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AIIA Policy Commentary

Bear on the Prowl?

The Return of Russia as a Great Power

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**The Six-Point Cease Fire Agreement signed by Russia
and Georgia*
13 August 2008**

1. Not to resort to force.
2. To end hostilities definitively.
3. To provide free access for humanitarian aid.
4. Georgian military forces will have to withdraw to their usual bases.
5. Russian military forces will have to withdraw to the lines held prior to the breakout of hostilities. Pending an international mechanism, Russian peace-keeping forces will implement additional security measures
6. Opening of international talks on the security and stability arrangements in Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

The Council calls on the parties to honour all these commitments, beginning with an effective ceasefire, and to ensure that they are implemented effectively and in good faith both on the ground and in the relevant fora. The international mechanism should be set up rapidly.

*http://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/en/IMG/pdf/General_Affairs_and_External_Relations_meeting_August_2008.pdf; accessed: 26/11/2008

**Statement by Dmitry A. Medvedev,
President of Russia*
26 August 2008**

Televised Speech to the Nation

“My dear fellow countrymen, citizens of Russia!

You are no doubt well aware of the tragedy of South Ossetia. The night-time execution-style bombardment of Tskhinval by the Georgian troops resulted in the deaths of hundreds of our civilians. Among the dead were the Russian peacekeepers, who gave their lives in fulfilling their duty to protect women, children and the elderly.

The Georgian leadership, in violation of the UN Charter and their obligations under international agreements and contrary to the voice of reason, unleashed an armed conflict victimizing innocent civilians. The same fate lay in store for Abkhazia. Obviously, they in Tbilisi hoped for a blitz-krieg that would have confronted the world community with an accomplished fact. The most inhuman way was chosen to achieve the objective – annexing South Ossetia through the annihilation of a whole people.

That was not the first attempt to do this. In 1991, President Gamsahourdia of Georgia, having proclaimed the motto "Georgia for Georgians" – just think about it! – ordered attacks on the cities of Sukhum and Tskhinval. The result then was thousands of killed people, dozens of thousands of refugees and devastated villages. And it was Russia who at that time put an end to the eradication of the Abkhaz and Ossetian peoples. Our country came forward as a mediator and peacekeeper insisting on a political settlement. In doing so we were invariably guided by the recognition of Georgia's territorial integrity.

The Georgian leadership chose another way. Disrupting the negotiating process, ignoring the agreements achieved, committing political and military provocations, attacking the peacekeepers – all these actions grossly violated the regime established in conflict zones with the support of the United Nations and OSCE.

Russia continually displayed calm and patience. We repeatedly called for returning to the negotiating table and did not deviate from this position of ours even after the unilateral proclamation of Kosovo's independence. However our persistent proposals to the Georgian side to conclude agreements with Abkhazia and South Ossetia on the non-use of force remained unanswered. Regrettably, they were ignored also by NATO and even at the United Nations.

It stands quite clear now: a peaceful resolution of the conflict was not part of Tbilisi's plan. The Georgian leadership was methodically preparing for war, while the political and material support provided by their foreign guardians only served to reinforce the perception of their own impunity.

Tbilisi made its choice during the night of August 8, 2008. Saakashvili opted for genocide to accomplish his political objectives. By doing so he himself dashed all the hopes for the peaceful coexistence of Ossetians, Abkhazians and Georgians in a single state. The peoples of South Ossetia and Abkhazia have several times spoken out at referendums in favor of independence for their republics. It is our understanding that after what has happened in Tskhinval and what has been planned for Abkhazia they have the right to decide their destiny by themselves.

The Presidents of South Ossetia and Abkhazia, based on the results of the referendums conducted and on the decisions taken by the Parliaments of the two republics, appealed to Russia to recognize the state sovereignty of South Ossetia and Abkhazia.

The Federation Council and the State Duma voted in support of those appeals.

A decision needs to be taken based on the situation on the ground. Considering the freely expressed will of the Ossetian and Abkhaz peoples and being guided by the provisions of the UN Charter, the 1970 Declaration on the Principles of International Law Governing Friendly Relations Between States, the CSCE Helsinki Final Act of 1975 and other fundamental international instruments, I signed Decrees on the recognition by the Russian Federation of South Ossetia's and Abkhazia's independence.

Russia calls on other states to follow its example. This is not an easy choice to make, but it represents the only possibility to save human lives.”

*http://www.kremlin.ru/eng/speeches/2008/08/26/1543_type82912_205752.shtml;
accessed:26/11/2008

Statement by Mikheil Saakashvili,
President of Georgia*
26 August 2008

Televised Address to the Nation

“The Russian Federation’s actions are an attempt to militarily annex a sovereign nation—the nation of Georgia. This is in direct violation of international law and imperils the international security framework that has ensured peace, stability, and order for the past 60 years.

Russia's decision today confirms that its invasion of Georgia was part of a broader, premeditated plan to redraw the map of Europe. Russia today has violated all treaties and agreements that it has previously signed.

Russia’s actions have been condemned in the strongest possible terms by the entire international community, which has reaffirmed its support for Georgia’s territorial integrity. The Government of Georgia is grateful for the world’s support.

The regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia are recognized by international law as being within the borders of Georgia.

Today, by its actions, the Russian Federation is seeking to validate the use of violence, direct military aggression, and ethnic cleansing to forcibly change the borders of a neighboring state.

Russia’s refusal to withdraw its military forces from Georgia—and its attempt to annex two regions of Georgia—is in direct violation of the EU-brokered cease fire to end Russia's invasion and occupation of Georgia.

The two regions in question have been de-populated by conflict and continue to be subject to widespread ethnic cleansing by Russia and its proxies—as confirmed by the United Nations and other international bodies.

These are areas where the local populations— simply because of their nationality - have been chased out, with the direct intervention of the Russian Federation.

The few civilians who remain in these regions have been given Russian passports en masse, in violation of international law and norms, making a mockery of the principle of “right to protect”.

One such expulsion took place in 1993 in Abkhazia. Others took place last week in South Ossetia and in Upper Abkhazia/the Kodori Gorge.

I remind you that before the first conflict, more than 525,000 people lived in Abkhazia. Today less than 150,000 do.

I remind you that ethnic Georgians in South Ossetia have been systematically forced to flee that territory due to Russia’s invasion.

The attacks on ethnic Georgians, both inside and outside the conflict zones, are continuing.

The ethnic cleansing is something that the local rebel separatists are proud to announce—and which Russia, through its actions, is attempting to legalize.

Is it legal to remove ethnic groups from their homes using violence and terror?

Is it moral or legal for an ethnically cleansed area to be rewarded with independence by a neighbor?

M. Saakashvili

If intervention in Kosovo was about stopping ethnic cleansing, today's decision by the Russian Federation is about rewarding and legalizing ethnic cleansing.

Russia has turned logic and morality on its head.

Russia's decision is therefore a direct and grave challenge to the international order. This is a challenge for the entire world. Not just Georgia.

It means that today, annexation and ethnic cleansing have once again become tools of international relations.

If accepted by the international community, it means that foreign-sponsored groups around the world can use violence and ethnic cleansing to achieve their ends.

It means that third parties can arm, sustain and direct those groups in order to change the borders on the world's map.

Today, it is clear around the world that Russia is acting as an aggressor state.

My appeal to the free world is to condemn and reject Russia's dangerous and irrational decision – NOT only for Georgia's sake – but for the sake of preserving the fundamental basis of international law and order.

On behalf of my Government and people, I condemn this reckless act and want to state clearly that the Russian action does not hold any legal value.

As before – and according to international law, Georgia's territorial integrity and sovereignty is inviolable.

Russia's aims, method and goals are now clear.

The Russian Federation has used military force to try to dismember my country.

In the days and weeks ahead we will work with the international community to prevent this decision from having any effect on the sovereignty of my country and from further undermining the international order.

Together we must stand united against this aggression and call on you for your assistance and immediate reaction.

This is a test for the entire world and a test for our collective solidarity.

This is the test that we—all free people—must not fail.

My friends, we are all concerned today. And today Georgia counts on your support.

Today a challenge has been posed to all of us.

Today the fate of Europe and the free world is unfortunately being played out in my small country.

But together, we can and we must unite to meet this challenge.”

* <http://www.president.gov.ge/?l=E&m=0&sm=1&st=40&id=2723>; accessed: 26/11//2008.

Australia's Response to the events in Georgia
27 August 2008*

House of Representatives- Question without Notice
Hon Stephen Smith,
Australian Minister for Foreign Affairs, MP

Ms REA (Bonner) (3:29 PM) — My question is to the Minister for Foreign Affairs. Minister, how is Australia responding to events in Georgia and what are the implications of the conflict for Russia's standing in world affairs?

