

# Russian Policy Toward the Commonwealth of Independent States

## *Recent Trends and Future Prospects*

Mark Kramer

Moscow has made it abundantly clear that the Commonwealth of Independent States is a Russian sphere of influence where the role of other great powers must be minimized.

ONE of the casualties of the August 2008 war between Russia and the small neighboring republic of Georgia was Georgia's membership in the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), the organization of former Soviet republics that was set up at the Russian government's initiative on December 21, 1991. Georgia had been a member of the CIS since December 1993, but in 2006 President Mikheil Saakashvili called for it to pull out of the Commonwealth, which he and other senior officials in Tbilisi dismissed as a "moribund relic of the early 1990s" and an "institution that has outlived its usefulness."<sup>1</sup> Saakashvili worried that continued membership in the CIS would impede Georgia's efforts to join the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), the European Union (EU), and other Western groupings. The Georgian parliament declined to endorse Saakashvili's proposal in 2006, but in mid-August 2008, less than a week after large-scale fighting broke out between Russian and Georgian forces in the South Ossetian region, the parliament approved Georgia's withdrawal from the CIS.

The CIS has enjoyed a prominent role in Russian foreign policy since the organization was created. Both Boris Yeltsin and his successor, Vladimir Putin, gave strong emphasis to the Commonwealth and sought to expand its functions. In mid-July 2008 the Russian government adopted a new Foreign Policy Concept that reaffirmed the

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“fundamental importance” of the CIS and characterized “the development of bilateral and multilateral cooperation with CIS member-states” as “the major thrust of Russia’s foreign policy.”<sup>2</sup> The Foreign Policy Concept was signed by Russia’s new president, Dmitry Medvedev, who followed up in late August 2008 by proclaiming that “Russia, like other (great powers) in the world,” is entitled to “privileged interests” in certain key regions, notably the CIS.<sup>3</sup> This explicit designation of the CIS as a Russian sphere of influence in the aftermath of the Russian-Georgian war bore all the hallmarks of Putin, who, despite having stepped down as president in May 2008 after completing his second term, has remained the most powerful leader in Russia in his new role as prime minister. Under the Russian constitution, the president is supposed to be the country’s highest official, but Medvedev was elected solely because of Putin’s endorsement and has not emerged from Putin’s shadow. Putin’s role during the Russian-Georgian war left little doubt that he is still the dominant political figure in Moscow, regardless of the constitution.<sup>4</sup> Hence, an analysis of Russian policy toward the CIS must take special account of Putin’s view of the organization and the direction in which he has been moving it.

This article provides an overview of Russian policy toward the CIS under Yeltsin and Putin and discusses how it is likely to evolve over the next decade. The latter task presupposes that the CIS as an entity will last another ten years—an assumption that may not be shared by some observers. When the Commonwealth was originally set up in December 1991, many analysts in both Russia and the West expected that it would be only a transitory body, little more than “the world’s largest fig leaf,” as Paul Goble described it at the time.<sup>5</sup> Even some of the original signatories of the CIS charter in December 1991 regarded the document as just a temporary pact that would allow for a smooth breakup of the Soviet Union. Contrary to these expectations, however, the CIS has persisted as an international organization that carries out at least a few meaningful functions. With headquarters in Minsk, it helps to coordinate trade, financial, environmental, legal, and even national security affairs among its participating states.<sup>6</sup>

Even though the CIS has already survived for the better part of two decades, doubts about its longevity have continued to surface. In recent years, a few of the CIS governments have occasionally hinted that they might leave the organization for good, as Georgia has now done. Turkmenistan downgraded its membership to “associate” status in August 2005, ostensibly because full membership was at odds with the country’s commitment to “permanent neutrality.”<sup>7</sup> In March 2007, Igor Ivanov, who was then secretary of

the Russian Security Council (and Russia’s foreign minister before that), publicly questioned whether the CIS would last.<sup>8</sup> He implied that most of its functions could be taken over by the Eurasian Economic Community, an organization set up in 2001 by Russia and four other CIS countries and now consisting of six full members (Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan) and three observer states (Moldova, Ukraine, Armenia). Other CIS functions, Ivanov said, could be transferred to the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), comprising Armenia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Belarus, and Russia. Doubts about the survival of the CIS seemed to abate in October 2007 when Putin decided to appoint his close friend Sergei Lebedev as CIS executive secretary. Lebedev had been director of Russia’s Foreign Intelligence Service (SVR) since May 2000, and his appointment to the top CIS post was widely construed as a major boost for the organization. Nonetheless, influential experts and commentators in both Russia and the West have remained skeptical about the CIS’s future, arguing that the Russian government has increasingly pursued bilateral and regional arrangements that will eventually supplant the Commonwealth or render it largely superfluous.<sup>9</sup>

Regardless of whether the CIS as an organization survives, the key question here is how Russia’s policy toward the CIS member-states has evolved since 1991 and how it is likely to develop over the next decade. This article discusses salient trends in Russian policy and highlights a number of factors that could augment or detract from Russia’s influence in the CIS area in coming years. The article also considers “wildcard” developments that could alter Russian-CIS relations in unexpected ways and briefly considers how Russian policy toward the Commonwealth affects Moscow’s other foreign policy priorities, including relations with the West, with China, and with India, as well as Russian efforts to earn greater revenue from energy exports. The article does not touch on Russian relations with the three Baltic states, a topic I have examined elsewhere.<sup>10</sup> Because the Baltic countries have never belonged to the CIS and are now members of NATO and the EU, their ties with Russia have been markedly different from those of the CIS states. Although some of the same issues come up in Russian-Baltic relations as in Russian-CIS relations—notably energy and foreign trade—the differences overall are more important.

## Russia’s Relations with CIS Countries

Three major dimensions of Russia’s policy toward the CIS countries—political, economic/energy, and military—are

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worth highlighting here. These strands of Russian policy have been mutually reinforcing, helping to augment Russia's political and economic influence in the CIS and in the Eurasian landmass more broadly.<sup>11</sup>

On the political side, Russia has tried to bolster governments and leaders that are supportive of its interests and are willing to establish close ties with it. Even now, some seventeen years after the collapse of the Soviet Union, many senior Russian officials still do not regard the other former Soviet republics as truly "foreign" countries—an attitude summed up in the continued use of the term "near abroad" (*blizhnee zarubezhe*), which in the CIS countries outside Russia is widely seen as a pejorative phrase. In economic and energy relations, Russia has attempted to consolidate its position as the dominant energy supplier and distributor not only in the CIS region, but also in Europe as a whole. Increasingly, the Russian government has been strengthening its hold over energy transport and distribution networks, paving the way for a near-monopoly. On the military and national security side, the Russian government has sought to give greater substance to the Collective Security Treaty (originally signed in 1992) and to work closely with CIS governments on counterterrorism, intelligence, and border security issues. Russia maintains military bases (ground, air, or naval) in eight of the other CIS member-states, including a large troop presence in eastern Moldova despite repeated efforts by the Moldovan government to secure the withdrawal of all Russian soldiers. Thousands of Russian troops also remain firmly ensconced in South Ossetia and Abkhazia, the two separatist regions of Georgia that were brought under Russian control in August 2008 as nominally independent states. Russia's large-scale incursion into these two regions and the rest of Georgia demonstrated that Russian military deployments in and near the CIS countries are not just for show. The conflict put Russia's neighbors on notice that even if they belong to the CIS (as Georgia did), they are at risk of military retaliation if they defy Moscow's wishes.

