

RUSSIA'S POLICY AND INTEREST IN CENTRAL ASIA SINCE 2000

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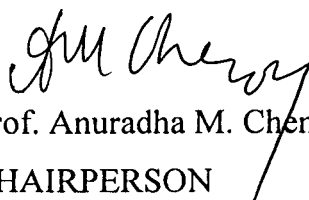
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July, 2004

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Certify that the dissertation entitled “**RUSSIA’S POLICY AND INTEREST IN CENTRAL ASIA SINCE 2000**” submitted by **Priyanka Gupta**, Centre for Russian, Central Asian and East European Studies, School of International Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi – 110 067, India, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of the Degree of **Master of Philosophy** is her own work and has not been previously submitted for any other Degree of this or any other University.

We recommend that this dissertation may placed before the examiners for evaluation for award of Degree of Master of Philosophy.


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PRIYANKA GUPTA

PREFACE

Writing on Russia's Policy and Interests in Central Asia since 2000 has been an educative exercise.

After the collapse of Soviet Union and the end of Cold War the world became unipolar as USA became the only super power. Later developments shows some sign of Multi polarity like emergence of European Union and the economic growth of China. Russia under President Putin favours a multi polar world. As Russian Prime Minister Premakov earlier on his visit to India advocated for the formation of Russia – China – India triangle. There are many obstacles in formation of such triangle. Central Asia is recognized by Russia as its zone of interest and they share a long history as a same country. This part has become geopolitically more important after the post 11 sep. 2001 attacks on US and the US war against Iraq. To preserve the Russian interest and to avoid any US domination in this area, Central Asia is important.

In the near future Russia and Central Asia and the US will play a major role in shaping the world politics of Central Asia. The US presence in this area for the exploitation of oil and natural gas will be a decisive factor for the future course of

Central Asia. Russia's close ties is essential to preserve its interest in Central Asia and to form a multipolar world and to balance the US acts in this area. As one of the players of the "New Great Game" Russian attempt is to have greater control over the region in every field.

China is also trying to have its space and Central Asia. It was in this context that the focus of the present study is to understand the Russian interests and policy in Central Asia. The region which is of great significance to India as well. It is hoped that the study will give a better perspective of Central Asia.

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CHAPTER – I

INTRODUCTION : RUSSIAN POLICY & INTEREST TOWARDS CENTRAL ASIA IN YELTSIN PERIOD

During 1992-93 Russia was working hard through a long process of change to a new type of statehood. Russia launched its systemic transition after the collapse of socialism and the subsequent break up of the Soviet Union in 1991. Hence in the initial years there was instability in Russia's foreign policy, marked by frequent zigzagging, and conflicting statements and moves. In the long run, foreign policy always depends on domestic policy. It may deviate from it one way or another, but over a longer period of evolution a country's foreign policy reflects its national interests. This is the point that has to be taken into account in any serious assessment of foreign policy. Russian foreign policy after 1991 was de-ideologized and based on its perception and of national interests.

It would be worthwhile, to see how far the foreign policy strategies of Yeltsin's period have accomplished the interests of ensuring national security in the full sense of the term, encompassing, at least, five major aspects : preservation of national integrity and survival within the given frontiers; military political security; economic security; legal protection of the population; and ecological security; in its policy towards

Central Asia. Within a year or two Central Asia came to acquire strategic significance for Russia.

CENTRAL ASIA DURING YELTSINS PERIOD

The failure of the coup in August 1991 led to acceleration and substantial expansion of the positive changes already taking place in Central Asia's society including foreign policy. Unfortunately, what has happened since, has given no reason for such optimism. This is primarily because of the uncontrolled, dis-integration of the USSR that followed the announcement by Russia, Ukraine and Belarus that they agreed to form a CIS. None of the positive expectations promoted by the founders of the CIS has been met. On the contrary, their decisions generated a whole series of vexing problems and exacerbated some existing domestic and foreign policy problems. In fact, many doubt, from a historical perspective, that the timing and the manner of the disappearance of the imperial union was hardly a forgone conclusion. On the other hand, many believe that a crisis was inevitable in the Soviet Union which could lead to disintegration.

While some believe that the essential aspect of the problem was that the overwhelming destruction of the territorial integrity of the Soviet Union was a result of the exclusively subjective ambitions of a group of political leaders and their scramble for political power rather than a consensus of all or the majority of the members of the Union.¹ It is for this reason that Russia found itself immediately faced with the problems of, for example, maintaining the security of its new frontiers; making policy in respect to the new states; overcoming the consequences of the sudden disruption of economic, transport, communication and other connections; interceding for the Russian – speaking population in the independent republics; and dealing with new regional conflicts and conflicts situation.

