro-industrial complexes. It gave special attention to the need for unified legal norms and rules for agricultural development. At the present time a proposal is being considered to restructure the bilateral forums with Kazakhstan and Belarus into a single tripartite forum of regions under the protectorship of the presidents of the three countries.

A considerable re-invigoration of the national agrarian economies of the countries has been noticed. In an environment of ever harsher economic sanctions Russian farmers are preparing to provide for the Russian market on their own and are geared up to increasing production volumes.

The Ukrainian crisis and the worsening of relations with the West may also provide a new impetus toward developing the economy through a policy of import replacement and development of the nation's industry and technological base.

The Ukrainian crisis has also had a positive effect on the internal political situation in Russia. For the first time in the post-Soviet period a consolidation of society is occurring and patriotism is growing in Russia. The standing of Russian Federation president V.V. Putin has undoubtedly grown in the country and abroad. For the first time since the 1990s Russia has openly stated its national interests and has been able to prove its ability to stand up for them. Political consolidation in the country is continuing and the image of a West that is hostile to Russia has played a positive role in that. The liberal opposition has been deprived of any serious arguments in the struggle for political power and influence.

Increasing trust in the President of the RF is also reflecting favorably on integration initiatives of the President and his Administration. Before the Ukrainian crisis the Eurasian Economic Union project was not popular among the Russian political or economic elite, not to mention that it was hardly understandable to the wider public. The Ukrainian crisis demonstrated the importance of Russia's active role in CIS countries, further integration, and consolidation.

As regards the Eurasian Union project in the post-Brussels period in general, Eurasian integration will proceed in spite of the crisis in Ukraine. Ukraine's participation is problematic due to the fact that the country is in a deep political and moral crisis and also in a full-scale social and economic crisis.

The Ukrainian crisis has become the most serious test on the path to establishing a unified Greater Europe. It has again demonstrated an unwillingness to consider the interests of the Russian Federation and its special position in the post-Soviet region. The

Ukrainian factor has again confirmed the existence of intense geopolitical rivalry and has set the Eurasian project against the Euroatlantic project.

It is for that reason that the Ukrainian crisis is capable of affecting the substantive elements of the Eurasian Union project. Influenced by the Ukrainian crisis, the project's authors, who initially sought to build equitable and mutually beneficial relations with the West and a free market from Lisbon to Vladivostok, have begun to rethink the substance of the project. What possible adjustments might the Ukrainian crisis bring?

- First, a strengthening of the unity of the Eurasian triumvirate—"strengthening from within"—is on the agenda;
- Second, a rethinking of plans for military force development and improving the defense capabilities of the new integration association;
- Third, a search for a new direction of developing integration, by bringing in Turkey, for instance.

Recent events in the Ukrainian area attest to the Eurasian integration association's increasing influence. In particular, the meeting in Minsk on August 26 was the first to be held in the EU-Ukraine-CU/SES format (the Eurasian triumvirate). No major agreements were achieved at the Minsk summit, but this meeting has great geopolitical significance in and of itself. At the opening of the summit Nursultan Nazarbaev proposed that the next meeting be held in the same format in the capital of Kazakhstan.

The position of parties in and around the Ukrainian conflict are intransigent and not open to compromise. On August 27 P. Poroshenko signed a decree to dissolve the Rada and hold new elections, which is a required condition for strengthening the political power of the president and consolidating the legislative authority, which should be completely loyal, given ratification of an agreement with the EU and consideration of a bill by the Ukrainian Cabinet of Ministers "On making changes to some laws of Ukraine regarding the support of sovereignty and protection of the territorial integrity of Ukraine." This law would create the legislative premises to integrate Ukraine into the Euroatlantic security space.

Conclusion

Geopolitical rivalry in the post-Soviet space has intensified recently. Russia is seeking to structure the sphere of its own interests. However, possessing fewer resources in comparison with the West, it is using such advantages as the territorial expanse of the Russian world, political and administrative assets, and economic clout (including the fuel and energy sector).

The policy of the EU in the post-Soviet space has in recent years taken on the character of a process of "integration without accession." And, nonetheless, the Russian Federation is taking a harsh view even on relations as these.

The main integration initiative in the post-Soviet space has been the Eurasian Economic Union, with serious work set to begin in 2015. Initially the project was conceptualized in quite broad terms as part of a Europe-wide integration process. However, the Ukrainian crisis exacerbated a range of existing tensions between Russia and the West

and made it impossible to harmonize the two European spaces and integration projects – European and Eurasian.