**Political.** The most conspicuous aspect of Russia's political ties with the CIS countries over the past seventeen years—a trend almost certain to continue over the next decade—is a willingness to accommodate autocratic leaders. Neither Yeltsin nor Putin made any effort to promote liberal democracy in the CIS region. On the contrary, the Russian government under Yeltsin and especially Putin (with his own authoritarian bent) seemed most comfortable when dealing with authoritarian leaders who will sup-

port Russia's interests and align their countries squarely with the CIS.<sup>12</sup>

This tendency was greatly reinforced by the series of popular upheavals that began with the downfall of Slobodan Milošević in Serbia in October 2000, followed by the Rose Revolution and the ouster of Eduard Shevardnadze in Georgia in November 2003, the Orange Revolution in Ukraine in late 2004, the Cedar Revolution in Lebanon in February–March 2005, the Tulip Revolution in Kyrgyzstan in March 2005, and the unrest and brutal government crackdown in Uzbekistan in May 2005. This rapid sequence of events, especially the Orange Revolution, had a profound impact on Putin and his close aides. Before the upheavals in Ukraine, the Russian government had been planning to form a Common Economic Space that would link Russia with Ukraine, Kazakhstan, and Belarus in a common economic—and eventually joint political and security—structure.<sup>13</sup> The Orange Revolution dashed these hopes and came as a humiliating setback for Russian leaders when their heavy-handed support of the unsavory pro-Moscow candidate, Viktor Yanukovich, was of no avail. Putin and other senior Russian officials vigorously claimed (and apparently genuinely believed) that the turmoil in all of these cases was mainly or entirely the result of covert Western attempts to manipulate the situations, especially through the provision of democracy assistance to local non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and grass-roots activists. Russian leaders used phrases like "mercenary revolutions" and "franchised revolutions" to disparage the popular unrest and accused Western democracy-assistance groups of acting as "insidious subversives" and foreign "spies."

Putin and his aides also hinted—and at times explicitly stated—that sinister "external forces" (i.e., Western governments) would try to bring about similar changes in Russia and other CIS countries, notably Belarus. Even if Russia's leaders deliberately overstated their concerns about outside support, they clearly feared that destabilizing unrest might occur in Russia unless they took forceful steps to prevent any further "color" revolutions. The desire to head off popular unrest has been perhaps the single most important factor shaping the Russian government's actions both at home and vis-à-vis the CIS since early 2005. The Putin administration ostracized and intimidated the countries that had undergone democratic change and rewarded the CIS governments that tried to stifle pressure from below for greater freedom.

In June 2005, for example, at the very time that the U.S. and EU governments were criticizing the Uzbek government for its massacre of hundreds of demonstrators and

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bystanders in Andijan the previous month, Putin hosted Uzbek president Islam Karimov at meetings and a lavish dinner in Moscow and Novo-Ogarevo, the presidential retreat. In an opening statement at the meeting, Putin offered Karimov a “warm welcome” and said he was “delighted that it was possible [for Karimov] to bring the situation under control.” Putin lauded the Uzbek president for “stabilizing the situation and returning it to normal.” When Karimov, in his own lengthy comments at the meeting, claimed that the violence in Andijan was attributable solely to “impudent mercenaries” and “extremist and radical religious forces” backed by foreign “scriptwriters and directors of this well-planned ‘operation’,” Putin implicitly supported these assertions, arguing that “we [in the Russian government] had information about the infiltration of specially trained fighters [into Uzbekistan] from bases in Afghanistan. Our special services confirmed the concentration [of these fighters] on adjacent territories.” Putin offered his “deep condolences” to Karimov for “these tragic events.”<sup>14</sup>

In subsequent months, Russia continued to strengthen its ties with the Karimov regime, even as the Uzbek president’s relations with the West sharply deteriorated. Karimov retaliated against U.S. and EU criticism by ordering an end to the U.S. military presence in Uzbekistan and demanding the removal of Western officials and NGO representatives, and he encouraged Russia to fill the gap. In September 2005, Russian forces staged an exercise near Tashkent simulating measures needed to quell an Islamist insurgency. Two months later, the Russian and Uzbek governments signed a bilateral accord committing them to help each other if a threat to the security of either country arose. The accord entitles Russia to use Uzbek military facilities to ward off threats both to Karimov’s regime and to Russia itself.<sup>15</sup> The Russian authorities urged the Uzbek government to enact a law similar to the one adopted in Russia imposing tight controls on NGOs, warning that this would “counter the subversive aims of foreign powers.” Putin, in a lengthy televised news conference in Moscow in late January 2006, acclaimed the strengthening of ties between Russia and Uzbekistan, a country that in the 1990s had generally tried to keep its distance from Moscow and had been cool toward the CIS. Putin praised Karimov for pursuing “evolution instead of revolution” and for adroitly handling the “outburst we witnessed in Andijan,” and he promised that Russia, unlike Western countries, would not adopt a critical approach vis-à-vis Karimov that would merely “agitate the situation” in Uzbekistan and “embolden terrorists and extremists.” Putin stressed the need to “act very cau-

tiously in Central Asia” in order to avoid the emergence of a “second Afghanistan.”<sup>16</sup>

The pronounced warming of relations between Russia and Uzbekistan in 2005–2006 was emblematic of Putin’s approach to the entire CIS in the wake of the color revolutions. He forged stronger ties with the autocratic Belarusian president, Alyaksandr Lukashenka, and ordered Russian security and intelligence agencies to assist their Belarusian counterparts in forestalling a resurgence of popular unrest after Belarus’s widely criticized parliamentary elections in March 2006. Revelations of electoral fraud in Georgia in 2003, Ukraine in 2004, and Kyrgyzstan in 2005 had been the catalyst for mass protests in those countries that undercut the incumbent leaders. Some of the Belarusian demonstrators hoped that a similar process would unfold in Belarus. Lukashenka responded with a forceful crackdown, much to the approval of the Russian authorities. Putin hailed the election results and declared that Russia, unlike the Western governments that had condemned Lukashenka’s heavy-handed repression, would “conduct a balanced policy” toward Belarus, a state with which “Russia has always had a special relationship.”<sup>17</sup>

In contacts with Azerbaijani, Tajik, Kazakh, and Turkmen leaders since mid-2005, the Russian government has repeatedly stressed the importance of Karimov’s decisiveness in crushing opposition rallies in Andijan. Both publicly and privately, Russian officials have urged these countries as well as Uzbekistan to terminate Western democracy-assistance programs, arguing that the programs are “merely subversion and espionage in a different guise.” The Putin administration also encouraged the Tajik, Turkmen, and Azerbaijani governments to introduce draconian legal restrictions on NGOs, especially those receiving foreign funding. Kazakhstan came close to adopting an NGO-control law in 2005 but backed off when the United States registered strong objections. Nonetheless, even without such a law, the Kazakh authorities, with strong Russian encouragement, have exerted severe pressure on NGOs and pro-democracy groups. The same has been true in the other Central Asian countries, which have worked actively with Russia to ensure that no further unexpected upheavals occur. Russia has reciprocated by providing security assistance and economic concessions, helping to solidify the southern flank of the CIS.

Conversely, Putin, as both president and prime minister, has used various forms of coercion against Georgia ever since Saakashvili came to power in 2004 and began seeking to align his country much more closely with the West. In February 2006 the Georgian government withdrew

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from the CIS Council of Defense Ministers, declaring that Georgia was “setting out to join NATO and could not be part of two (rival) military blocs simultaneously.”<sup>18</sup> Although Georgia did not succeed in its bid to receive a Membership Action Plan (MAP) from NATO when the allied leaders held a summit in Bucharest in April 2008, the goal of NATO membership remained on the agenda, from Saakashvili’s perspective, in the wake of Georgia’s May 2008 parliamentary elections. Georgia’s westward course has been bitterly opposed by Russia, which responded in 2006 and 2007 by manipulating the flow of energy supplies to Georgia, imposing a near-total embargo on Georgian wine and agricultural exports (offering a transparently spurious rationale for this measure), stirring up xenophobic anti-Georgian sentiment in Russia’s mass media and parliamentary discussions, and supporting pro-Russian secessionist movements in South Ossetia and Abkhazia. In taking these actions, the Russian government aimed to discredit Saakashvili by keeping the situation in Georgia unstable, to maintain a conspicuous military presence in the country, to derail Georgia’s attempts to join NATO, and to forestall any cooperation between Russian democracy activists and their Georgian counterparts who had spearheaded the Rose Revolution.