Mr STEPHEN SMITH (Perth) (Minister for Foreign Affairs) — I thank the member for her question. Members would be aware that overnight the Russian President, President Medvedev, indicated that the Russian Federation had recognised the independence of South Ossetia and Abkhazia, often known as the separatist region of Georgia. Australia does not support such recognition. That is Australia's longstanding position. Australia recognises the territorial sovereignty of Georgia over the provinces of South Ossetia and Abkhazia. The declaration by the Russian Federation is not a helpful contribution to tensions in that area of the world and not a helpful contribution to international relations. Indeed, some might say that such a declaration was provocative. It does not help the standing of the Russian Federation. In the Australian government's view, it diminishes and lowers its standing.

Members would recall that earlier this month, following the incursion of Georgian forces into South Ossetia, the Russian Federation deployed a large-scale military offensive in Georgia, not restricted to South Ossetia. That large-scale military offensive implemented and effected large-scale devastation upon parts of Georgia, including military and economic points. We saw, regrettably, civilian casualties and a large number of displaced persons, as a consequence of which

the Australian government announced humanitarian assistance of a million dollars through relevant international agencies.

The actions of the Russian Federation in this respect were clearly disproportionate. We welcomed very much the efforts of President Sarkozy, the President of France, in his position as European Union chair, and the Finnish Foreign Minister, my counterpart from Finland, in his position as chair of the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe, in effecting a ceasefire agreement between Georgia and the Russian Federation. Regrettably, Russia has not abided by that ceasefire and, as we have done publicly and through officials in both Canberra and Moscow, we again call upon the Russian Federation to return its troops to the positions they occupied prior to the commencement of hostilities on 6 and 7 August.

The Russian Federation is a significant and influential player in world affairs. It is essential that it engages in dialogue and peaceful conduct. We urge the Russian Federation to abide by the ceasefire brokered by President Sarkozy and return its forces to those positions, and to engage fully in international affairs through the relevant regional multilateral forums—through discussion, not through the disproportionate use of military force of arms.

*[http://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/search/display/display.w3p;adv=;db=CHAMBER;group=;holdingType=;id=chamber/hansardr/2008-08-27/0079;orderBy=_fragment_number;page=0;query=Id%3A%22chamber/hansardr/2008-08-27/0079%22;querytype=;rec=0;resCount=](http://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/search/display/display.w3p;adv=;db=CHAMBER;group=;holdingType=;id=chamber/hansardr/2008-08-27/0079;orderBy=_fragment_number;page=0;query=Id%3A%22chamber/hansardr/2008-08-27/0079%22;querytype=;rec=0;resCount=;); accessed: 26/11/2

The Resurgence of Russia as a Great Power?

Emeritus Professor Paul Dibb, AM

My contribution to this AIIA Policy Commentary argues that Moscow's invasion of Georgia in August 2008 marked the return of a resurgent Russia profiting from what it sees as a distracted and weakened America. As the saying goes in Moscow these days "America down, Russia up, Europe out".¹ None of this is to argue that we are going to see a return to the military power of the old Soviet Union or a new ideological Cold War, involving nuclear confrontation. But we *are* in for a period of heightened tension between Russia and the West, in which a more confident Russia will seek to reassert itself in the former Soviet strategic space in Eastern Europe and the Caucasus. And it will be much less cooperative elsewhere in the world. As I suggested two years ago, this renewed Russia will be strong, assertive and probably increasingly undemocratic and it will definitely not be a consistent or reliable partner of the West.²

I accept the argument that Russia, far from being a status quo participant in the post-Cold War international system, is now a revisionist power ready to use force to challenge the settlement of 1991, and that the United States has imprudently encouraged some of Moscow's neighbours to stand up against this enterprise without being prepared to protect them in their hour of need.³ Russia's invasion of Georgia has posed a challenge to the US-dominated international order and harks back to a world based on spheres of influence.

Ever since the collapse of the Soviet Union in December 1991, the US has treated Russia as an irrelevant power that is too weak to stand up to Washington's plans to expand NATO to the borders of the former Soviet strategic space or to resist the spread of democracy to Ukraine, Georgia and the Baltic countries. For the last 17 years,

Washington has viewed Russia bordering on contempt as a defeated enemy and not worthy of the status of a major power. And now the Russians have struck back with a vengeance.

All those rosy expectations in the early 1990s that Russia was going to adopt democracy, a market economy, a free press and the rule of law have been dashed. The dream that Russia was going to join in a great alliance to build global peace, and perhaps even become a member of NATO, have been shattered by the image of an ever more belligerent Russia - culminating in the invasion of Georgia. For many of us, Russia has reverted to being that great 'Other' - familiar but not familiar, understood yet not understood, in some ways European and yet not so. The West has always had great ambivalence toward Russia. And once again, in one of those eternal cycles of its history, Russia is alienated from Europe.

The view of the world from Moscow

We need to understand just why Moscow's view of the world is so bitter and resentful and why it is now determined, as it regains its economic and military strength, to reassert itself as a great power (*velikaya derzhava*). When Vladimir Putin remarked that the disintegration of the Soviet Union was the greatest catastrophe of the 20th century he spoke for many Russians who took pride in the USSR's status as a superpower, feared by the West. His aim, however, was not to resurrect Russia as a Communist state. That had clearly been a failure, not to be repeated. But he wanted to reclaim Russia's status as a major power with recognised vital interests in what it terms its "near abroad" (*blizhnoe zarubezhe'e*) where 25 million ethnic Russians live. And above all else, he wanted to rebuild Russia both economically and militarily so that its views on key security issues would be respected and taken into account.

There is nothing new about Moscow's current paranoia over being encircled strategically and treated with contempt as not being a civilised European power. Most countries are prisoners of their history, geography and culture - and none more so than Russia. As Geoffrey Hosking, Professor of Russian History at the University of London, has remarked: Russia has been in desperate situations before, some of them to all appearances far worse than its current one - and it has recovered from them because its society and culture are extraordinarily resilient. ⁴ Russia, he says, is one of world history's great survivors.

It is difficult for those of us from island countries, secure behind vast ocean approaches, to comprehend the obsession with defence that stems from open land frontiers that offer no compelling security. As Hosking points out, because of its size and vulnerability Russia needed the structure of an authoritarian state. Territorially, it has been the most extensive of the world's major empires. It can readily both invade and be invaded. And over the centuries Russia has both inflicted and suffered aggression repeatedly. With one exception, though (the Mongols in the 13th century), the really destructive invasions have come from the West - from Europe: the Swedes, the French and the Germans. But less well-known is how the lands now called Ukraine and Belarus fell under Lithuanian and then Polish Catholic control for centuries.

This, you might think, is all ancient history and so what? Like most European countries, perceived insults and transgressions historically rankle deeply in Russia. What is ignored too readily, however, in Moscow is the fact that when Russia was strong it expanded its borders and when it was weak its borders contracted. So, in the contemporary situation after the fall of the Soviet Union a weak Russia contracted to its smallest territorial size since before the time of Catherine the Great in the 1700s. It has lost Ukraine, the original 9th century heartland of early Russian culture, as well as Belarus and Moldova. It has lost the Baltics, too, and the Caucasus lands of Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan. And it has lost the vast reaches of

Central Asia. What Russians grew used to as great territorial buffers have now been lost and thrown into their faces as putative staging grounds for Russia's competitors. Russia now shares common borders with several NATO countries, one of which (Estonia) is scarcely more than 120 kilometres from St Petersburg.

Here, in short, is the historical and psychological context for Russia's contemporary will to re-establish and reassert great power status. It would be a grave mistake to underrate the influence of that context. Nations, like individuals, are largely the product of their environment. None of this is to excuse Russia's military aggression against Georgia. But, as John LeCarre has recently said: "If you bite the Russian bear on the arse in its own backyard, then you know what will happen: it will react brutally." (*The Sunday Times*, 15 September 2008; <http://www.smh.com.au/news/world/spy-writer-le-carre-admits-he-considered-defecting/2008/09/14/1221330653189.html>) The fact is from Moscow's perspective the US has provoked it by promising Ukraine and Georgia will become members of NATO. This played to Russia's worst historical paranoias. So, Moscow has decided to draw the red line in the sand. And what did it do on the 8th of August 2008? Putin did not want to confront NATO directly, but he did want to confront and defeat a power closely aligned with the US. Given that the US is absorbed with its wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, he judged correctly that the US was in no position to intervene anywhere on the Russian periphery. What Russia has now done in Georgia is based on a new order of confidence and indifference to world opinion.

Is this the beginning of a new Cold War?

The tensions that now exist between Russia and the West are the worst in over 20 years. But we should not fall into the trap of forecasting a new Cold War: in the foreseeable future there will be no ideological confrontation between two superpowers threatening nuclear war. Present-day Russia does not have the global military

reach of the former Soviet Union. Now, and foreseeably, it will simply not be able to match the US in projecting military power around the world.