The formation of the Eurasian Union continues, it is being imbued with substance, and expansion of its participants is under discussion. For example, President Serzh Sargsyan of Armenia does not preclude the possibility of signing a treaty of accession to the EEU before this autumn.

Further confrontation between Russia and the West may be conducive to bringing Turkey into the Eurasian integration project. Turkey plays a special role in the Turkic world. The closeness of cultures of the peoples of the Caucasus, Central Asia and Turkey and their religious and ethnic kinship would strengthen the integrity of the Eurasian Economic Union, and would also provide Russia with strong ties to the Islamic world.

Ratification of the Treaty on the Eurasian Economic Union is on the agenda of national parliaments. The prospects for development of Eurasian integration do not come down solely to what is happening in Ukraine, but to a certain degree are being modified based on how the so-called “post-Maidan geopolitical configuration” develops.

The signing of the Brussels documents and the Ukrainian crisis directly create new difficulties for Eurasian integration. Finding itself in a situation of growing international competition and direct threats to its interests, the Eurasian Economic Union must strengthen itself from within, which in the future will lead to new dividing lines and exacerbation of the international situation.

Further protraction of the Ukrainian crisis and the spread of russophobia may make the inevitable normalization of relations and resumption of an integration project from the Atlantic to the Pacific more difficult, and can also lead to an increase in NATO’s military and political presence in Eastern Europe.

The annexation of Crimea and civil confrontation in the South-East of Ukraine require that a new Russian strategy toward Ukraine be worked out. Russia’s official position regarding the South-East of Ukraine is that there is a need for free expression of the will of the residents on the issue of possible federalization of the Ukrainian state. Normalization of the relationship between Russia and Ukraine will be a difficult and lengthy process, just as it was with Georgia after 2008. The numerous civilian victims, nationalist propaganda in the Ukrainian media, the rise of nationalism, the absence of legitimate authority and political stability – all this is preventing not only Ukraine’s participation in any integration processes, but also the preservation of its sovereignty and national integrity.

The Transfer of Power in Central Asia and Threats to Regional Stability

Sergei Y. Shenin *

It is no secret that authoritarian forms of government are predominant across post-Soviet space, although some are softer than others. In Moscow, Astana, Minsk, Dushanbe, Ashkhabad and so forth across almost the entire region, each country is governed by “strong personalities,” some enlightened, others not. Even today’s Ukraine, which is a little closer to the West in terms of geography and mentality, continues to hesitantly fluctuate between poles of democracy and authoritarianism. Truth be told, these endless oscillations will ultimately mean the death of the country.

Authoritarianism offers uncontested advantages that help the former Soviet republics to find and maintain stability during transition: authoritarian methods are the shortest path to consensus, and facilitate control and governance. The population, meanwhile, has no objection to “strong personalities,” tolerating figures that might be overthrown elsewhere, because they are “saviors of the homeland” – a legend discreetly confirmed by all-pervasive state propaganda. All of history, both recent and more distant, tells us of endless “foreign chicanery,” the permanent state of being “surrounded by enemies,” as if living in a “besieged fortress,” where it is so often necessary to “power through,” “resist and rebuff” and so on, and so forth.

Since Ukraine, the reflex to “support our man,” to “stand up for our beloved leader” has only become stronger in post-Soviet authoritarian states: the horrors of a civil war initiated from outside the country leave the population no choice. This populace will not hesitate to support its “strong personality” but will not support democracy, because you can only sit back and wait for the fruits of liberal democratic reforms to ripen if you are protected by two oceans (as in the case of the USA) or if 800 years have passed since your first social contract (as in the case of England).

In all post-Soviet countries, authoritarianism is obscured by the fig leaf of constitutional clauses stipulating democratic provisions and institutions which, truth be told, do not function (because it would be foolish to obey the law during a “period of lethal danger”) or are selectively deployed at strategic moments for the benefit of world public opinion (for example, the UN General Assembly).

Naturally, the population in post-Soviet countries understand that the quality of governance in authoritarian regimes is fairly low, while the risk of instability, or imbalance between the interests of society and the elite, is high. This is a drawback. A greater downside of authoritarian forms of governance, which has not yet been fully evident in post-Soviet space but which threatens stability across the Eurasian continent, is the lack of institutions for the transfer of power.

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The rotation of leaders in such a political system is truly a time of historic vulnerability, as the old and weak president withdraws, as he can no longer exert control over events in the country, and a new leader takes his place, who is equally weak because he is, as yet, unable to control the state machinery. At this point, competitors can take advantage, forcing a redistribution of resources and property, perhaps under the guise of reform. Meanwhile, the forces attempting to choreograph the political transition face the ultimate challenge: correctly balancing the distribution of power in line with existing relationships between clans, tribes, families, etc. – an exceptionally complex task.