Moscow’s efforts to tighten the screws on Saakashvili escalated drastically in August 2008, when outright warfare erupted between the two countries and led to Russia’s dismemberment of Georgia. This military confrontation came after a long series of public statements in 2006–2008 by Putin and other senior Russian officials about Kosovo, a separatist region of Serbia, and its implications for Russia’s policy toward Georgia. At a press conference in early 2006, Putin hinted that Russia might push for independence for Abkhazia and South Ossetia if Kosovo gained recognition from the West as an independent state. The hints became more overt and ominous over the next year and a half. Senior Russian officials spoke in increasingly strident tones about the need to resolve the “frozen conflicts” in Georgia and Moldova in the same way that Kosovo’s dispute with Serbia was being handled. Although Russian leaders did not take any immediate action in Georgia after Kosovo unilaterally proclaimed its independence in February 2008, they continued to suggest that they might eventually retaliate by encouraging the pro-Russian secessionist groups in Abkhazia and South Ossetia to move ahead with their own independence drives, forcing both the Georgian government and the NATO countries (most of which had recognized Kosovo’s independence) to decide how to respond. Putin stressed this point in an interview

shortly after Kosovo declared its independence: “If some believe that Kosovo should be granted full independence as a state, why should we deny this same thing to the Abkhazians and South Ossetians? . . . I do not want to say that Russia will immediately recognize Abkhazia or South Ossetia as an independent, sovereign state, but such precedents, once created, become a part of international practice.”<sup>19</sup> (Presumably, Putin was not suggesting that Kosovo should also be a precedent for Chechnya.) In April 2008 the Russian government followed up on these comments by establishing formal legal (though not yet full diplomatic) ties with Abkhazia and South Ossetia, sending reinforcements of “CIS peacekeeping forces” to Abkhazia, and sternly warning the Georgian government that if it tried to crack down on the separatist regions Russia would “defend our compatriots with all available means,” including military force, and would “respond militarily” even if Saakashvili relied on “NATO soldiers to come and fight” on Georgia’s behalf.<sup>20</sup>

Russia made good on these threats in August 2008 when it sent thousands of troops into South Ossetia to thwart Georgia’s bid for greater control and then embarked on a much wider military campaign to redraw Georgia’s borders and bring Saakashvili’s government to heel. The circumstances and events that led up to the fighting remained murky long afterward, and each side put forth its own version of how and why the war began.<sup>21</sup> Regardless of what precipitated the hostilities, the conflict gave the Russian government the opportunity (or pretext) to launch a major military operation that had obviously been prepared many months in advance. Russian troops, vastly outnumbering Georgia’s tiny armed forces, moved deep into Georgian territory, seizing or destroying key economic assets and infrastructure and causing many civilian casualties. Russian planes bombed military and civilian targets in Georgia, including the country’s main railroad, which was rendered unusable. Nearly 160,000 Georgian civilians were displaced from their homes by the Russian advance, adding to the 210,000 who were still living as refugees after being uprooted in Georgia’s earlier wars.<sup>22</sup> Despite strong international criticism, Russian ground troops backed by air and naval forces occupied large swaths of Georgia outside South Ossetia and Abkhazia and subsequently established broad “security zones” around the two regions. Russian leaders vowed that the separatist enclaves would “never return to Tbilisi’s control” and that “any discussion about Georgia’s territorial integrity should be forgotten.”<sup>23</sup> On August 26, 2008, the Russian government formally recognized South Ossetia and Abkhazia as independent states, a move that was

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swiftly condemned by all the leading NATO countries, the EU, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), and many third world governments.<sup>24</sup> Their criticism, however, could not alter the realities on the ground. The dramatic nature of Russia's military incursion, and the forcible detachment of South Ossetia and Abkhazia from Georgia, conveyed a blunt warning to the other CIS countries that they, too, might pay a grievous price if they failed to heed Moscow's strictures.

Nowhere has this message been better understood than in Moldova, which has long had to cope with its own separatist challenge in Transnistria, a strip of territory along Moldova's border with Ukraine that is now inhabited mainly by Slavs. The Transnistrian secessionist movement, headed by Igor Smirnov since 1991, has traditionally relied on Moscow for support, including the continued deployment of the Russian Army's operational group of some 1,500 soldiers. These troops are the remainder of what was once the Soviet 14th Guards Army (and then the Russian 14th Army), which intervened on behalf of Smirnov against the Moldovan government in the war over Transnistria in 1991–92. Soon after a peace agreement was signed in July 1992, the Moldovan authorities began seeking the removal of Russia's occupation forces from Transnistria. In November 1999, shortly before Yeltsin resigned as president, the Russian government (with Putin as prime minister) formally agreed to withdraw all Russian troops from Transnistria, but Putin as president reneged on the commitment. Over the past few years, officials in Moscow have repeatedly indicated that Russian forces will stay for the indefinite future in Moldova as "peacekeepers," thus defying the wishes not only of the Moldovan government but also of the EU and the OSCE.<sup>25</sup>

The continued presence of these troops has reinforced the other types of pressure that Russia has used against the Moldovan government in recent years to deter it from pursuing a more independent course. In 2005, after Moldova indicated that it would be seeking closer ties with the West and reassessing its role in the CIS, the Russian government stepped up its support for Smirnov. Russian officials praised the December 2005 parliamentary elections in Transnistria, which were marred by fraud and boycotted by all other countries and by the OSCE's election-monitoring division. Two months later, Smirnov broke off all talks with Moldovan leaders. For its part, the Russian government halted supplies of natural gas to Moldova for sixteen days in early 2006 and imposed an embargo on imports of Moldovan wine and agricultural goods, depriving Moldova of a vital market. These steps

were reminiscent of the tactics used against Georgia and Ukraine and also, at varying points, against the Baltic states.

The sundry forms of pressure on Moldova had their intended effect. In March 2006, Vladimir Voronin, the president of Moldova, announced that his country was not planning to leave the CIS despite the organization's "amorphous condition" and "loss of vigor." Voronin said it would be "a colossal mistake if we abandoned the huge markets of the CIS countries," thus signaling to Russia that Moldova, when seeking integration with the EU, would not do so at the expense of the CIS.<sup>26</sup> In return, Russia gradually lifted its embargo on Moldovan products and encouraged Smirnov to refrain, for the time being, from pushing for independence in Transnistria. Voronin publicly affirmed in October 2007 that Russia was playing a "helpful and positive role" and was thereby allowing Moldova to "stabilize the situation" in Transnistria short of a full-fledged settlement.<sup>27</sup> Even without the resumption of formal negotiations between Chisinau and Tiraspol, Russia's shift to a more flexible position on Transnistria facilitated progress that led in April 2008 to a meeting between Voronin and Smirnov—the first time in seven years that the two leaders had met face-to-face. Although no further progress was achieved when Russian and Moldovan leaders discussed the matter at a CIS summit in June 2008, the situation in Transnistria in the summer of 2008 was considerably less volatile than in either Abkhazia or South Ossetia.<sup>28</sup>

Russia's success in curbing Moldova's quest for greater leeway vis-à-vis the CIS underscored Moscow's determination to parry even modest challenges to its authority, a point now greatly reinforced by the Russian-Georgian war. In late August 2008, shortly before Russia formally recognized the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, Medvedev met with Voronin in Sochi and stressed that "The events in South Ossetia show how dangerous the potential for volatility can be in certain so-called frozen conflicts."<sup>29</sup> Although Medvedev welcomed what he described as the "exceptionally good prospects for achieving a settlement in Transnistria," he emphasized that Russia's incursion into Georgia should be seen as "a very serious warning, a warning to everyone," not least to the other members of the CIS. He added: "Consideration of other problem areas that exist," including Transnistria, "should be approached in this context." Voronin responded to Medvedev's admonition by reassuring him that the Moldovan government was "paying close attention to the events" in Georgia and would be "taking full account of what has happened in this other place." Voronin pledged

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that he would “not allow such things to occur in our own country” and would “exercise restraint and forestall any aggravation of the situation” in Transnistria.