We should not, however, be lulled into the belief that Russia's conflict with Georgia is simply about establishing a new balance of power in the Caucasus, rather than a step towards greater tensions between Russia and the West. This need not lead to direct military confrontation between Russia and NATO. However, those countries on Russia's strategic perimeter are now confronted by an increasingly aggressive and unilateralist Russia and the spectre of a divided NATO, which seems to have little stomach for military operations against Russia.

Moscow's actions in Georgia have signalled to its neighbours that it is ready to defend its interests by military means if necessary. As the International Institute for Strategic Studies in London observes, Moscow "increasingly sees NATO enlargement and Western military presence in the region as 'red lines' not to be crossed, and, if they are, it is ready to respond assertively." ⁵ Russia's use of military force against Georgia is a brutal reminder that large countries still have spheres of influence over small neighbours. Russia has now compelled every state on its periphery to re-evaluate its position relative to that of Moscow. August 2008 marked Russia's return, at least in its own eyes, to great power status. Convinced that the days of a unipolar American world are dead and buried, Russia believes that it has a rightful place in a fast-changing multipolar world in which American power has been weakened both militarily and, as we have seen in 2008, financially.

Writing in *The New York Review of Books*, George Friedman asserts that Russia's invasion of Georgia has announced that the balance of power in Eurasia has shifted. ⁶ By this he means that the United States is so absorbed in its wars in Iraq and Afghanistan that it has no military forces in reserve and is in no position to intervene on the Russian periphery. In any case, Georgia is a marginal issue to the US.

And as he remarks, the Europeans for the most part lack serious expeditionary military forces and are heavily dependent upon Russian energy exports and, therefore, have even fewer options.

Given the deep-seated geopolitical thrust in Russian thinking, which reflects the permanent consciousness of Russia's strategic location, the realms in which Russian-Western partnership is now possible will only narrow. Russia's foreign policy priorities are not difficult to discern. The first will be to continue giving precedence to the strengthening of the state. The medium-term economic outlook appears favourable once the current world financial crisis abates, given the expectation of continuing relatively high energy prices (Russia is the world's largest producer of natural gas and the second largest producer of oil). President Medvedev has announced that Russia will have to think now about rearming its military. Modernisation of Russia's strategic nuclear forces and the air force will have precedence in my view.

The second priority is reasserting Russia's natural sphere of influence in the "near abroad" - focussing on the former republics of the USSR, of which Ukraine is by far the most important. Ukraine is the original 9th century heartland of early Russian culture: Alexander Solzhenitsyn wrote that all the talk of a separate Ukrainian people "is a recently invented falsehood. We all sprang from precious Kiev, from which the Russian land took its beginning, and from which we received the light of Christianity." ⁷ Be that as it may, Moscow has made it clear that Ukrainian membership of NATO will lead to confrontation with Russia and will provoke responses—possibly including reclaiming the Crimea which was given to Ukraine by Moscow in 1954, denouncing the 1998 bilateral friendship treaty that recognises Ukrainian territorial integrity, and targeting missiles at Ukraine. Ukrainian membership of NATO will represent a fundamental threat to Russia's national security, rendering Russia indefensible in Moscow's eyes.

The third priority will be to cow the three Baltic States, which share a common border with Russia and Belarus and whose armed forces, despite being members of NATO, are weak (numbering scarcely 19,000 altogether). In theory, their membership of NATO means that any military threat from Russia should automatically draw a NATO military response. But who actually believes that? An associated priority will be to ensure that Poland and the Czech Republic do not go ahead with hosting US ballistic missile defence capabilities. If they do, Russia has threatened to target these countries with missiles. On 5 November 2008, President Medvedev stated that Moscow will station Iskander SS-26 missiles in its territory of Kaliningrad, which shares a common border with Poland, to carry out that military mission.⁸

A fourth priority is to strengthen Russia's relationships with countries such as China, which share Moscow's concern about the dominance of American power. Russia and China are both authoritarian powers that are highly uncomfortable with US hegemony and deeply distrust the Bush administration's policy of spreading democracy as a global panacea. In Asia, Russia can offer China (and India and Japan) what the US cannot: oil and gas. Russia will seek to establish a new Eurasian block through the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, whose members are China, Russia and four of the Central Asian states and may include Pakistan, Iran and Afghanistan in future. It is commonplace to predict that Russia and China will become geopolitical rivals one day - and that may well be the case. (For reasons to do with Taiwan, Beijing was not supportive of Moscow's recognition of South Ossetia and Abkhazia as independent entities after its invasion of Georgia). But a tactical alliance to take advantage of America's relative decline in power may be the glittering prize in the shorter term. As Coral Bell points out, Russia has the widest diplomatic options of any of the world powers: if it were to conclude a strategic partnership with China that would "more or less restore a bipolar balance of power overnight." ⁹ I regard that, however, as an unlikely event.

A fifth priority might be to undermine American interests in the Middle East, Asia and Latin America. This will be more difficult because of Moscow's limited capabilities these days. But the US needs Russian cooperation with regard to restraining the nuclear ambitions of both Iran and North Korea. The US wants the Russians to participate in sanctions against Iran and does not want it to sell highly effective S-300 air defence systems to Tehran - which would complicate the contingency planning of the US and Israel. The Russians are in a position to pose serious problems for the US in Iran. And Russian weapons sales to countries as far spread as Syria, Venezuela, Vietnam, Malaysia and Indonesia would be a matter of concern (including for Australia with regard to the last three). As an example of Russia's determination to operate in America's sphere of influence, on 10 September 2008 it deployed Tupolev Blackjack strategic bombers to Venezuela.

How will the current global financial crisis affect Russia's strategic plans? Falling oil prices will erode Russia's international clout in the short term and probably cause it to focus more on nearby countries and less on distant areas, such as Latin America.

It is, however, a serious mistake in my view to think (as some Australian intelligence agencies do) that Russia has been demoted for all time to the level of a second-rate power. Any country that has over 4,200 strategic nuclear warheads and is in a belligerent mood needs to be taken seriously. Russia now feels it has a choice between accepting subservience and reasserting its status as a great power, and it has decisively chosen the latter course. The events in Georgia promise greater tension - perhaps serious tension - now between Russia and the West. Ukraine is as likely a setting as any for the eruption of such tension and for the calling of the West's bluff. If this means clashing with NATO, Russia may even be prepared to threaten the use of force and re-establish old understandings about spheres of influence. And should the Russian army occupy a chunk of Estonia, for example, what would - what *could* - NATO do about

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it? Moscow knows that Europe will not commit suicide for the sake of minor allies.

A resurgent Russia may now be willing to contemplate disruption in the international order to create strategic space in the former Soviet lands to re-establish itself. On 1 September 2008, President Dmitry Medvedev made it clear Russia would protect its foreign nationals everywhere and that it had a right to "historically special relations with its spheres of privileged interests."¹⁰

He has also blamed Washington's "economic egotism" for the world's financial woes and has accused the Bush Administration of taking Europe to the brink of a new Cold War by pursuing a deliberately divisive foreign policy. In order to end US unipolar dominance, Medvedev suggests creating a new financial system and has proposed a new European security treaty.¹¹

A resurgent Russia will not be a recycled Soviet Union in terms of messianic ideology. The Cold War as such will not return. But make no mistake: we are in for a new period of heightened geopolitical tension between Russia and the West that could be highly unpleasant - and even dangerous.

Foreign policy implications for Australia

What does all this imply for Australia's foreign policy? First, it adds yet another complicating factor to the emerging new global balance of power that tends to focus rather too heavily in Canberra on the rise of China. We need to think more about a new world order in which the authoritarian powers, China and Russia, will challenge the continuing dominance of the US and its close allies, including Japan and Australia. Moscow does not loom as large in Canberra official minds as it should. Russia may be a distant problem and unlikely to assert itself in our region, but Moscow can effectively work against Australia's interests in the Middle East and Europe.

Second, it follows that we should monitor the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) more closely than seems not to be the case at present in Canberra. We need to understand whether the SCO is evolving into a cohesive Eurasian continental bloc opposed to the United States. The SCO accounts for 20% of the world's oil resources and 50% of its natural gas, as well as over 25% of the earth's population. The question arises will the SCO become a threat to Western energy security? And how might the SCO impact on Australia's South Asia policies, particularly if India, Pakistan, Iran and Afghanistan become full members? (The first three are observer states of the SCO, together with Mongolia).

Third, Russia's current mood suggests that this is a time for restraint and reflection on both sides. In September 2008, six former American and Russian Ambassadors expressed concern that "heated rhetoric today often seems to take the place of a thoughtful analysis of the common interests of the United States and Russia in the 21st century." ¹² They are alarmed about the downward spiral in relations which, without urgent attention "could lead to a protracted period of confrontation and counter productive activity." ¹³ Australia should do what it can to support this initiative with the new administration of President Barack Obama. Threatening to cut off uranium supplies to Russia, which is a signatory to the NPT, will not help

Fourth, the good news is we are unlikely to see major Russian activity in our primary region of strategic interest. Russia's main concerns will be in what it sees as its "spheres of privileged interests" in Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia. Unlike in the Cold War, Soviet military bases are unlikely to appear in Southeast Asia and the Russians seem to have little interest in the South Pacific - unlike China these days.