Given such vulnerability, the process of transferring power is conducted in a total information blackout, especially as regards the health of heads of state. The modest history of power transfers in post-Soviet space has already given us a memorable example: the figure who first heard about the illness of the president of Turkmenistan (naturally, it was the Minister for Health) inherited that high office.

As they come to power, new forces inevitably begin (as a rule under the label of “reform”) the radical redistribution of resources, without which it would be impossible for them to hold on to power. However, such redistributions inevitably upset the balance of forces and interests both within the elite and within society. Such shifts often reveal “weak links” which can face an increased load, risking the destabilization of the entire social system. There are “weak links” in every country (ethnic, religious, tribal, family or clan relationships, interactions with neighboring countries or great powers, strong opposition figures, etc.) and new authorities, as a rule, do not think a great deal about threats triggered by such a load redistribution. They release a powerful Genie, in the hopes that after using his powers to secure a victory, they can chase him back into the lamp.

Of course, power transfers could be greatly simplified, and risks reduced (removing them completely would be impossible), if clear conditions for the transition existed – terms accepted by the elite and by society (at least, by the majority). As all the countries of Central Asia are “democratic,” the laws governing the transfer of power are laid out in all the constitutions. As a rule, they are based on the standards adopted in the West.¹

However, it would be very surprising if, given the prevalence of legal nihilism (the inability to live by the law) this particular portion of legislation was observed religiously. No-one can count on this. In these countries, a practice has formed, whereby the individuals most capable of attracting resources at the time of a power transfer—domestic, foreign, informational, financial or military—are awarded the desired position (although it should be underscored that this is by no means the last stage of the transition: as was noted previously, while attempting to redistribute resources, it is possible that one destabilizes a country, losing the entire war booty). Therefore, despite the presence in Central Asian countries of legislated procedures for the transfer of power, this actually takes place in very different ways, depending on the resources deployed, and destabilizing factors.

¹ Erden Nazarov, *Kazakhstan after ...* (Almaty: Studiia “Vektor,” 2013).

One example is Kyrgyzstan, an unstable country susceptible to “orange revolution” infections, where the process of power transfer remains incomplete, but could come into effect at any moment, and take any shape. Nevertheless, here we already see the shaping of traditions of democratic elections and inter-clan consensus, which inspires optimism for the mid-term. In Turkmenistan, Gurbanguly Berdimukhamedov has spent too little time in the president’s office to think about how to pass on his authorities (although in 2006 it was he who established a tradition of law-breaking when the Senate Speaker, the legal successor of Turkmenbashi, was placed under arrest). The Tajikistan’s President Emomaliy Rahmon has been in power for twenty years, but he is still in excellent physical form and building a dynasty to transfer power to his heirs (his advantage is a plethora of sons – this is no less important in Central Asia than in Azerbaijan).

In Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, two key regional powers, the situation is dramatically more urgent. The local leaders have very little time left: both are extremely advanced in age, neither has a son to offer the simple solution of political dynasty, and there is no precedent for the transfer of power here (both leaders have governed their countries since Soviet times). Moreover, these are densely populated, multi-confessional and multi-ethnic countries, where numerous circumstances have to be factored into any transfer of power. Finally, the consequences of an unsuccessful transfer for regional (and global) stability could be even more serious, and more painful, than destabilization in Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan or Turkmenistan (especially if the transition follows the “orange” or “Arab Spring” tradition).²

Uzbekistan has a population of thirty million, the largest in the region. The Uzbek diaspora is the largest in Russia. The country’s leadership, headed by Islam Karimov, has the trickiest relations with the Islamists, both within the country (Hizb-ut-Tahrir) and outside (The Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, IMU, and its followers). Most spectators consider that resolving the problem of inheritance of power in the country could have a colossal impact on both internal and external stability (especially taking into account the dominant traits of Karimov’s regional policies: isolationism, hegemony and aggressiveness).³

Islam Karimov has governed Uzbekistan for more than 25 years. He is 76 years old, and rumors suggest that he suffered a powerful heart attack in March of 2013. There is no opposition in the country (even Islamic), and no pretenders to the throne: the inner circle, even blood relatives, are shy of expressing any presidential ambitions – of those who have, most did not even make it to the border.⁴ In society, the

² Evgeniy Satanovsky, “The Destabilization of Central Asia. A Repetition of the Arab Spring on Russia’s Southern Borders Is More than Possible,” *Voenna-promishleniy Kurier* 6(524), 9 February 2014, available at <http://vpk-news.ru/articles/19189> (in Russian).