In all of these cases, Russia’s policies obviously were not driven by any desire to promote democracy, sovereign statehood, or equal interactions within the CIS. On the contrary, Russia’s relations with CIS countries during the Putin era, especially in the wake of the color revolutions, were aimed at maintaining a position of dominion, preserving Russia’s (and Russian elites’) economic interests, and forestalling a resumption of pro-democracy unrest or large-scale protests against fraudulent elections in any CIS country.

The trends in Russia’s political relations with the CIS countries during the Yeltsin and Putin years, and especially the more distinctive pattern that has emerged since early 2005, provide a reasonably solid basis for judging what the contours of Russian policy toward the CIS are likely to be over the next decade.

First, there is little reason to believe that Russian leaders—Putin, Medvedev, or a plausible successor—will attempt to promote liberal democratic change in the CIS countries or will watch passively if CIS countries seek greater integration with the West, especially with NATO. Regardless of the type of political reforms (if any) that Medvedev may ultimately pursue at home, the turmoil that could accompany far-reaching democratization in the CIS countries (e.g., Belarus, Uzbekistan, or Kazakhstan) will almost certainly give Putin and Medvedev a stake in seeing authoritarian rule in those countries continue indefinitely. To forestall widespread Orange-style unrest, Russian officials will continue to work with authoritarian governments to curtail the activities of Western and Western-funded NGOs, crack down on charismatic opposition figures (especially those who seem unlikely to defer to Moscow’s wishes), coordinate the activities and planning of their internal security forces, and disrupt cross-country links among pro-democracy NGOs, political activists, and election-monitoring groups.

By the same token, Russia will continue to exert pressure on any CIS countries that seem to be aligning themselves too closely with the West. In the cases of Georgia and Ukraine, the Russian government will go all-out in trying to thwart their efforts to gain entry into NATO. The prospect of NATO membership for Georgia was controversial within the alliance even before the August 2008 war, and the conflict has accentuated NATO’s internal divisions over the matter, further lessening Georgia’s chances. Russia has been equally adamant about Ukraine. When Putin met in a closed session with President George

W. Bush at the NATO summit in Bucharest in early April 2008, he reportedly warned the American leader that Ukraine’s entry into NATO might prompt Russia to encourage Ukraine’s predominantly Russian-inhabited regions (Crimea and the eastern oblasts) to break away from the rest of the country.<sup>30</sup> A few days later, Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov declared, “Russia will do everything it can to prevent the admission of Ukraine and Georgia into NATO.”<sup>31</sup> In the aftermath of the August 2008 war with Georgia, Russian leaders began publicly hinting that they might resort to forceful action in Crimea if the Ukrainian government clamped down on the Russian community there or took other steps that would endanger “Russia’s vital interests,” a formulation that presumably could include a vigorous effort to join NATO.<sup>32</sup> These threats, and others regarding both Ukraine and Georgia, suggest that sentiment in Moscow on the NATO issue will remain highly combative in the years ahead.

Equally important from the Russian government’s perspective will be the need to prevent other countries from emulating Georgia and Ukraine in the pursuit of NATO membership. Although Uzbekistan’s recent limited rapprochement with the United States might be tolerable, any effort by Moldova or Belarus (after Lukashenka) to forge much closer ties with NATO—and especially to seek membership—would be opposed at all costs. When NATO enlargement began in the 1990s, the SVR warned that Russia’s “vital interests would be endangered” if the process ever extended to CIS countries. Such a development, the SVR predicted, would consolidate “a unipolar world in which the Russian Federation would be given the role of a country with a very limited range of interests and functions”—a scenario that would be “wholly unacceptable” and “must be decisively rejected.”<sup>33</sup> This sentiment became even stronger under Putin and took on a new edge in 2006–2008 when first Georgia and then Ukraine began actively pushing for membership in the Western alliance. Russia will continue to oppose their efforts to join NATO and will attempt to deter other countries from even contemplating such a step.

***Economic/Energy Ties.*** In the 1990s, Russia bore a considerable economic burden to foster greater political cohesion within the CIS. Some forms of Russia’s economic largesse that were especially onerous, notably the maintenance of a common ruble zone (which had disastrous inflationary consequences in Russia), were abandoned relatively early, but other economic subsidies to CIS member-states continued well beyond the 1990s. The low level of world prices for natural gas and oil during

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most of the 1990s meant that the opportunity cost of Russia's subsidized energy exports to the CIS countries was not exorbitant. However, as world energy prices soared to record levels during Putin's second term as president, Russia's opportunity cost increased commensurately.

One of the hallmarks of the Putin era was his effort, at a time of sharply rising world prices for oil and natural gas, to marshal Russia's energy wealth on behalf of the state (and of those who govern it). This policy carried over into Russia's relations with the CIS. Even as Putin was reasserting state control over large segments of Russia's oil industry, he was also spurring Gazprom (the state-owned natural gas monopoly) to bring the prices it charges CIS countries more into line with those for EU customers. By 2005, the disparity between the two price levels had grown so large that a continuation of the policy at a time of rapidly increasing world demand would have deprived the Russian state of vast amounts of revenue. The series of price increases to CIS countries from 2005 through early 2008—roughly 290 percent for Georgia and Azerbaijan, 120 percent for Moldova and Belarus, 95 percent for Ukraine, and so forth—rectified a substantial part of the CIS-EU price disparity, but by no means eliminated it.<sup>34</sup> On average, the prices for natural gas shipments to CIS countries in 2008 were still 40 percent below those paid by EU customers. The long-term pricing contracts used in the natural gas trade give Russia an incentive to adopt further large increases in intra-CIS prices as contracts come up for renewal.

Although the Russian government, working through Gazprom, has continued to use natural gas pricing for political purposes, the recent price increases for Belarus and other "loyal" CIS countries suggest that the main trend is toward greater equalization of pricing for EU and CIS customers, while preserving the option of political manipulation. To be sure, Belarus is still receiving significant subsidies, and the prices charged to Azerbaijan have been greatly increased since 2006, partly in retaliation for Azerbaijan's participation in the Shah Deniz Pipeline (also called South Caspian Pipeline) project, which came on line in December 2006. The pipeline, running from the Shah Deniz gas field in Azerbaijan's sector of the Caspian Sea through Georgia to Turkey, is the first (and as yet only) non-Gazprom route available for CIS gas shipments to Europe. Even though the initial price increases for other CIS countries were not as steep as for Georgia and Azerbaijan, the trend overall has been toward prices much closer to those for the EU.

Another aspect of Putin's energy policy that has had a far-reaching impact on the CIS is the drive by Gazprom to

gain maximum control over gas transport and distribution. Until very recently, all Gazprom shipments to EU countries had to go through pipelines controlled by Ukraine or Belarus, both of which imposed high transit fees and often illegally siphoned off some of the gas without paying for it. To ensure more reliable transport at lower cost, Gazprom has been seeking to develop alternative transport routes and to acquire as much control as possible over the Belarusian and Ukrainian distribution networks.