Fifth, however, we can expect heightened Russian interest in intelligence activities in Australia - similar to those in the Cold War -

to get access to the secrets of our US-sourced advanced military platforms and missile systems. That will require us to rebuild our counter-espionage agencies, which were rundown too much after the collapse of the USSR.

Sixth, we need to monitor closely Russian weapons supplies into our region and especially those that will help China extend its strategic reach (for example, modern quiet submarines and accurate long-range missiles). They will erode our traditional margin of technological military superiority in future. We will need to factor that into our long-term military planning.

And, finally, the intelligence and policy community in Canberra needs to put Russia back on its agenda in a rather more serious way.

¹ See Pierre Hassner, "One Cold War Among Many?", *Survival* (Vol. 50, No. 5, October/November 2008) p. 248.

² Paul Dibb, "The Bear is Back", *The American Interest* (Vol. II, No. 2, November/December 2006) p. 85.

³ Paul Goble, "Window on Eurasia: What the Georgian Events Demonstrate", <http://windowoneurasia.blogspot.com/2008/08/window-on-eurasia-what-georgian-events.html> , cited in Pierre Hassner, p. 255, note 1.

⁴ Geoffrey Hosking, *Russia and the Russians* (London: Allen Lane The Penguin Press, 2001), p. 613.

⁵ *Strategic Comments*, Vol. 14, Issue 7, September 2008, p.1.

⁶ George Friedman, "Georgia and the Balance of Power", *The New York Review of Books*, Vol. 55, No. 14, September 25, 2008 (<http://www.nybooks.com/articles/21772>)

⁷ Alexander Solzhenitsyn, *Rebuilding Russia* (London: HarperCollins Publishers, 1991), pp. 17-18.

⁸ *Stratfor Geopolitical Daily*, 6 November 2008. Iskander is a short-range, high speed missile capable of carrying a conventional or nuclear warhead. It has terminal manoeuvring capabilities designed to avoid countermeasures and missile defences.

⁹ Coral Bell, *Living with Giants: Finding Australia's place in a more complex world* (Canberra: Australian Strategic Policy Institute, 2005), p. 36.

¹⁰ George Friedman, "The Medvedev Doctrine and American Strategy", *Stratfor Geopolitical Weekly*, 2 September, 2008.

¹¹ *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 10 October, 2008.

¹² "A time for restraint and reflection", *International Herald Tribune*, 27-28 September 2008, signed by Alexander A. Bessmertnykh, James F. Collins, Yuri V. Dubinin, Arthur A. Hartman, Jack F. Matlock, Jr., and Thomas R. Pickering.

¹³ *Ibid*

Russia-21: Understanding the Northern Giant Dr. Alexey D. Muraviev

It is possible that the turbulent years of the first decade of the twenty first century will be registered in the annals of political history as one of the most complex and controversial periods of the millennium. The tragedy of 9/11 that brought the United States to the height of its global power soon was overshadowed by major strategic blunders caused by this hyperpower, the situation that accelerated the global transformation.

The new global architecture that is currently taking shape will be based around several poles of power with Russia being one of them. Over the past seven years under the tough leadership of Vladimir Putin the nation achieved a remarkable breakthrough in rebuilding itself from the ashes of the collapsed Soviet giant.

The Five Day War over Georgia which began on 7 August 2008 placed Russia's revisionist behaviour in the spotlight. For the first time since its creation Russia openly fought in defence of national strategic interests outside its borders. What was supposed to be a *Blitz-krieg* for the US-backed regime of Mikhail Saakashvili turned out to be a 'short victorious war' for the Russians.

By challenging US-crafted regional order Moscow announced it's come back a major international player, and one of the key poles of power.

Despite Russia's obvious successes, the international community has not come to full terms as yet that the Russians are back. Just like seven years ago the rhetorical question "Who is Mr. Putin?" effectively exposed the confusion in the West and elsewhere about Russia's new charismatic leader, analysis of contemporary Russia show similar confusion, but this time about the sudden rise of a new Eurasian power.

Identifying Current Strategic Priorities

Russia's vast geography, which enables that nation to be present in or engaged with several geopolitical areas simultaneously complemented by rich but often controversial political history, complicates analysis of its major strategic priorities. This becomes particularly evident when it comes to evaluating two of Russia's three principal foreign policy vectors: western (European/Transatlantic) and eastern (Pacific).

The history of Russia's engagement with the Pacific Asia originates in the 1600s, when the nation established a presence on Siberia's eastern coastline and founded the first seaport at Okhotsk in 1647. But over three hundred years of continuous engagement Russia considered the region as an area of secondary importance, giving priority to its European affairs.

This status quo began to change during the Cold War era. While, the European and Trans-Atlantic vector continued to be of primary interest to Moscow, the Far East and the Pacific featured very significantly in Soviet strategic calculus. The prospect of an all-out war with the United States (US) and its allies in the Pacific, a strategic stand-off with China between 1960s and 1980s, Soviet political engagement in Asia, the Pacific and Africa, these and many other factors signified the importance of what seemed-to-be the USSR's secondary front of the Cold War rivalry.

Throughout the 1990s, Russia's main strategic concerns continued to be directed towards the West and the South where the nation faced principal geopolitical challenges of the expanding North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO), loosened influence over Central and Eastern European buffer states, the Baltics and some former Soviet republics, as well as threats of separatism and ethno-religious terrorism in the North Caucasus.

More recently, declared intentions of Ukraine and Georgia to join NATO and the US decision to deploy third operational echelon of the strategic Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) defence system in the Czech Republic and Poland, paralleled with growing criticism about Russia's 'managed' democracy sparked not just a sharp criticism and warnings of a new era of East-West heightened geopolitical rivalry (culminated in Putin's high-impact speech given at the security conference in Munich in February 2007).

Moscow has also shown its political will to employ a combined hard power approach in defence of its national interests, ranging from the announcement of the unilateral moratorium regarding the Conventional Forces in Europe (CFE) Treaty, to the highly publicised test launches of new land- and sea-based ballistic missiles, out-of-area naval deployments, to the actual use of military force, as demonstrated during the Five Day War. The most recent step was announced by President Dmitry Medvedev on 5 November 2008, during his address to the Federal Assembly: in response to US ABM strategic initiative in Europe Russia will halt the reduction of its strategic nuclear arsenal and will deploy counter measures (including new-generation *Iskander* tactical missiles) to the Kaliningrad enclave.¹

Medvedev's address has once again highlighted Russia's preoccupation with immediate strategic concerns to the west and south-west of its borders. Indeed, Russia's current foreign policy priorities could be identified in the following order:

1. Former Soviet space (Commonwealth of Independent States);
2. Europe and the United States;
3. Asia-Pacific-Indian Ocean region (APIOR);
4. Middle East, Latin and South America;
5. The remainder of the international community.

Retaining the political and economic dominance within former Soviet borders (with an exception of the Baltics for the time being) is part of Russia's reassertion as the regional superpower and the global power broker. Europe is critical to Russia because of its geographical proximity, prospects of political collaboration, particularly with Western European leading players and, simply because the European Union is Russia's largest economic partner.

The strategic relationship with the United States is driven by a pragmatic understanding of the need to maintain strong political and economic links with the global superpower, links that offer more dividends to both sides than a simple coexistence of the poles of power that consider each other as rivals. This approach dominates over a combination of geopolitical and geostrategic 'flash points' accumulated over the past seventeen years:

- Persistent reconfiguration of the strategic balance of forces in Europe through expanding NATO organisational framework, the final disintegration of the former Yugoslavia, and plans to offset US-Russia strategic nuclear parity (ABM dilemma);
- Support and orchestration of regime changes ('coloured revolutions') inside the former Soviet space;
- Ignoring Russia's national interests and continuous efforts to marginalise it as an international player.

Russia-2008 is a revisionist player with a clear sense of strategic direction and a power base sufficient to press ahead by employing a combined 'soft'/hard' power approach. The nation has globalised interests that stretch well beyond Eurasia. Its hungry and highly opportunistic authoritarian capitalism seeks new markets, while the Kremlin creates regional political and security networks in support of these and other long-term goals.

At the same time it is important to note that Russia will not substitute the fallen Soviet Union. The nation doesn't have neither the resources to fight for global dominance, nor the political desire to take on this unrealistic burden. Nevertheless, Moscow wants to be recognised as one of the principal centres of global power, an ambition that the Russians consider to be sufficiently realistic to accomplish.

To achieve this strategic end Russia strives to position itself as Eurasia's hegemon, the supreme political, economic and military power inside the former Soviet space, and an active heavyweight in adjacent areas. By intervening in Georgian conflict, Moscow made its claim clear. The command of the 'Heartland' will enable Russia to play a high impact role in key geopolitical areas, including the Pacific, in the coming Asian century.