³ Ibid.

⁴ Sergey Dolgov, “Who Will Inherit Uzbekistan?” *Ekspert* 14 (8 April 2013), available at <http://expert.ru/expert/2013/14/kto-unasleduet-uzbekistan> (in Russian); Alexey Malashenko, “Uzbekistan: No Transition yet Visible” (Moscow: The Carnegie Moscow Center, 2014), pp. 3–4.

question of the transfer of power is not openly discussed. Unofficially, the main pretender is Gulnara, Karimov's eldest daughter, although her position recently became far less strong, including in the eyes of her father.⁵

The country's Constitution states that a change in power in Uzbekistan must take place "when the president cannot perform his functions" (a very vague formula, which omits, *inter alia*, the critical concept of "voluntary retirement"). In this case, the head of the Senate would become acting president for three months (Article 96 of the Constitution, 18 April 2011).⁶ Yet no-one doubts that, if necessary, a different person would be nominated, according to Karimov's personal preferences.

The loyalty and devotion of the country's new leader to the current president is the key factor guiding the handover of supreme authority, as retirement would not necessarily imply the president's demise. Karimov may expect to gradually withdraw from office over a long period of time, which would make him heavily dependent on his temporary replacement, who could heavily influence the choice of a future, permanent leader. Of course, we have to take into account that, apart from his personal interests, today's president is also thinking about the interests of his family (two daughters) and his clan (the Samarkand-Bukhara Clan). Finally, there is no doubt that Karimov is seeking an acceptable transition mechanism in the interests of stability and security for the whole country, which is inseparable from the interests of the family and the clan.

At the same time, everyone understands that legal transition mechanisms alone, especially those under the complete control of Karimov himself, will be insufficient to reliably legitimize the new president-heir. Therefore he would naturally want to reinforce the legal mechanism with dynastic principles of succession that are acceptable to the majority of the population of Uzbekistan. This is evidenced by his long and patient support for the ambitions of his eldest daughter, Gulnara. However, as all of her activities have discredited her (both with respect to her family, and the state itself) the president is thought to have rejected the idea of succession via the female hereditary line (his second daughter is unlikely to accept an offer of power – she prefers business, even in very seedy forms).⁷

The absence of male heirs forces the president to think of ways to transfer power to reliable figures from his own circle. In truth, this will not be highly legitimate, because the constitutional procedure for the election of a new head of state will clearly lack democratic content. There are currently just a handful of serious pretenders to the presidential privilege.

⁵ Daniil Kislov, "Uzbekistan: Karimov's Power Unshatterable," *Fergana Information Agency*, 20 February 2014, available at <http://www.fergananews.com/articles/8059> (in Russian).

⁶ Erden Nazarov, "Rules for Power Transfers in Central Asia," *Khronika Turkmenistana*, 24 July 2013, available at <http://www.chrono-tm.org/2013/07/pravila-peredachi-vlasti-v-stranah-tsentralnoy-azii> (in Russian); Alexandr I. Cherkasov, *Heads of State and Government in the Modern World (Constitutional and Legal Regulation and Norms)* (Moscow: Ekzamen, 2006), 222 p.

⁷ Malashenko, "Uzbekistan: No Transition yet Visible," pp. 5-7.

First, there is Karimov's most trusted aide, the head of the National Security Service, Rustam Inoyatov. There are doubts as to whether he really needs to be president – it may be that he is perfectly happy to remain the country's "grey cardinal," the all-powerful head of state security. If this is so, then Inoyatov may support the deputy PM and Finance Minister, Rustam Azimov, who is in favor of pro-Western foreign policy, and draws support from the moderately influential "Tashkent Clan."

Azimov may face competition in the person of Shavkat Mirziyayev, the country's PM, who enjoys the trust of the president (they both belong to the Samarkand-Bukhara Clan), but in foreign policy, the prime minister looks towards Moscow (if his bond with distant relative A. Usmanov, the Russian billionaire, is any guide).⁸

If a new president were to come to power with questionable legitimacy, the competition within the elite may be dissatisfied. It cannot be excluded that resistance could take the form of Islamist protests. The dangers would be relatively small, as Karimov has almost completely suppressed the Islamist movement in the country with the most vicious repressions; it is currently extremely weak, driven deep underground. Local Islamists are highly unlikely to be able to take advantage of the point of transition. However, if the next president is not as tough as Karimov, then they could "raise their head" and, in time, the ideas of "Islamic justice" could gain popularity. Today, Uzbek Islamists from the Hizb-ut-Tahrir, Akromiya and Islamiya movements are unable to change the political situation in the country single-handed – they need an external detonator.⁹