Gazprom has made important headway in this regard over the past few years. In late 2005 the Ukrainian government strongly resisted Gazprom's demand for higher price increases, prompting the Russian company to halt all gas supplies to Ukraine for four days at the beginning of 2006. To help resolve the dispute, the Ukrainian government agreed in February 2006 to set up UkrHazEnergo, a murky distribution company partly owned by Gazprom (through its 50 percent share in the intermediary company RosUkrEnergo, which in turn was given 50 percent of UkrHazEnergo). UkrHazEnergo quickly became the dominant wholesale supplier of natural gas in Ukraine, providing Gazprom with an important inroad into the Ukrainian gas industry. Although a further Ukrainian-Gazprom dispute regarding transit fees in early 2008 resulted in the dissolution of UkrHazEnergo, the move was largely symbolic. Under the new arrangement, RosUkrEnergo will sell gas directly to the Ukrainian company Naftohaz.<sup>35</sup> But RosUkrEnergo will still be operating on behalf of Gazprom to strengthen Russia's control of the Ukrainian gas industry—meaning that Gazprom will have a good deal of leverage to expand its presence in Ukraine in coming years if prices rise.

Favorable as Gazprom's arrangement in Ukraine was, the outcome for the Russian company in Belarus was even more advantageous. From the early 1990s on, Gazprom had been seeking a major stake in the Belarusian gas transmission network, Beltransgaz. In 2004, senior executives at the Russian company floated the idea of purchasing the entire Belarusian network outright, including all its gas pipelines.<sup>36</sup> The Belarusian government initially resisted this proposal, but the price increases imposed by Gazprom starting in 2006 induced it to agree at the end of 2006 to transfer a 50 percent share of Beltransgaz to Gazprom in a four-stage deal from 2007 to 2010, allowing Gazprom to serve as co-operator of the pipelines.<sup>37</sup> With further large price increases in the offing in coming years, Gazprom will have ample bargaining leverage to move toward even greater control of the Belarusian transmission network.

The acquisition of these stakes in the Belarusian and Ukrainian gas-distribution systems came on top of

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Gazprom's long-standing majority share of the Moldova-based transit system, Moldovagaz. Moreover, in April 2006 Gazprom also arranged to obtain a 75 percent stake (above its previous 45 percent share) in Armenia's state-owned natural gas company, ArmRosGazprom, in return for deferring hefty price increases for Armenian customers until 2009. In December 2007, Gazprom further expanded its projected share of ArmRosGazprom, to 80 percent.<sup>38</sup> This deal, to be carried out in three phases, not only has allowed Gazprom to gain control of Armenia's gas industry but has also enabled the Russian company to use its greatly augmented influence in ArmRosGazprom to acquire Armenia's share in the Iran-Armenian gas pipeline, helping to shore up Gazprom's commercial position on the western side of the Caspian Sea. Gazprom executives justified this purchase by citing the difficulty of transporting gas into Armenia through Georgia, but most observers regarded the move as part of a bid for leverage over gas shipments to Europe from Iran, which ranks only behind Russia in the size of its gas reserves.

Gazprom's control over the transport of CIS-origin natural gas to Europe will be further enhanced by the South Stream project, a joint venture with the Italian energy company ENI to build a 900-kilometer pipeline through southern Russia and under the Black Sea to Bulgaria, Serbia, and other countries in southern and central Europe. This advanced pipeline will circumvent the CIS states that have been most avid in their demands for higher transit fees (Ukraine and Belarus) and will thereby avert the sort of problem that arose in early 2006 when Gazprom temporarily ceased all gas supplies to Ukraine, causing major disruptions in Europe. Russia's deals with Bulgaria, Serbia, and Hungary in January/February 2008, which gave Gazprom exactly what it had sought—passage and cooperating rights for South Stream—have essentially guaranteed that the project will move forward.<sup>39</sup> Although Romania or Ukraine could try to force a rerouting of the new pipeline by asserting an exclusive economic zone along its Black Sea coast, the requisite adjustments would almost certainly not be significant enough to derail or even slow down the construction of South Stream, which is one of several new pipelines Gazprom aspires to build in coming years to allow for steadily increasing gas exports to both Europe and Asia.

Gazprom's acquisition of controlling shares in the gas-distribution systems of CIS countries and its efforts to construct new pipelines have been coupled with maneuvers to forestall the advent of an alternative pipeline system that would permit the transport of CIS-origin gas to Europe outside Gazprom's channels. The two main

alternative networks that have been proposed—a U.S.-backed Trans-Caspian Pipeline (TCP), running from Turkmenistan under the Caspian Sea through Georgia and Azerbaijan to Turkey, and the Nabucco project championed by the EU and the United States—have thus far failed to get beyond the exploratory stage. Even before Russia struck its expansive South Stream deal in January 2008 with Bulgaria (a country on which Nabucco would depend), the future of both TCP and Nabucco was uncertain. The uncertainty is especially great in the case of the TCP because both Russia and Iran strongly oppose the project and, as countries abutting the Caspian Sea, are entitled to veto the undersea construction.<sup>40</sup> Although one or both Western-backed projects might eventually move forward, Gazprom has given every indication that it will do its best to prevent these alternative pipelines from ever being completed.<sup>41</sup>

Gazprom's desire to preclude alternatives to its own transport/distribution networks for natural gas shipments to Europe and Asia has also been reflected in its recent efforts to establish maximum control over gas exports from Central Asia. In May 2007, Putin signed an agreement with the presidents of Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan to build a new 510-kilometer Caspian pipeline that will transport gas from Turkmenistan through Kazakhstan to Russia, from which it can be exported to Europe. This deal came right after Russia arranged with Uzbekistan to carry out a major upgrade of the Soviet-era pipeline system known as the Central Asia–Center (CAC) network, permitting the capacity of that system eventually to double from its current 44 billion cubic meters (BCM) annually to roughly 90 BCM.<sup>42</sup> The upgraded CAC system will handle, among other things, gas flowing in from the new Caspian pipeline. These Gazprom-sponsored projects will absorb extensive supplies of gas that could otherwise have been allocated to one or both of the proposed alternatives to the Gazprom network, TCP and Nabucco. With far less gas available for the TCP and Nabucco projects, their economic attractiveness (and thus the likelihood of ever being completed) will be greatly diminished. Final arrangements for the new Caspian pipeline, including an accelerated construction schedule, were approved on December 20, 2007. Although Turkmen president Gurbanguly Berdimukhammedov initially said that the deal did not necessarily mean that the TCP was “completely dead,” Russia's energy minister, Viktor Khristenko, made it clear that his government regarded construction of the new Caspian pipeline as a valuable way of undercutting the TCP, which he insisted would now be “impossible to build . . . unless a political investor comes along who

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does not care whether there will be sufficient gas to flow through it.”<sup>43</sup>

The extent of Russia’s determination to forestall alternatives to its own transmission network for CIS-origin gas became even more evident in March 2008, when Gazprom agreed to start purchasing shipments from Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Kazakhstan at “European prices” as of 2009.<sup>44</sup> This pricing structure will be a major departure from earlier purchasing agreements, which enabled Gazprom to obtain gas from the Central Asian countries at cut-rate prices and then sell it at a huge profit on the EU market. The definition of “European prices” was left vague in the quadrilateral deal, but most observers expect that in 2009 Gazprom will be paying roughly double the prices it paid in 2007–2008. In the short term, this arrangement will mitigate Gazprom’s earnings from Central Asian–origin gas, even though some of the difference will undoubtedly be passed on to EU and CIS customers. In the longer term, the deal will be greatly advantageous to Gazprom by reducing the likelihood that the Central Asian countries will feel any need for alternative distribution systems. The agreement will effectively lock them into the Gazprom network and deprive possible alternative pipelines of a supply of gas large enough for economic viability. By incurring a short-term burden, Gazprom will emerge more powerful in the long run.