However, the continuing preoccupation with the immediate neighbourhood and the Trans-Atlantic direction does not overshadow the Pacific vector. On the contrary, the area has been viewed by Moscow no longer as a rear door by more as the future front porch that can bring strong economic and political dividends.

The Pacific Vector

Throughout the 1990s the analysts and policy makers in Asia and the Pacific considered Russia as a peripheral player in-being with marginalised interests and even fewer options to exercise influence in the region. For example, Austin and Gallan effectively compared Pacific Russia with a "terrier at the feet of Asia's great powers."² To date, these perceptions are widely shared in Australia, particularly in the context of understanding the nation's current and future role and place in regional affairs. The Australian Strategic Policy Institute's (ASPI) Strategic Assessment for 2008 show cases a predominant local understanding on Russia's political weight in the region:

Russia will remain an isolated and frustrated power, largely ineffectual in the region. It has some cards to play on the global stage, including as a newly enriched energy supplier and a traditional arms supplier, but those cards will buy it relatively little influence in Asia.³

This critical view is based on the analysis of post-1991 developments and array challenges that the nation is facing to the east of Ural mountains, such as significant reductions in power projection capabilities, economic and demographic crisis, particularly in Eastern Siberia and the Far East, underdeveloped physical infrastructure, the need to respond to challenges in Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia, and other factors.

However, the same factors drive Russia's desire to reengage with Pacific Asia. The new ruling elite in Moscow has declared the development of relations with the region a matter of strategic importance based on the country's long-term strategic interests. Contrary to the Cold War era, when military-strategic and ideological considerations were the prime basis of Soviet Pacific strategy, the twenty first century reengagement is driven by long-term economic goals. Russia is positioning itself as a future strategic transit link between Pacific Asia and Western Europe, and a major supplier of much needed energy resources.

To achieve this goal the Russian Government plans to considerably modernise its existing and build new marine infrastructure (currently, sea transport accounts for 97 per cent of transport services offered by the Russians to foreign clients in the Pacific), and to expand land-based communications networks. For example, on 29 September 2008 President Medvedev and his South Korean counterpart Lee Myung Bak announced plans to connect the TransKorean railway with Russia's TransSiberian railway (*TransSib*), thus creating a strategic link between Western European

and Russian industrial and transport hubs of South Korean ice-free ports – gateways into East Asia.⁴ The modernisation of the Pacific marine infrastructure will include upgrades of main ice-free ports, among them Vladivostok, Nakhodka, Vostochny, and Khasan.

The role of the Far Eastern seaports as points of entry, just like Murmansk in the north, will only grow in the future, especially in the context of Russia's continuous economic growth and the expansionist energy strategy, aimed at transforming Russia into an energy superpower. In early October 2008 Russian officials opened the first stage (1,105 km) of the 4,200 km-long strategic pipeline network 'Eastern Siberia–Pacific Ocean' (ESPO), which is suppose to allow the transportation of oil and gas from Eastern Siberia to the clientele in East, North, and Southeast Asia, and the US west coast.⁵ It is expected that the ESPO network will become operational in 2010 and will be able to pump up to 30 million tonnes a year.⁶

The Russians are also acquiring a fleet of very large crude and LNG/LPG carriers from Japan and South Korea and upgrading their Far Eastern oil and gas processing facilities. Combined with the commenced modernisation of marine infrastructure and the ESPO pipeline network development as well as already existing energy projects on Russia's continental shelf near the Sakhalin Island, these steps undertaken by the Russian Government in recent years aim to create a potent energy supply chain aimed at securing a niche in the APIOR's energy market.

To ensure that these ambitions will be realised and to address some urgent problems such as population decline, underdeveloped regional infrastructure and other the Russian Government has approved a special-purpose federal program entitled 'The Economic and Social Development of the Far East and the TransBaikal Region until the Year 2013' and allocated an excess of 500 billion rubles to fund the initiatives outlined there. About a quarter of the allocated funds (203 billion) will be spent on the development of Vladivostok, Russia's

principal regional centre, the main gateway into Pacific Asia, and a host city of the 2013 APEC summit.⁷

By exploring the untapped resources of eastern Siberia and the Far East, including the continental shelf, by building a powerful pipeline network, which will be linked to a modernised marine infrastructure enabling the nation to reach clients as far as Southeast and South Asia, by offering its territory as a strategic transit point linking the Pacific Asia with Europe and visa versa, Russia will position itself as a strong economic partner. These plans may also rectify the local demographic crisis and improve the living conditions and the economic appeal of the Russian Far East.

Another major consideration for the Russians to give the Pacific vector prominence in the coming decade is a more traditional geo-strategic factor. While assessing the possibility of the country becoming engaged in a large-scale military conflict in the future, Russian strategic and defence thinkers do not rule out the chance of a serious military conflict in the Far East and Western Pacific. For example, one of Russia's most prominent strategic thinkers, General Makhmut Gareev, came to the conclusion that the "most acute outbreak of struggle may be anticipated in Asia and the Pacific."⁸ Two scenarios dominate ongoing debates: a war with China over the Far East, and China waging war against a US-led regional coalition for supreme dominance in the Asia-Pacific region, with Russia indirectly involved in the confrontation. However, neither of the scenarios expected to unfold in the next ten years.⁹

These prognoses are likely to trigger a substantial upgrade of Russia's defence capability east of the Urals, but not before similar modernisation program will be complete in the country's western and south western regions. In the near-term future, efforts will be concentrated on upgrading defensive posture, except for the Russian Pacific Fleet, which is expected to be reconfigured into once again Russia's most potent ocean-going naval grouping with new-generation *Borey* class nuclear-powered ballistic missile submarines

being based in Kamchatka, and with general-purpose forces being rebuild around two to three carrier battle groups.¹⁰

From the military-strategic viewpoint the Pacific provides Russia with a platform to showcase its grown strength to potential allies and friends and to display its asymmetric responses to the West's efforts to contain the country. For example, Putin's decision in August 2007 to recommence strategic bomber patrols over the Arctic, Atlantic, and the Pacific is more than a show of Russia's grown military capability and a muscular reverence toward the West and the rest.

If aerial patrols over the Arctic could be regarded as a power support of the declared national interests in the area, the resumption of the operational activity over the Pacific, particularly in the areas of heavy maritime traffic and Russia's economic interests has a dual purpose: 1) to demonstrate principal clients and friends in Northeast, Southeast and South Asia the nation's ability to protect the supply of strategic raw materials (oil and gas in the near future); 2) to show existing and potential partners (including members and observers of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO)) and other players Russia's capacity to project power and offer military support if necessary; 3) to display the retained capability to pressure strategic maritime links should the power competition between Russia and US-led maritime coalitions escalate.

Russia is accelerating efforts in developing regional political and security frameworks that would suit its long-term agendas. Strong political dividends may come from a prospect of forming a powerful security framework under the auspice of SCO (Shanghai Cooperation Organisation). It is becoming clear that the Russians desire to use the SCO as a balancer against Western maritime coalitions and the guardian the great Eurasian and later Asian space. The manoeuvres *Peace Mission 2007* demonstrate that Moscow pursues the idea of creating a defence component, or at least coalition of the willing, but *under its control*. If these plans become a reality, the international and particularly the Pacific community will see the emergency of a powerful nuclear coalition of continental and littoral states with

agenda stretching from Eastern Europe and the Baltics, to the Arctic, the Pacific and, possibly the Indian Ocean. At the same time, it is important to note that the SCO's 'threat factor' should be assessed with a degree of caution, given continuous quite power struggle for control between Russia and China.

Lessons for Australia

Under the Coalition, the Australia-Russia relations began experiencing a slow but steady growth, culminating in September 2007 Putin's visit to Sydney, during which a major multi-billion dollar contract concerning the commercial sale of the Australian Uranium to Russia was signed. However, following the events in Georgia and, also in response to some public criticism, the Rudd Government took a pause in ratifying the agreement.¹¹

It seems that debates about the uranium agreement overshadow a much deeper problem that may affect future development of bilateral relations between Australia and Russia, the problem of understanding the latter's strategic behaviour, including its long-term objectives as a global power and a Pacific player.

Russia's current strategic policy is based on 360° approach, where all first three priorities (CIS (Commonwealth of Independent States), Europe/US, Asia-Pacific-Indian Ocean) come first with more interlinkages between the three emerging, one of them is SCO. The Pacific is as important to Russia as its Eurasian neighbourhood or the principal power poles. It provides the nation with new economic opportunities and an extra space for political-military manoeuvring. Whilst the Russians will try to avoid sliding into a new escalation phase of East-West strategic rivalry, they may use the area to demonstrate what they can do should the confrontation become unavoidable.