This external detonator is well known: it is called the Islamic Movement for Uzbekistan, or IMU, and it has existed for a long time, since the end of the 1990's. This is when IMU attempted to penetrate Uzbekistan from Afghanistan through the territory of Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan. IMU subsequently lost its leaders, and split into a number of smaller groups, the most visible of which was the Islamic Jihad Union (SID) and the Islamic Movement of Turkestan (IMT). These groups are now ready to form a united front and once again march on Uzbekistan, to which end they are honing their military skills in Syria, fighting for the fundamentalist opposition.¹⁰

Successful breakthroughs by IMT and the local radical Islamist uprising are unlikely even in the mid-term, because what was barely possible in 1999 is already impossible today. Such events should draw a strident response from the SCO, which was created specifically to deflect threats of this nature. Moscow and Beijing, under the pretext of the need to fight Islamist fundamentalism (which they claimed was spreading in the form of a "Central Asian Spring," an "arc of instability," "manageable chaos," etc.) will soon be able to radically reinforce their positions in Central Asia, becoming guarantors of regional stability. Of course, Moscow and Beijing have no strong lobby

⁸ Dolgov, "Who Will Inherit Uzbekistan?"; Malashenko, "Uzbekistan: No Transition yet Visible," pp. 8–10.

⁹ Malashenko, "Uzbekistan: No Transition yet Visible," 15.

¹⁰ Dolgov, "Who Will Inherit Uzbekistan?"

in Tashkent, but they could manage without any lobbyists, if needed.¹¹ Naturally, geopolitical opponents of Russia and China are in no way ready to offer such a convenient pretext.

An Islamic uprising in Uzbekistan is therefore unlikely, as the USA and EU have a good understanding of the associated risks, particularly given lessons learned in Ukraine. For the USA, Tashkent is just a temporary partner to support the withdrawal from Afghanistan.¹² Karimov, meanwhile, has always been able to find the right distance in relations with Washington: after the 9/11 attacks, he brilliantly played his cards, winning hundreds of millions of dollars in economic and military aid, and in 2005, after Andijan, he brazenly switched his attentions to Moscow.

As the US withdraws troops from Afghanistan, the opportunity to drive a wedge between Russia and China is too tempting for Washington. Forewarned of Karimov's penchant for treachery, America will try to push for deeper commitment to their policies, for example by handing Tashkent part of the American weapons used in Afghanistan. These bonds, together with external pressure through the Islamic movement, could have an effect in the mid-term (5–7 years), the most likely time for "operation successor."

On the other hand, the period of political transition in Uzbekistan, when it comes, is unlikely to exacerbate the situation along the Tajik axis. Troubled relations between Dushanbe and Tashkent are largely the result of personal antipathy on the part of Rahmon and Karimov: the latter, in helping the former to come to power, had hoped for complete understanding from his Tajik counterpart. Rahmon, however, managed to use the counterweights of Moscow and Washington to implement an independent regional policy. On the whole, the personal nature of the conflict and the possibility of mutual neutralization of exacerbating factors (e.g. Tashkent could deploy a railroad blockade in response to water and energy pressure from Dushanbe) suggest that Karimov's successor will not use this factor to further "consolidate the nation."¹³

On the whole, the risks of ending up in the ballpark of another "spring," "orange revolution," or an "Islamic revival," inevitably triggering suppression by SCO partners, threaten Uzbekistan with weakened independence and greater control either from the East, or the West. In Tashkent, however, all foreign policy vectors find some support, and in such a situation—at the time of transition—the local elite will most likely be forced to find a compromise figure capable of preserving the equilibrium between clans and the existing economic order (the "Turkmen option" of power inheritance). Otherwise (i.e. if a consensus is not found) internal contradictions will deepen, external forces will attempt to take advantage of them and, if an Islamist "fifth column" emerges in the country in addition to competing regional neighbors, Uzbekistan may well face "Ukrainization." It is highly unlikely that the existing elite will allow events to develop this way.

¹¹ Andrew E. Kramer, "Rumors About Uzbekistan Leader's Health Set Off Succession Debate," *The New York Times*, 7 April 2013, A14.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Dolgov, "Who Will Inherit Uzbekistan?"

In Kazakhstan the situation around a possible period of political transition is noticeably different both in structure, and in terms of the potential consequences for regional stability. Kazakhstan has a colossal territory rich in natural resources (especially hydrocarbons). It is a member of the Eurasian Union, and depends heavily on Moscow, despite the counterweight of massive Chinese economic investment, as well as the presence of Western corporations.