The new arrangement with Central Asia could easily cause severe hardships for Gazprom’s CIS customers, including the two Central Asian countries that do not possess significant energy reserves (Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan). Gazprom will therefore have greater leverage to extract concessions on pipelines from western CIS countries by offering, in return, to cushion the blow of price increases. The country to watch in this regard is Ukraine, which has long been one of Turkmenistan’s largest customers. In 2008 the Ukrainian government, headed by Yulia Tymoshenko, tried to stave off Gazprom’s demands and press for higher transit fees, but the prospect of much higher prices starting in 2009 may induce Ukrainian officials to buy time by offering to give Gazprom an ever larger stake in their country’s transmission network.

The changes in the pattern of Russian economic and energy relations with the CIS over the past seventeen years, especially since 2005, give a reasonable basis for predicting what is likely to happen over the next decade. Having started out by providing large economic subsidies to the other CIS countries, Russia over the past few years has shifted steadily to a policy that will get rid of most of its remaining economic subsidies to the CIS, notably through major increases in prices for exports of natural

gas and oil. At a time of record-high prices for energy, the phasing-out of subsidies has caused major economic disruptions in several CIS countries, and these are bound to increase in coming years, especially in light of the March 2008 Russian–Central Asian pricing agreement. Ukraine, Belarus, Moldova, Georgia, Tajikistan, and Kyrgyzstan could encounter severe problems as the price increases engendered by this agreement are passed on. A sustained decrease in world energy prices could alleviate some of the hardships in these countries, but, short of that, Russia’s new economic approach to the CIS is likely to require some painful economic tradeoffs and sacrifices in countries that can ill afford them.

Despite the political tensions that this new approach may cause within the CIS, Gazprom’s long-term strategy of consolidating its dominant role as a producer and distributor of natural gas to Europe and Asia has been remarkably successful thus far. The company has acquired far-reaching control of foreign transmission networks, and the Russian government has strictly prohibited any foreign investment in Gazprom’s own pipelines. If Gazprom achieves similar gains in the future, it could end up with a nearly monopolistic hold over gas shipments from the CIS for many years to come. From the EU’s perspective, such an outcome would be economically worrisome and would entail a multitude of political complications—complications that would be especially ominous in light of Russia’s apparent shift against the West. A recent analysis published by the Swedish Defense Research Agency revealed that on fifty-five occasions in 1992–2006 Russia curbed its energy exports for purely political reasons.<sup>45</sup> These sorts of abuses are apt to become even more common as Gazprom increasingly dominates the world gas trade.

Nonetheless, even though Western governments have ample reason to be concerned about Russia’s energy policy in the CIS, Gazprom’s strategy could yet come unraveled over the next decade in three respects.

First, domestic production may well founder at least temporarily and perhaps longer. Investment in Russian energy fields has been lagging for a long while, and the costs of production have been increasing, in some cases sharply. The situation in Gazprom’s western Siberian fields—its traditional mainstay—is especially serious, as productivity wanes. The gas reserves in eastern Siberia are immense, but the costs of production are steep, and the development of fields has been curtailed by investment shortfalls.<sup>46</sup>

Second, growth of foreign demand for CIS natural gas could fall behind Gazprom’s projections. Although

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demand for CIS gas has been steadily burgeoning in recent years in both Europe and Asia, over time a renewed surge of prices should slow the growth of demand (and in some scenarios even reverse it), either because of a shift to alternative energy sources (e.g., nuclear power) or because of conservation. Even if a prolonged global recession does not occur, and if brisk economic growth in China and India continues, demand seems unlikely to increase as rapidly over the next decade as in recent years.

Third, even if demand does continue to grow swiftly, Gazprom's supply strategy is apt to prove too ambitious. The share of exports in the company's total gas production expanded precipitously from 2003 through 2008—rising from just over 30 percent to roughly 50 percent—but this expansion has been feasible only because it has not yet put a serious crimp on domestic supplies, despite relatively flat levels of overall production.<sup>47</sup> To the extent that Russian domestic demand increases in coming years, Gazprom may not be able to boost production fast enough to meet it and to continue increasing exports at the same rate. In that case, Gazprom's ability to remain the dominant supplier to Europe and East Asia will depend on its acquisition of more gas from Central Asia. The company's recent successes in this regard may encounter significant opposition in coming years, especially from China and India, both of which may push ahead with proposals to construct alternative pipelines for gas shipments from Central Asia.

***Military/National Security Relations.*** Despite the severe woes of the Russian armed forces under both Yeltsin and Putin, Russia maintains a formidable military capacity with respect to the other CIS states. No CIS country other than Ukraine could hope to avoid being crushed in a direct military confrontation with Russia, and even Ukraine would be overwhelmed relatively quickly unless it received help from the West. The latest projections for the CIS armies over the next decade confirm that Russia will remain by far the dominant military power in the region.

Russia's military preponderance allows for a certain freedom of action vis-à-vis the CIS that not even NATO can challenge. If any doubt about this matter existed before August 2008, the war between Russia and Georgia dispelled it. The NATO countries protested when the Russian army moved far beyond South Ossetia into the rest of Georgia, but they were unable to prevent Russia from doing what it wanted. Nor have the NATO governments been able to compel Russia to alter its military deployments in the CIS. Although Western leaders obtained a written pledge from Moscow in November 1999 to pull

all Russian troops out of Georgia and Moldova in return for adjustments in the Conventional Forces in Europe (CFE) Treaty, NATO has been unable to force Russia to live up to that commitment. Several factors—Russia's decision in July 2007 to “suspend” its participation in the CFE Treaty, the deployment of a much larger number of Russian troops in South Ossetia and Abkhazia, and the growing acrimony between Russia and the West as a result of the August 2008 war and dismemberment of Georgia—greatly increase the likelihood that Russian soldiers will remain in Georgia's former territories and in Moldova for many years to come. In South Ossetia and Abkhazia, in particular, Russian military units show no signs of leaving anytime in the next decade. If anything, they are likely to establish new military bases in one or both regions. Even if Russian leaders are unable to gain international recognition of Abkhazia and South Ossetia as independent states (or as regions to be incorporated into Russia), the presence of tens of thousands of Russian troops on or near South Ossetian and Abkhaz territory gives Moscow, not Tbilisi or NATO, the ultimate say over the political fate of the two entities.

Dominant though Russia's military power is in the CIS, Yeltsin and Putin both sought to devise multilateral defense arrangements with the other CIS countries, starting with the Collective Security Treaty in May 1992. The treaty was not intended to establish a full-fledged alliance, but it did give rise in 2002 to the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), which since April 2003 has been overseen by Nikolai Bordyuzha, formerly a general in the foreign intelligence directorate of the Soviet Committee on State Security (KGB), where he first got to know Putin. Bordyuzha was a high-ranking national security official in Russia throughout the 1990s (often working closely with Putin) and then served as Russian ambassador to Denmark. His appointment as CSTO secretary general gave the organization a much higher profile and a direct channel to the Russian president. In recent years Moscow has been striving to bolster the CSTO, turning it into something closer to a genuine alliance.