The Western and the Pacific community, including Australia, should come to terms with the fact that Russia is back and its might is on the rise. The nation's return as a formidable Pacific player may not necessarily destabilise the regional balance. Russia remains an important contributor to the Global War on Terror (particularly in Afghanistan) and is becoming increasingly prominent as a leading provider of energy resources, especially taking into consideration mounting instability in the Middle East and unsettled behaviour of individual supplier-states such as Venezuela. In the longer run the nation may become a key player in the region's efforts to restore stability in Korea and possibly to contain China, which many in Russia consider as a future security challenge.

The long-term economic agenda and the clear interest to cooperate, not to confront drives this comeback. Russia's intention to build credible military capability in the Pacific this time is not driven by threat perceptions alone, but by a pragmatic need to protect its national economic and political interests. This is a reflection of a behaviour of a power that it is experiencing a major transformation of its strategic culture, by shifting focus from inland to the global maritime domain. In this context, the Russia factor should once again be included in Australia's strategic calculus.

¹ 'Address to the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation', *President of Russia* (official web portal), 5 November 2008, at: http://www.kremlin.ru/eng/text/speeches/2008/11/05/2144_type70029type82917type127286_208836.shtml, accessed on 11 November 2008; also see Ivan Konovalov, 'Protivoraketnaya Oborona' [Anti-Ballistics Missile Defence], *Kommersant*, 6 October 2008, p. 2..

² Greg Austin and Tim Callan, 'Russia: a Terrier at the Feet of Asia's Great Powers' in Gary Klitworth (ed.), *Asia-Pacific Security. Less Uncertainty, New Opportunities?*, New York: St. Martin's Press, 1996, pp. 79-93.

³ Rod Lyon and Christine Leah, 'Global Jigsaw. ASPI's Strategic Assessment 2008', *ASPI Strategy*, Canberra: The Australian Strategic Policy Institute, October 2008, p. 30.

⁴ Artem Aniskin, 'TransSib Doshel do Korei' [The TransSib Reached Korea], *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, 30 September 2008, at: <http://www.kp.ru/daily/24172/383392/print/>, accessed on 30 September 2008.

⁵ Igor Novikov, 'Vostochny Vybor Rossii' [Russia's Eastern Choice], *Krasnaya Zvezda*, 15 October 2008, at: http://redstar.ru/2008/10/15_10/4_01.html, accessed on 15 October 2008.

⁶ It will reach its full potential in 2023. By then, Russian Pacific pipeline network will pump about 80 million tonnes a year. Novikov, 'Vostochny Vybor Rossii'.

⁷ 'Pravitel'stvo Prinyalo Popravki v FPTs po Razvitiu Dal'nego Vostoka' [The Government Approved Changes to the Federal Program on the Development of the Far East], *RIA Novosti*, 4 August 2008.

⁸ Makhmut Gareev, *If War Comes Tomorrow? The Contours of Future Armed Conflict*, London: Frank Cass, 1998, p. 36.

⁹ Peter Rainow, 'If War Will Come Tomorrow', in Stephen J. Cimbala (ed.), *The Russian Military into the Twenty-First Century*, London: Frank Cass, 2001 pp. 43–4.

¹⁰ 'Rossiya Sozdast na Severnom i Tikhookeanskom Flotakh Avianosnye Gruppy' [Russia will Create Carrier Battle Groups on the Northern and Pacific Fleets], *RIA Novosti*, 27 July 2008; Konstantin Lobkov, 'TOF Budet s Bulavoi' [The Pacific Fleet will be with the 'Bulava'], *Krasnaya Zvezda*, 28 October 2008, at: http://www.redstar.ru/2008/10/28_10/1_02.html, accessed on 28 October 2008.

¹¹ Brendan Nicholson, 'Russian Uranium Deal under Threat', *The Age*, 19 September 2008, p. 11

Russia and Eurasian Security: Pragmatism and Geopolitical Ambition in the CSTO (Collective Security Treaty Organisation)

Dr. Kirill Nourzhanov

The collapse of the USSR in 1991 triggered a frenzy of alliance-making involving the former Soviet republics. The array of regional blocs and associations and their objectives has been astounding. Better-known entities such as the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) with its catch-all membership and a broad remit covering anything from nuclear non-proliferation to geological survey and veterinarian control have shared space with short-lived or virtual ventures like the Central Asian Union (CAU) or the Black Sea Economic Cooperation group (BSEC).

The Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO) stands out from the post-Soviet alphabet soup for a variety of reasons. First, it is the only multilateral organisation explicitly dedicated to collective security with a substantial military component. Second, unlike the multitude of institutional paper tigers, it appears to have achieved some practical results in underwriting conventional security of member states. Finally, CSTO is currently the most important geopolitical project pursued by the Kremlin in Eurasia. It is impossible to understand Russian strategic ambitions and intentions in the region without a closer look at the bloc.

The demise of the CIS and the rise of the CSTO

Looking at CSTO gives an insight into Russia's great power ambitions, relations with former Soviet republics and approach

towards NATO and its member states. The CSTO arose from the detritus of the CIS Collective Security Treaty (CST), which was signed on 15 May 1992 in Tashkent. The Treaty provided for the preservation of the integrated military infrastructure of the USSR and collective defence in case of external aggression. The CST and the CIS as a whole were viewed by the administration of President Boris Yeltsin as a means of reintegrating the former Soviet republics under Russian leadership. Although by 1994, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Kazakstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan had acceded to the Treaty, it remained a dead letter. The lack of consensus on the definition of external threat, extreme nationalism of the newly independent states, multiple conflicts among them, apprehension of Russia's dominant role, and limited resources at Moscow's disposal contributed to the failure of the project.¹

The leaders of Azerbaijan and Georgia joined the CST with great reluctance, as a price for Russia's mediation in conflicts on their territories, and withdrew from it in 1999. They were followed by Uzbekistan, whose President, Islam Karimov, was frustrated by Moscow's insensitivity to his security concerns centered on the Taliban regime in neighbouring Afghanistan and home-grown Islamic extremists. Even those who chose to stay and signed the protocol on CST extension in 1999 limited their cooperation with the Kremlin to a bare minimum and refused to subscribe to Yeltsin's by-then-entrenched vision of NATO as the paramount security threat.

The change of guard in Moscow in 2000 marked a dramatic shift in Russian policy towards the former Soviet republics. President Vladimir Putin quickly abandoned Yeltsin's unbridled integrationism redolent of imperialism, and announced a pragmatic course based on energetic pursuit of Russian security interests. Despite continuing rhetorical commitment to the CIS, the Kremlin no longer regarded it as a primary instrument of achieving its objectives in Eurasia. Putin took stock of the moribund organization in 2005: "If someone was expecting some particular achievements from the CIS in, say, the

economy, in political or military cooperation and so on, it is clear that this was not going to happen because it could not happen”.²

The *National Security Concept of the Russian Federation*, published in January 2000, was thus a rather inward-looking document. While still identifying NATO as the greatest potential military threat, it identified the risks associated with poor economic conditions, separatism, terrorism, transnational crime, and spillover effects from regional conflicts as immediate challenges. This shift in security perceptions was congruent with similar developments in many of the former Soviet republics. After a decade of more or less successful existence as sovereign nation-states they were no longer fearful of aggression from Russia or any other country, focusing instead on a new generation of domestic, regional, and transnational threats.

In May 2000, the presidents of Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia and Tajikistan produced a declaration pledging renewed cooperation in the sphere of domestic, regional, and international security, with an important caveat that such cooperation would not limit their sovereign rights to develop military ties with third parties and international organisations. In October 2002, the same actors signed the Charter of the Collective Security Treaty Organisation, and two years later the CSTO was granted observer status at the UN General Assembly.

The CSTO retained the original Tashkent Treaty as one of its governing documents, including its Article 4 stipulating unconditional collective defence in case of aggression. However, it has proved to be a qualitatively new regional alliance compared to the CIS security arrangements.

In terms of its normative parameters, the CSTO has moved from a narrow focus on collective defence to a much broader notion of collective security, which is amended and adapted as the situation demands. For example, at the Astana Summit in 2004, CSTO members agreed to help each other in dealing with internal conflicts

arising from ‘political, economic, ethno-religious, territorial and other contradictions’, using peacekeeping troops if required.³ This additional guarantee of regime security was particularly welcomed by weak Central Asian states, and was instrumental in bringing Uzbekistan into the CSTO following the bloody Andijan uprising in May 2005.

According to the CSTO Charter, each member has equal voting rights and all decisions are made consensually. Unlike the CIS, the implementation record for these decisions is rather good. Individual countries adopt the necessary legislation quickly and in full. Even Uzbekistan, a notoriously sluggish latecomer, had ratified 80 binding CSTO agreements and protocols by March 2008.