A large part of the population—17 million—is made up of ethnic Kazakhs, while Russian-speakers are rapidly becoming fewer (dropping from 40% in 1991 to 20% in 2014). The secular nature of government is unchallenged, and the opposition is as tame as a puppet. There are Islamists (again, Hizb-ut-Tahrir), but they enjoy no support amongst the population, nor have any chance of becoming a genuine political force (unless there is an unexpected social cataclysm). Massive income from the sale of oil and gas persuade the insanely rich elite that they can hope for a “trickle-down effect” to stabilize the social situation.

The problem of a power transition in Kazakhstan is becoming more topical each year, as the president of Kazakhstan (since 1990), “Leader of the Nation” Sultan Nazarbayev, is already 74 and the media often carry rumors of his poor health. Unlike Islam Karimov, the Kazakhstan president has no qualms about publically discussing the challenge of transition. On 4 July 2013, he made a particularly revolutionary televised appearance, in which he stated that a solid political foundation had to be built for a new leader to take over.¹⁴ Apparently, he places no faith in the existing system.

In truth, Kazakhstan lacks legal institutions or mechanisms for the transfer of power and, therefore, maintaining the country’s political course. The constitution describes a general legal mechanism for substituting the head of state in emergencies. For example, a line of succession is described in case the president’s authorities are terminated prematurely (premature release, suspension due to illness, high treason or death): the first in line is the Senate Chair, followed by the Majilis Chair and, finally, the Prime Minister is third in line. The successor has to remain in that post for the rest of the presidential term.¹⁵ Naturally, elections for a new president inevitably become a formality in the absence of multi-party political competition, merely approving and confirming the candidate put forward by the current president. No-one in the country believes elections are honest.

This means that Nazarbayev is trying his best to create a system of succession, which would not negatively impact the interests of the family, the clan, the elite or national stability. However, with the option of using elections to crown any person president, the incumbent faces the problem of choosing a candidate who is both a good compromise, and as legitimate as possible.

The need for a future president with maximum legitimacy in the eyes of the majority prompted Nazarbayev to think carefully about the issue of balancing modern and archaic traditions in Kazakhstan society. The highest priority was to factor in Kazakh

¹⁴ International Crisis Group, *Kazakhstan: Waiting for Change*, Asia Report No.250, 30 September 2013, p. 21.

¹⁵ Nazarov, “Rules for Power Transfers in Central Asia.”

self-identification, based on tribal and group (Zhuz) membership, and particularly the hereditary line of “Chingizides,” the highest and most legitimate rulers of the state and the entire Great Steppe.

Not being a Chingizide (although he is a representative of the Higher Zhuz) Nursultan Nazarbayev, according to some researchers, placed his bets on his eldest daughter, Dariga, and her husband, Rahat Aliev, supposedly a Chingizide. The sons of their marriage could achieve the ideal form of legitimization in the eyes of the Kazakh population. One particularly favorable option was the eldest grandson of Nazarbayev, Nurali, who could occupy the presidency by 2020, aged 35, thus resolving the difficult task of balancing the modern demands of democracy with traditional ideas about the principles of succession. However, Rahat Aliev let the cat out of the bag, prematurely announcing his participation in elections, after which he was forced to flee the country in May 2007.¹⁶

With this scheme foiled, Nazarbayev sought a new plan. Legitimization had to be achieved by the appearance of direct heirs – the sons of his third, secret wife, Asel Isabaeva. Yet the eldest son, Tauman, is now only 9 years of age, and Nazarbayev will clearly be unable to stay at the country’s helm until the child reaches the age of 35. If a reliable successor can be found to play the role of temporary president, able to govern as regent, then Tauman could make it to the throne of this modern Khanate in 2040 (or even earlier, given the known flexibility of the constitution).

The situation in Kazakhstan is similar to that in Uzbekistan: anyone who shows initiative and independently makes moves towards the presidency is immediately disqualified from the race; Rahat Aliev and Danial Ahmetov illustrated this eloquently.¹⁷ So, Nazarbayev only sees as candidates those among his circle of committed associates who silently demonstrate unlimited loyalty, such as Prime Minister Karim Masimov, Astana’s *akim* [mayor] Imangali Tasmagambetov, and the National Security Committee deputy, Samat Abish.

Karim Masimov may be Nazarbayev’s closest and most trusted friend, but many emphasize that he is an Uighur by ethnicity, and as such would not be trusted by the public, if president. Tasmagambetov has a different drawback – he represents a Zhuz that is not friendly with Nazarbayev. Meanwhile, in the opinion of most observers, Samat Abish could become the “backbone” of a new Nazarbayev Khan dynasty.