The greater emphasis on the CSTO bore fruit in October 2007 when the organization's heads of state signed major agreements adopting proposals first broached by Putin and Bordyuzha as far back as 2003 to set up joint peacekeeping forces and to enable CSTO countries to purchase Russian weapons at “domestic” (i.e., concessionary) prices. According to Bordyuzha, “the zone of peacekeeping activities could be any hot spot in the world.”<sup>48</sup> His comments prompted some observers to speculate that joint CSTO units might be deployed for “peace enforcement” in Abkhazia



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directly—involved in internal political matters. In other CIS countries, the political influence of Russian troops has been much more circumscribed and oblique.<sup>52</sup>

The maintenance of these ground, air, and naval bases and the invigoration of the CSTO have been championed not only by the Russian Defense Ministry but also by the Internal Affairs Ministry and the Federal Security Service, both of which have long worked with CIS partner agencies in Central Asia and the Caucasus to combat terrorism and Islamic extremists. The Russian government began giving these missions prime of place soon after the Soviet Union disintegrated and nearly a decade before the United States embarked on its “global war on terrorism.” As early as September 1994, a few months before Russia launched its first war in Chechnya, the SVR warned that “Islamic extremism has a highly negative effect on the crisis situations on CIS territory. . . . Of late, Islamic extremism has intensified as a movement aiming to spread Islam by violence, to suppress opposing forces, and to change the secular nature of the state. The impact of this extremism has manifested itself in both Tajikistan and the Caucasus conflict zone. However, the problem of the spread of Islamic extremism is not at all locally confined.”<sup>53</sup>

Whatever the merits of that assessment in 1994, it still constitutes the SVR’s basic appraisal of the situation in the North Caucasus and Central Asia and is shared by most of the Central Asian governments. Russian military, security, and intelligence forces will continue to work with their counterpart agencies in the Central Asian countries and the Caucasus to combat Islamic extremist movements, even if this entails repression of some moderate Islamic groups in Central Asia and southern Russia. There is little likelihood that Russia will be embroiled in a large-scale military conflict with either NATO or China over the next decade, despite the surge of tensions between Moscow and Western governments over Georgia and numerous other matters. Hence, the counterterrorism mission within the CIS (and in Russia itself) is likely to remain the primary one for Russia’s armed forces and state security organs.

### **Possible Jolts to Russia’s CIS Policy**

Despite the many continuities in Russia’s policy toward the CIS over the past seventeen years, some “wildcard” developments could push Russian-CIS relations onto a different trajectory over the next decade.

Domestic political turmoil in Russia could lead to major changes in Russia’s polity (either through democratization engendered by mass popular resistance or through a brutal clampdown), which in turn could affect foreign policy,

including relations with the CIS. Further authoritarian drift in Russia might empower leaders who are even more determined to resist democratic inroads in the CIS and use Gazprom even more vigorously for political as well as economic purposes. Although widespread, destabilizing unrest from below in Russia seems highly unlikely, Russian policy toward the CIS could also be swayed by internecine rivalries at the upper levels of Russia’s political elite—the sort of infighting between security agencies that began to flare up in 2007 in the months preceding Putin’s anointment of Medvedev as his successor. If a more intense political conflict were to erupt, rival political groups might be inclined to seize on Russia’s ties with CIS countries as a point of contention.

Even if (as seems plausible) the political situation in Russia remains largely stable over the next decade, one or more additional color revolutions in the CIS would almost certainly have a far-reaching impact on Russian policy. Because Putin and all those around him (including Medvedev) are so deeply hostile to the type of unrest that occurred in Georgia and Ukraine in 2003 and 2004, they might be tempted to invoke the October 2007 CSTO agreement and send in Russian military and security forces to prevent or undo a new color revolution. Such an action would set a precedent and would have profound implications for Russia’s relations with other CIS countries as well as with the West. Neither Medvedev nor any other Russian president would embark lightly on such a fateful course, but the Kremlin’s antipathy toward color revolutions is great enough to push leaders to make decisions despite their awareness of the high costs. Just as Leonid Brezhnev tried for many months in 1968 to reverse Czechoslovakia’s “Prague Spring” without resorting to direct military intervention, so too would a Russian president try to prevent or undo a color revolution by using all means short of direct military force.<sup>54</sup> But if these other options proved of no avail, the president would worry that failure to take military action would be more damaging to Russia in the long run than the use of force. Brezhnev made much the same choice in 1968 when he decided that the Soviet Union would be more gravely set back if he and his colleagues in Moscow allowed the Prague Spring to continue unchecked than if they used overwhelming military force in Czechoslovakia to put an end to the problem once and for all.

The public and private comments of Russian officials and political commentators suggest that the CIS country in which they are most worried about the prospect of a color revolution over the next decade is Belarus. Because Belarus is contiguous with several NATO countries, Russian military action

there would pose a challenge for the alliance, intensifying all the other adverse consequences of such a move.

Other major changes in Russia's relations with the CIS countries could come from a sharp, sustained decline in world prices of oil and natural gas—adding to the huge drop in oil prices in September and October 2008—or from a prolonged disruption of Russia's role in the global energy trade. As the lack of sufficient investment takes its toll on production at Gazprom fields and Russian state-owned oil companies (especially Rosneft), Russia could lose one of its most potent levers of influence in the CIS. By the same token, a protracted decline in world prices for natural gas—whether induced by a lengthy global recession or by an unexpected shift to alternative energy sources—would mitigate Russia's ability to use its gas resources for political and economic ends in dealing with other CIS countries.

Russia's policy in the CIS, especially toward Azerbaijan and Central Asia, could also be heavily affected by renewed warfare in the North Caucasus or with Georgia. Although the conflict in Chechnya has greatly abated since 2006, other parts of the North Caucasus, especially Ingushetia and Dagestan, have become increasingly unstable.<sup>55</sup> If full-scale fighting resumes in the region, the same sorts of problems that arose for Georgia during the second Russian-Chechen war (when Russia repeatedly engaged in cross-border bombing raids and threatened to embark on a much larger intervention to get rid of insurgent safe havens) are apt to recur. A renewed military conflict in the North Caucasus might also have undesirable implications for Russia's ties with the Central Asian countries, especially Uzbekistan. To the extent that Islamic extremist fighters moved from the North Caucasus into Central Asia, the Russian government would feel obliged to invoke the October 2007 CSTO agreement. Much the same would be true if destabilizing turmoil and Islamic extremism spread from Afghanistan and Pakistan into Central Asia. All the evidence suggests that no Russian president would simply stand by if such a threat were to arise anywhere in Central Asia. If in the early 1990s the Russian government already felt compelled to expend large amounts of blood and treasure in Tajikistan, Russian leaders nowadays will be even more inclined to safeguard far more important Central Asian countries like Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, or Turkmenistan.

Other jolts to Russian policy in the CIS could come from the West. From Moscow's perspective, the granting of NATO membership to Ukraine, Georgia, and possibly other CIS countries would be disastrous and must be vehemently opposed. Russian leaders will probably persist with a hard-line policy toward Georgia and might even provoke further military clashes in the hope that constant

turmoil would thwart Georgia's efforts to fulfill the criteria specified in NATO's MAP (which Georgia failed to receive even before the August 2008 war). If NATO does extend its writ into the CIS region over the next decade, the reaction in Moscow is likely to be harsh. Russian leaders will go to great lengths to prevent Ukraine from entering NATO and to deter other CIS countries from even considering membership in the alliance.

Finally, Russia's policy toward the CIS could be altered in unexpected ways over the next decade if far-reaching democratic change were eventually to occur in China. The highly authoritarian regime in China, which has become more, not less, repressive in recent years, has been no more willing than the Russian government to countenance democratization from below (or above) in Central Asia. However, if China undergoes wide-ranging democratization over the next decade, the repercussions in Central Asia and in Russia itself could be profound. At the very least, authoritarian-minded leaders in the CIS would lose a key prop.

## **Tradeoffs and Compatibility with Other Foreign Policy Goals**

The Russian government's desire to maintain overarching influence in the CIS ranks at the top of Russia's foreign policy goals, second only to the basic objective of deterring a large-scale foreign attack. Relations with the West, relations with China and India, and foreign economic ties loom large in Russian foreign policy, but not as large as ties with the CIS. If there was any doubt about the order of Russia's priorities before August 2008, the Russian-Georgian conflict and Medvedev's subsequent enunciation of the "five principles" of Russian foreign policy made it clear that the CIS is a paramount concern for Russia's leaders. Russia's actions vis-à-vis the CIS have entailed tradeoffs with some other foreign policy goals but have also helped to advance certain goals. When tradeoffs are necessary, policy toward the CIS has taken precedence, as was evident during the crisis with Georgia. This pattern is likely to persist in the future.