The CSTO boasts a ramified and well-endowed institutional structure. Its top political bodies include the Collective Security Council, comprising heads of state, the Councils of foreign and defence ministers, and the Committee of the Chairmen of the National Security Councils. In 2006, the CSTO Parliamentary Assembly was established. The Organisation’s permanent agencies are directed by the Secretary-General – former Chief of Russia’s Federal Border Protection Service and Secretary of the Security Council of the Russian Federation, Col.-Gen. Nikolai Bordyuzha. The Joint Staff coordinates operations in three regional commands: Eastern European, Caucasian, and Central Asian. The first two are sites for Russian-Belarusian and Russian-Armenian groups of forces, while in Central Asia the multilateral Collective Rapid Deployment Forces (CRDF) have been created, incorporating ten battalions totaling 4,000 servicemen.

In 2006 the CSTO decided to set up Collective Peacekeeping Forces (CPF). Whereas regional groups and CRDF are designed to deal with external attack or transborder terrorist incursions (as was the case with the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan in 1999 and 2000), the CPF would be involved in mitigating internal conflicts, and would comprise police and civilian personnel as well as military units.

According to the CSTO Deputy Secretary-General, Col.-Gen. Valerii Semerikov, the CPF would number 4-5 thousand personnel in a high state of alert, and would not require a sanction from the UN or any other international body to deploy.⁴

Joint counter-narcotics operations and regular military exercises constitute the most salient form of cooperative activity within the CSTO. Since 2003, Operation *Kanal* has been an annual event involving personnel from police, state security, customs and border protection departments who target illicit trafficking. More than 90 thousand officers from six countries participated in *Kanal-2007*, which led to the interdiction of 10 tons of narcotic substances, disruption of 456 gangs, and confiscation of 687 illegal firearms.⁵

Military exercises called ‘Rubezh’ have been held each year since 2004. Usually they focus on counter-terrorism or search-and-rescue scenarios and are designed to improve coordination between regular army units, police, and emergency services. *Rubezh-2008* was an exception: held in Armenia last July, it rehearsed for the first time a joint operation to defend territorial integrity of a CSTO member in the face of external aggression. As Bordyuzha commented in the lead-up to the event, its objective was to “test one of the variants of operational decision-making ... in the interests of ensuring security of the Republic of Armenia under conditions of the deteriorating military-political situation”.⁶ This was a barely camouflaged warning to Azerbaijan and its supporters in the West not to do anything precipitate about the frozen conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh.

Russia and the CSTO

At its inception, the CSTO clearly belonged to the functionalist category of alliances according to the taxonomy suggested by Gregory Gleason: “Functionalism relies on the idea that incremental steps toward carefully defined mutually beneficial policies are more likely to lead to enduring forms of cooperation”.⁷ A shared security

agenda coupled with Moscow's abrogation of the neo-imperial high-handedness of the Yeltsin years ensured the bloc's success. Nonetheless, in recent months Russia's hegemonic role in the CSTO has become quite pronounced, and may undermine its cohesion and prospects in the long run.

As a regional superpower, Russia has been organically predisposed to dominate the bloc. It underwrites half of the CSTO operational budget. Its military-industrial complex still has a near-monopoly on supplying national armies and security services in the former Soviet republics. Indeed, the ability to procure military goods and services at low internal Russian prices is one of the major factors sustaining the bloc. Moscow is shouldering the bulk of expenditure in creating the integrated systems of air defence, early warning, and command and control in three security regions.⁸

The Kremlin has led the move to revive traditional economic ties and divisions of labour among arms manufacturers in the CSTO. In Bordyuzha's words, "in the USSR, there existed cooperation in military industry. It is in ruins today, but it can be restored, as the relevant technological potential has not been lost yet".⁹ Arms firms from the former Soviet republics have been invited to take part in research and development on new weapons systems sponsored by the Russian government. In August 2008, the CSTO had a separate exposition at a high-profile international arms fair in Moscow, indicating that the Kremlin's allies are now allowed to join the gravy train of Russian military exports worth US\$8 billion a year.¹⁰

Each year around 2,500 officers and cadets from Armenia, Belarus and Central Asia receive education in Russian military institutes and academies. By way of comparison, the total number of trainees from the CSTO states studying elsewhere abroad does not exceed fifty.¹¹ The Russian language has been accepted as a standard medium of communication in all CSTO structures.

A sort of dependency may have emerged between the non-Russian CSTO members and Moscow, but so long as security and material dividends outweighed potential risks, they did not seem to mind. There is evidence, however, that this is beginning to change, and the main reason is the shift in Moscow's understanding of the bloc's purpose and direction.

The latest *Foreign Policy Concept* promulgated by President Dmitry Medvedev in July 2008 undertakes to “promote in every possible way the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) as a key instrument to maintain stability and ensure security in the CIS area focusing on adapting the CSTO as a multifunctional integration body to the changing environment”.¹² Apart from the reappearance of the word ‘integration’, which is at loggerheads with the sovereign sensibilities of other CSTO members, this document contains two other controversial ideas. First, there is a notion of exclusivity – apart from a token reference to the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), no other international organisation is given any role in the security architecture of the CIS. Second, the Concept implies that any third country intending to pursue its legitimate security interests in the CSTO zone of responsibility must do so through the CSTO channels. This of course severely limits the room for manoeuvre for individual CSTO members, who, for instance, are not averse to doing business with NATO or the US. A good example of changes was furnished by the negotiations earlier this year over the transport corridor to supply NATO troops in Afghanistan by land from Europe. The Central Asian republics did not have much input as Russia insisted on conducting these talks under the CSTO aegis, effectively acting on their behalf.¹³

A most disconcerting development for smaller countries in the CSTO has been Moscow's recent attempts to position the alliance as a *global* rather than regional player. While they may appreciate Russia's contribution to their security, they have no desire to progress from security politics to geopolitics of (counter-) containment and end up as pawns in some strategic great game. When Moscow tentatively

suggested in 2005 that the CSTO consider creation of joint combat groups comprising entire divisions and army corps rather than battalions, this idea was quickly rejected. And yet in September 2008 Bordyuzha resuscitated the idea for the Central Asian region, citing the imperatives of what he called ‘political deterrence’ (*politicheskoe sderzhivanie*).¹⁴ There could be only one object of such deterrence in the area – US forces in Afghanistan. Moscow’s paranoia may have been incited by an enigmatic reference to the “CENTCOM master plan for future access to and operations in Central Asia”¹⁵ produced in 2007 by the CENTCOM chief, Admiral William Fallon, but the reaction of the Central Asian leaders to the appearance of tens of thousands of troops under CSTO (read – Moscow’s) control on their territory continues to be negative.

Over the past two years CSTO declarations and resolutions have contained a growing number of references to the security dilemmas facing Russia rather than all member states. These include Moscow’s apprehension about the deficiencies of the *Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe* (CFE), which gave NATO threefold superiority in tanks, armoured vehicles and artillery systems over Russia,¹⁶ as well as its strenuous objections to the US missile shield plans in Europe. Multilateral endorsement and legitimation of such concerns is valuable to Russia, but CSTO leaders are starting to show reluctance in rubber-stamping far-reaching statements emanating from Moscow that do not necessarily correspond to their hierarchy of security threats. One example of this is the final communiqué of the September 2008 CSTO Collective Security Council session, which took place shortly after the Russo-Georgian war. It failed to follow the script proposed by the Kremlin and denounce the ‘Georgian aggression’, merely registering “deep concern over Georgia’s attempt to resolve the conflict in South Ossetia by force”.¹⁷ The unilateral recognition of Abkhazia’s and South Ossetia’s independence by Russia was not supported. President Medvedev had to work extra hard engaging in ‘honest and direct’ discussion with fellow-presidents to secure even a semblance of approbation for Russian actions in the Transcaucasus.¹⁸

Coordination of the security agenda through hierarchy, so typical of the erstwhile Warsaw Pact, would not work in the case of the CSTO. It is hard to disagree with Weinstein's assessment: "The smaller states of the CSTO are not pure satellites: they do not depend upon Moscow for social, political, or economic sustenance, nor are they in immediate danger of doing so. Notwithstanding Russian rhetoric to the contrary, the alliance is certainly not cemented by fraternal or ideological bonds."¹⁹ Should the Kremlin wish to continue using the CSTO as a tool of military and security policy, it would be best advised to resist the temptations of hegemony.

The CSTO and NATO

Nowadays the description of NATO and the CSTO as antagonistic mirror images of each other is almost *de rigueur*. Addressing students in Dushanbe in 2007, Bordyuzha opined that "the CSTO is a NATO analogue, albeit still in a different 'weight category'", and added that NATO deliberately worked against security consolidation in the CIS.²⁰ Such rigid juxtaposition is a fairly recent phenomenon. The CST Security Concept formulated in 1995 (and still listed as a foundational document on the CSTO website) envisaged "the establishment and advancement of equal partnership relations with NATO and other military-political organizations and regional security structures, aimed at effective resolution of tasks of strengthening peace".²¹ The events of 9/11 and the ensuing war on terrorism generated a great deal of sympathy and understanding towards the US and its allies' security agenda in Russia and all other former Soviet republics. As a result, NATO bases were set up in Central Asia. In June 2004, the CSTO summit approved the *Document on the Main Directions of Cooperation between the CSTO and NATO*, which proposed a wide range of collaborative measures against terrorism, drug trafficking and WMD proliferation.