Kazakhstan traditions include a custom, when after the death of a chieftain such as Nazarbayev, his young widow, Asel, becomes the wife of one of his immediate relatives, in this case his nephew, the current deputy chairman of the National Security Committee, Samat Abish. The sons of the chieftain would thus retain the chance of becoming president, as they remain in the presidential family, via their father’s blood-

¹⁶ Oleg Yu. Maslov and Alexandr V. Prudnik, “Kazakhstan before and after 2020,” *Nezavisimoe analiticheskoe obozrenie*, 9 July 2007, available at <http://www.polit.nnov.ru/2007/07/09/chingizid> (in Russian).

¹⁷ Leyla Khrapunova, “Nazarbayev’s main scenario is to pass power to his son,” *Ablyazov.org*, available at <http://ablyazov.org/glavnij-scenarij-nazarbaeva-peredacha-vlasti-sinu.htm> (in Russian).

line.¹⁸ It would be easy to bring Abish to power, promoting him as a presidential candidate via the mechanism of Nur Otan, the ruling party. Many experts in Kazakhstan suggest that this candidate already got the green light from Moscow.

Nazarbayev is therefore offering the current succession system, in case of force-majeure events: first, a temporary president (the Senate Chair), and then an officially-selected president-regent (Abish) who would “keep the throne warm.” Only after this, perhaps by 2040, the prince and heir apparent, Nazarbayev’s eldest son (Tauman Nursultanuly) would ascend to the throne. If this chain is deployed the inflexibility of the scheme, the lack of any margin of adaptability, could be a destabilizing factor that detonates certain underground processes that, in the current dormant state, are merely gently rocking the foundations of Kazakhstan society.

Important external factors include relations with the powerful states next door, and farther afield. In Moscow, Nazarbayev is viewed as a close ally, a key element in implementing the Kremlin’s Eurasian plans, and thus the scheme supporting Samat Abish has broadly been accepted, as he himself has given guarantees of his commitment to further integration. It is thought that the problem of succession in Astana is of no great concern to Beijing, as they are confident that China’s Western neighbor has literally nowhere to go: the economic integration of the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region and Kazakhstan has reached a record high, and no-one in the Celestial Kingdom has the courage to challenge such processes.

Western investors, meanwhile, are very interested in the problem of political succession in Kazakhstan; they have just learned to adapt to the treacherous local conditions, infested with patronage and corruption. Naturally, they fear that if Nazarbayev is unable to fulfill his role of a “successful intermediary” then the rules of the game, which many investors have learned by heart, could change. For foreign investors, current political risks are multiplied by the lack of economic diversity, excessive bureaucracy, and an unpredictable tax regime. If the 73 year-old Nazarbayev vanishes from the political arena now, the *status quo* will inevitably collapse, leaving Western investors with no guarantees and no protection.

In the West, it is accepted that Nazarbayev is an excellent “supreme arbiter,” administering the privilege of access by the elite to capital and power. Competing groups look to him to resolve conflicts, so the internal balance of power is consistently maintained by the current president. Replacing this arbiter could provoke all-out war between internal groups, and so in the West many would prefer not accelerating or complicating the handover of power. At least, the ideal would be to maintain the current balance of power as much as possible, and the most appealing, and simple, option for Western investors is the transfer of power to Nazarbayev’s daughter, Dariga. According to unofficial public opinion polls she only takes seventh place in terms of elector

¹⁸ “Kazakhstan after ... Kazakhstan without Nazarbayev: the moment of truth,” *Central Asia Monitor*, 8 August 2014, available at <http://camonitor.com/12738-kazakhstan-posle-kazakhstan-bez-nazarbaeva-moment-istiny.html> (in Russian).

sympathies, but this is no great hindrance, given modern advances in election “know-how.”¹⁹

Within the highly unstable political environment, other destabilizing elements are already appearing. For example, labor conflicts in Western Kazakhstan, started by oil workers in Mangistau and in Zhanaozena. Oil and gas are the driving forces of the nation’s economy; yet, at the same time, the inability of the elite to share hydrocarbon income with the population is Astana’s main problem. If politically motivated, the poorest strata of the population could pose a serious threat to anyone inheriting Nazarbayev’s presidency.