***Frictions with Western Countries.*** Under both Yeltsin and Putin, Russia's policy toward the CIS frequently provoked tensions with the United States and other Western governments. Although Russian-Western (especially Russian-U.S.) relations in general have been increasingly acrimonious since 2003, the differences and recriminations over the CIS long predate the recent deterioration of overall ties. Western opposition to certain Russian actions in the CIS was salient

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even during the period of greatest Russian-Western cooperation, especially in the early 1990s when Russian troops were actively involved in conflicts in Moldova, Georgia, and Tajikistan. Russia's incursion into Georgia in August 2008 sparked acute tension with Western governments, and Russian military intervention in other CIS states in the future could have even more dire effects.

Part of the problem for Russian-Western relations all along has been that the Russian Federation's main goals in the CIS are incompatible with those of the West. Both the EU and the United States have sought to promote democracy and human rights in the CIS. Russia has been a barrier to this goal since the early 1990s and will almost certainly remain a barrier in the future under Medvedev or any plausible successor.

Similarly, both the EU and the United States have a strong interest in developing alternative supply routes for CIS energy supplies, especially natural gas (through Nabucco, the TCP, or another pipeline), whereas Russia is interested in gaining maximum control over all CIS natural gas supplies to Europe and Asia, including supplies from Central Asia. To the extent that Gazprom continues to attempt to thwart Western efforts to sponsor alternative gas pipelines, Russia-Western relations are bound to suffer.

The issue that is likely to remain the greatest source of friction with the West, as suggested in the preceding section, is the prospective enlargement of NATO and the EU into Georgia or the CIS (notably Ukraine). Putin, Medvedev, and Lavrov have all repeatedly vowed that Russia will "do everything possible" to prevent the entry of Georgia, Ukraine, or any other CIS countries into NATO.<sup>56</sup> Russia's military bases in the area, including fortified garrisons in the Caucasus and naval facilities in Ukraine, would create significant problems for NATO even if all the other obstacles could be resolved. Tensions over the expanded Russian troop presence in South Ossetia, Abkhazia, and Moldova could even undermine the CFE Treaty and the entire European security structure. Although disagreements within NATO may stymie any further efforts to extend the alliance into the former Soviet Union (beyond the three Baltic states), support for Georgian and Ukrainian membership remains strong in influential Western circles. Hence, in all likelihood the status of NATO will continue to provoke bitter divisions between Russia and the West.

***Relations with China and India.*** Both China and India have an interest in securing reliable and economically attractive natural gas and oil supplies from the CIS, especially Central Asia. The surging demand for energy

in China and India was one of the main factors driving up world prices through mid-2008. Russia will remain committed to maximizing its control over natural gas supplies from the whole of the CIS, including Central Asia, whether through the construction of new gas pipelines (including two new pipelines to China) or the establishment of distribution arrangements with Central Asia countries that will prevent enough gas from being available to make non-Gazprom pipelines economically attractive. The divergence between Moscow's and Beijing's approaches to energy security could provoke sharp bilateral tensions, but not necessarily. If Russia is willing to provide enough gas and oil to China on a multi-year basis at world prices, Chinese leaders might find that arrangement acceptable even over the longer term. The real sticking point could come if Russia, despite its promises, turns out to be incapable of supplying enough gas to meet China's needs. Even if China's demand for natural gas does not rise as rapidly in the next decade as it has over the previous fifteen years, the trend is almost certain to remain upward unless a prolonged global recession or domestic political turmoil curbs China's economic growth.<sup>57</sup> Even with increased purchases of Central Asian gas, Gazprom will be hard pressed to meet demand in both Europe and Asia.

***Revenue from Energy Resources.*** Russia's policy toward the CIS over the past half-decade, particularly since 2005, has clearly been conducive to the Russian government's effort to earn as much income as possible from exports of natural gas and oil. When Russia provided far-reaching subsidies to the CIS countries for energy supplies in the 1990s, world prices for energy were much lower, and the opportunity cost of the subsidies, therefore, was relatively modest. However, when world energy prices soared to record levels after the early 2000s, the opportunity cost increased drastically, depriving Russia of tens of billions of dollars of potential revenue. Since 2005, the Russian government has been steadily phasing out those subsidies. Although the supplying of energy to the CIS countries is still being exploited for political as well as economic purposes, Russia's policy now entails far fewer tradeoffs with the economic objectives than it did in the past.

## **Conclusion**

Regardless of the tradeoffs with other foreign policy goals, the CIS countries will undoubtedly remain at the forefront of Russian activities abroad. Medvedev's declaration that Russia would enjoy "privileged interests" in the Com-

monwealth of Independent States merely codified what had long been taken for granted in Moscow—namely, that the CIS is a Russian sphere of influence, and thus that the involvement there of other great powers must be minimized. Describing the Russian-Georgian war as a “long-desired moment of truth” for Russia’s relations with the West, Lavrov warned that NATO expansion into the CIS would not be tolerated.<sup>58</sup> Although Russia will try to avoid confrontations with NATO over the CIS, Russian leaders have promised that “If someone makes an aggressive foray, he will get a response.”<sup>59</sup> They have also given every indication that they will seek to preserve Russia’s dominant role in the region as an energy supplier and distributor. By relying on interlocking political, economic, and military ties, Russia will continue to wield vast influence in the other CIS countries. Russia’s CIS partners have been nominally independent since early 1992, but they have been and will remain constantly mindful of Russia’s wishes.

## Notes

1. Interview with Georgian Deputy Foreign Minister Valeri Chechelashvili, May 26, 2006, transcribed by Caucasus Press.
2. *Kontseptsiiia vneshnei politiki Rossiiskoi Federatsii* (Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation) (Moscow, July 12, 2008).
3. Vladimir Kuzar, “Piat printsipov vneshnei politiki” (Five Principles of Foreign Policy), *Krasnaya zvezda* (September 2, 2008): 1; “Medvedev oglasil novye printsipy vneshnei politiki” (Medvedev Has Enunciated New Principles of Foreign Policy), *Kommersant* (September 1, 2008): 1.
4. Sergei Vladimirov, “Vladimir Putin: Grossmeister v igre” (Vladimir Putin: Grandmaster of the Game), *Rossiiskie vesti* (August 20, 2008): 4; Ellen Barri, “Putin vsemi komanduet, chtoby zashchitit starye rany” (Putin Commands Everyone to Heal Old Wounds), *Vremya i dengi* (Kazan) (August 14, 2008): 3; Ulyana Makhkamova, Viktoriya Kruchinina, and Elina Bilevskaya, “Putin i Medvedev podelili sfery” (Putin and Medvedev Have Divided Up Their Spheres), *Nezavisimaya gazeta* (August 14, 2008): 3.
5. Paul Goble, “Forget the Soviet Union,” *Foreign Policy* 90 (spring 1992): 56–65.
6. All of the former Soviet republics other than Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania have taken part in the CIS. Georgia announced its withdrawal in August 2008, and since August 2005 Turkmenistan has been only an associate member. Ukraine, a co-founder of the CIS along with Russia and Belarus, did not actually sign the CIS charter but has participated in CIS activities and entities.
7. Official justifications aside, the Turkmen government’s decision to change to associate membership may have been intended primarily to forestall any “contamination” from Ukraine, Georgia, or Kyrgyzstan. In any case, the downgrading has not significantly affected Turkmenistan’s activities in the CIS or its relations with Russia on energy and other key issues. In the wake of President Saparmurat Niyazov’s death in December 2006, some observers have speculated that Turkmenistan will eventually return to full membership.
8. “RF dolzhna aktivno otstavat svoi pozitsii na postsovetском prostranstve, no ot termina ‘postsovet’skii’ pora otkazyvatsia—Ivanov” (The Russian Federation Must Actively Safeguard Its Positions in the Post-Soviet Space, But It’s Time to Discard the Term “Post-Soviet”), *ITAR-TASS* (March 18, 2007).
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