Essentially, this was a roadmap for a security condominium, and a shared responsibility for policing Eurasia.

Such proposals were ignored and ultimately rejected by NATO – or to be more precise, by the US – out of fear that formal recognition of the CSTO security role would enhance Russia’s positions in Eurasia. This fear stems from a fundamentally flawed and reductionist view held by the neo-con decision-makers in Washington that “Russia has formed the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) to prevent local states from aligning with the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)”.²² The US strategy of choice, based on dealing bilaterally with individual countries, has been doomed to failure, raising Russian suspicions and antagonizing local regimes.

Viewed in realist terms, the security dilemma of smaller former Soviet republics invokes a decision as to which great power represents a more pressing threat. The US wins hands down in this contest. Its aggression in Iraq, erratic performance in Afghanistan and, especially, export of democracy which directly affects regime security in many of the post-Soviet states made the choice easy: “The republics have clearly determined that the balancing of Western military influence, even if it cedes Russia more power, is an acceptable relative gain.”²³

The CSTO came into existence as a voluntary association of countries interested in collective action against transnational security threats, but perceived ignorance, intransigence, double standards, and aggressiveness of the West have cemented the bloc and expedited the growing Russian hegemony in it. Commenting on a series of regime changes known as ‘coloured revolutions’ which took place between 2003 and 2005 and were at least indirectly supported by the West, the CSTO Secretary-General wrote: “We are ... increasingly concerned over ... external pressure methods that verge on interference in the internal affairs of the CSTO member-states. Some well-coordinated actions and campaigns are organized to bring political, economic and information pressure to bear from the

outside.”²⁴ An expert from a government think-tank in Kyrgyzstan was more blunt in his assessment of the situation, calling on the CSTO to “counteract effectively the US humanitarian aggression against Eurasian space”.²⁵

In March 2008 the CSTO made a principle decision to drop further attempts to find common ground with NATO and focus instead on building ties with the European Union. In the words of Bordyuzha, “strategic relations with Europe from now on will be constructed directly, without the participation of the USA”.²⁶ While the extent of the EU’s enthusiasm for partnership with the CSTO remains a speculative issue, this approach tallies up well with Moscow’s post-Georgian war effort to start a dialogue about a new European security system which would supersede the obsolete Helsinki Final Act of 1975.

Conclusion

The CSTO project has been a success story for Russian policy and diplomacy. Moscow has learned from the failure of the CIS and opted for a tighter focus both in terms of the extent of its security objectives and their geographic scope. Working in cooperation with a handful of pivotal states in Eurasia, the Russian government has achieved a tangible reduction in threats and acquired loyal allies. It has also attained the status of a recognised leader at least among half of the former Soviet republics, which feeds into the domestic discourse of ‘resurgent Russia’ by Putin and Medvedev, contributing to their popularity at home. Enhanced security and prestige come at a price, mostly in terms of money but also the unenviable international reputation as a protector of unsavoury authoritarian regimes.

Through a force of circumstances rather than by design, Russia has now obtained an opportunity to use the CSTO as an instrument of grand strategy going beyond its proclaimed zone of security interests. If it yields to the temptation of challenging NATO in Afghanistan,

the Transcaucasus and Eastern Europe, the CSTO will not last long. If, however, it stays on course by using the CSTO as a vehicle for dealing with regional conflicts and security threats, there is every reason for the CSTO to go from strength to strength.²⁷

¹ Richard Sakwa, Mark Webber, "The Commonwealth of Independent States, 1991-1998: Stagnation and Survival", *Europe-Asia Studies*, Vol. 51, No. 3, 1999, pp. 383-384.

² "Press Conference Following Russian-Armenian Talks", *Official web portal of the President of Russia*, 25 March 2005, http://www.kremlin.ru/eng/text/speeches/2005/03/25/2234_type82914type82915_85953.shtml, accessed on 10 November 2008.

³ *Kontsepsiia formirovaniia i funktsionirovaniia mekhanizma mirotvorcheskoi deiatel'nosti ODKB*. 18 June 2004, <http://www.lawmix.ru/abro.php?id=92>, accessed on 9 November 2008.

⁴ Quoted in "ODKB nadevaet golubye kaski", *Voенno-promyshlennyi kur'er*, 28 November 2007.

⁵ "ODKB planiruet sozdat' tsentralnoaziatskii regionalnyi antinarkoticheskii proekt", *Novosti-Armenia*, 7 November 2007, <http://newsarmenia.ru/sng1/20071107/41765950.html>, accessed on 29 October 2008.

⁶ Nikolai Bordiuzha, "Kollektivnaia oborona v deistvii", *Krasnaia Zvezda*, 22 July 2008.

⁷ Gregory Gleason, "Inter-State Cooperation in Central Asia from the CIS to the Shanghai Forum", *Europe-Asia Studies*, Vol. 53, No. 7, 2001, p. 1079.

⁸ Oleg Gorupai, "ODKB: osnovnaia struktura bezopasnosti", *Krasnaia zvezda*, 18 September 2008.

⁹ "Gosudarstva ODKB budut sovместno finansirovat' raboty po sozdaniiu novykh obraztsov vooruzheniia", *MFIT*, 30 December 2004, <http://www.mfit.ru/defensive/obzor/ob30-12-04-3.html>, accessed on 12 October 2008.

¹⁰ Yuri Avdeev, "Nam est' chto miru pokazat'", *Krasnaia zvezda*, 7 Aug 2008.

¹¹ Viktor Mikhailov, "Rossiia kuet kadry dlia ODKB", *Nezavisimoe voенnoe obozrenie*, 28 March 2008.

¹² "The Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation", *Official web portal of the President of Russia*, 12 July 2008, <http://www.kremlin.ru/eng/text/docs/2008/07/204750.shtml> accessed on 14 October 2008.

¹³ M K Bhadrakumar, “The Taliban's shadow hangs over NATO”, *Asia Times*, 8 April 2008.

¹⁴ Quoted in “NATO v tiubeteikakh”, *Vremya novostei*, 15 September 2008.

¹⁵ Gareth Porter, “You need Uncle Sam, Iraq told”, *Asia Times*, 26 July 2008.

¹⁶ For a detailed discussion of the CFE Treaty and its impact on the CSTO, see Azhdar Kurtov, “The CSTO, GUAM: Transformation of the Post-Soviet Area”, *Central Asia and the Caucasus*, No. 3-4(51-52), 2008, pp. 262-276.

¹⁷ “The Collective Security Treaty Organisation summit”, *Official web portal of the President of Russia*, 5 September 2008, <http://www.kremlin.ru/eng/events/chronicle/2008/09/206210.shtml>, accessed on 10 November 2008.

¹⁸ See “ODKB protiv NATO i SShA: itogi vstrechi”, *Globalist*, 9 September 2008, <http://globalist.org.ua/?p=3323>, accessed on 10 November 2008.

¹⁹ Adam Weinstein. “Russian Phoenix: The Collective Security Treaty Organisation”, *The Whitehead Journal of Diplomacy and International Relations*, Vol. VIII, No. 1, 2007, p. 177.

²⁰ Quoted in Viktor Dubovitskii, “Nikolai Bordyuzha poznamomil tadjhikskikh studentov s deiatel'nost'iu ODKB i raskritikoval NATO”, *ferghana.ru*, 2 March 2007, <http://www.ferghana.ru/article.php?id=4948>, accessed on 12 November 2008.

²¹ “Kontseptsiiia kollektivnoi bezopasnosti gosudarstv – uchastnikov Dogovora o kollektivnoi bezopasnosti”, *Official CSTO internet portal*, 10 February 1995, <http://www.odkb.gov.ru/start/index.htm>, accessed on 7 October 2008.

²² Stephen J. Blank, *U.S. Interests in Central Asia and the Challenges to Them*. Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, 2007, p. 8.

²³ Weinstein, op. cit., p. 177.

²⁴ N Bordyuzha, “CSTO: Counteraction Tool against New Threats”, *International Affairs*, Vol. 53, No. 2; 2007 p. 55.

²⁵ Quoted in Pavel Kanishchev, “O zasedanii ekspertnogo soveta ODKB”, <http://www.panarin.com/comment/840>, 13 March 2008, accessed on 8 November 2008.

²⁶ Quoted in “Operatsiia ‘Drang nach Westen’”, *evrazia.org*, 13 March 2008, <http://evrazia.org/article.php?id=358>, accessed on 8 November 2008.

²⁷ The special case of CSTO fortunes in the Central Asian region in light of Sino-Russian competition and cooperation is not touched upon here. An excellent analysis can be found in Ivan Safranchuk, “The Competition for Security Roles in Central Asia”, *Russia in Global Affairs*, Vol. 6, No. 1, 2008, pp. 159-169.

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