More than this, the protests in Zhanaozena revealed a previously hidden, yet highly dangerous tribal division within the Kazakh people. As the Western Caspian has traditionally been under the control of the Adai, who are the core of the Bayoglu tribal union of the Kichi Yüz, they have always attempted to resist, by any means available, the theft of their natural resources by bureaucrats from the centralized authorities, who represent other tribal unions, primarily the Uluyüz. Ultimately the more belligerent Aldai managed to mobilize workers to join protests that provoked violent reprisals, but which nevertheless ratcheted up the tension between the Kichi Yüz and the Uluyüz, undermining any possible compromises on succession.²⁰

Kazakhstan nationalism is potentially a very strong force, although the authorities have, as yet, avoided playing this card in the context of relations between the “titular nation” and ethnic minorities; there is a danger that Nazarbayev’s successor could do this in order to reinforce his position amongst ethnic Kazakhs. Some opposition groups are already trying to use this tool, incidentally accelerating the flight of the most qualified, Russian-speaking people from the country. This trend is fraught with danger, as it could contradict the choice of a future Kazakhstan: “Eurasian integration” within the Customs Union and the Eurasian Union.

These instability factors could turn out to be even more dangerous than they appear at first glance, if we take into account the fact that the situation could be heavily shaken by oligarchs in conflict with the regime, who are currently in exile, primarily Mukhtar Ablyazov and Rakhat Aliev. They possess huge financial resources, create and fund anti-government media, and distribute compromising information that they collected when still part of the Kazakhstan’s authorities.

It is important to remember here that a wave of violence swept through Kazakhstan in 2010-2012. Initially, it was thought that common criminals stood behind the events, but the authorities gradually came to admit that religious extremists had organized the violence in order to destabilize the country. Jund al-Halifa (The Soldiers of the Caliph-

¹⁹ Kramer, “Rumors About Uzbekistan Leader’s Health Set Off Succession Debate”; “Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan: Intimations of mortality. Two of Central Asia’s strongmen and their daughters ponder succession,” *The Economist*, 6 April 2013, available at www.economist.com/news/asia/21575826-two-central-asias-strongmen-and-their-daughters-ponder-succession-intimations-mortality (in Russian).

²⁰ Fabrissi Vielmini, “It turns out that Kazakhstan is unstable,” *inoCMII.ru*, 23 January 2012, available at http://inosmi.ru/middle_asia/20120123/183778418.html (in Russian).

ate) was named most frequently, though we do not consider that this organization, or Hizb-ut-Tahrir, could be capable of galvanizing mass discontent and channeling such sentiment into mass protests. Kazakhstan could not be a foundation for a religious state. Isolated acts of religious opposition (including periodic terrorism) could be truly destabilizing only when the central authorities are weak due to a power transition, which has to be taken into consideration when planning any power handover.

Despite Kazakhstan's apparently comfortable position, the situation around a transfer of power, with a political transition and the impact on regional stability, is worse than in Uzbekistan, for example. The absence of clear paths of power transfer (however shady, compared to modern legislative standards) and, instead, persistent attempts to hold on to succession schemes and models that are clearly not viable in the long term, could trigger many of the destabilizing factors now evident in society.

Domestic and foreign religious fundamentalism (let alone terrorism and non-systemic risks) pose real but obscured threats, which will hold back efforts by Moscow and Beijing to pool their resources in the country in order to prevent risks associated with the transfer of power – especially considering that Russia and China have somewhat different goals and plans in Kazakhstan.

The West, especially America, have several reasons to refrain from interfering in the transfer of power and the complications it could generate. First, Kazakhstan has virtually no involvement in the withdrawal of US troops from Afghanistan; second, there is no reason to worry about the status of oil and gas corporations: whoever the president is, he is not going to “kill the chicken who lays golden eggs”; third, active interference could trigger a tough reaction from Moscow, Beijing, or both.

The factor of having a successor-regent makes a potential division in Kazakhstan society more likely along tribal or social lines, than along religious fault lines. The probability of consensus forming within the ruling elite with respect to the post-Nazarbayev power system is also waning. Despite approval for Vladimir Putin's scheme for handing over power, which is clearly capable of freezing, to some degree, the *status quo* for the mid-term, such an approach will not inspire the Kazakhs to unite, which is a precondition of critically-important reform. The risks associated with a power transition will deepen social instability in general, which cannot fail to also undermine stability across the region: relations with neighboring countries in Central Asia will deteriorate, and bonds with the great powers will become more of a challenge. Therefore, Astana will be unable to maintain Nazarbayev's successful multi-vector foreign policy for any significant length of time.

In conclusion, reforms will be out of the question in both Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan during the transition, and the actions of transition figures will be focused on preserving or reproducing the existing pattern for redistributing power and wealth in their respective countries. Most likely, both countries will manage to avoid turbulence triggered from outside the country (given that there are external guarantors with vested interests – Russia and China), although social turmoil is possible in the mid-term (especially in Kazakhstan), and could negatively impact regional stability in the mid-term.