President Boris Yeltsin found himself in a totally different setting, confronted by principally new priorities. For an accurate assessment of the importance of these new priorities, the specific character of the relationship between Russia and the former Soviet Union needs to be taken into account.

¹ Gorbachev, Mikhael, *The August Coup: The Truth and the Lesson*, Harper Collins, London, September 1991.

By the beginning of 1995, the Central Asian states had begun to acquire some basic features of independence and sovereignty. Not only the presidential system on the pattern of the new Russian state was in position, but also central Asians states had begun to operate as independent entities; more importantly, the local communist parties as they existed earlier had gradually lost their relevance in the new emerging states. Thus on June 14, 1991, President Islam Karimov of Uzbekistan could declare before the 5th session of the 12th Supreme Soviet of Uzbekistan that “We shall deal directly with foreign countries and establish our own relations with them. I am convinced that a day will come when Uzbekistan becomes a member of the UN as an equal and sovereign state. This is our legitimate right, this is the demand of our time, and the wish of the long-suffering Uzbek people and all citizens living in the Republic, based on the international law.”² More importantly, the Central Asian states had inherited a basic attribute of the nation state, namely a substantial majority of titular nationality. In spite of the ethnic tensions, all these five Central Asian Republics (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan,

² Military Forces in Soviet Successor States, *Adelphi papers*, London, 1993.

Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan had well defined territory and core ethnic group with its own titular language and culture. This attribute was further strengthened by the traditional intermingling of nationalities and cultures within a given state boundaries as well as at the inter – regional level.

At the end of 1995, the new independent Republics of the region, with the sole exception of Tajikistan, presented a picture of relative stability. The external environment of the Central Asian was vitiated with the on going conflict in Afghanistan. This had an impact especially on Tajikistan. The Central Asian States had before them enormous problems of transition to an independent nation state, further compounded by the legacies of their immediate past. The unexpectedness of the independence meant that they were not prepared for it. The fact that they emerged as independent entities implied that they had to consolidate their independence and manage their external and internal policies on their own.

In dealing with their big neighbour, the Russian Federation, against the backdrop of historical legacies of their dependence on it was an asset as well as problem. Liability, as there was

no change of guards, no restructuring of the command and control mechanism; only labels and nomenclatures had changed, indeed a far cry from democracy and civil society. Only the future will show how this continuity/ change paradigm could operate in making these independent republics develop and become viable. However on the eve of the independence in December 1991, these states with their vast resources as well as with their new determination, certainly appeared endowed in facing new challenges ahead.

Once in complete control of the Russian state, Yeltsin outlined the broad aims of the, foreign policy.³ The traditional concept of Russia's historic mission as a link between Europe and Asia was underlined. The task of Russian foreign policy was to secure positive external conditions for effecting internal economic and political reform.

Partnership with the USA and the West on strategic matters was given the top priority. This was natural because with the end of ideological divide Russia expected that the West would accept it as an equal partner. It also expected the West to help it in its systemic transition in terms of credit, investment etc.

³ White, Stephen, Gorbachev and After, Cambridge, 1991.

The Common Wealth of Independent States (CIS) was given the lower priority at that time. Other issues were evidently to be sorted out on the basis of the experience and interest of the Russian state. In this new dispensation China and India did not receive high priority.

Despite the dominance of those who supported strong ties with the West in the foreign policy making circles, Russia under Yeltsin tried to maintain some sort of cooperation with these Central Asian republics. During this period, dangerous developments started to take place in the Republic of Tajikistan bordering Afghanistan. A civil war broke out in Tajikistan. Another development that took place during this period was the emergence of radical Islamist groups partly aided and abetted by Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and from various radical Islamist groups in Afghanistan. The foreign policy makers realized that they had to contain these developments which could also threaten the unity and integrity of Russia, as it lies very close to Central Asia. Realising this, the first step Russia took in this direction was signing of Collective Security Treaty on 15 May 1992 at Tashkent, in which apart from Russia, all Central Asian Republics (except Turkmenistan)

and Armenia participated.⁴ The Treaties high point was that Belarus sharing with borders of the CIS countries were considered as strategic borders, which had to be defended by all the signatories. This is how a CIS peace-keeping force is guarding the 1500 km long Tajik-Afghan border. Even today the troops are stationed there. The signatories should also resolve their differences by peaceful means, abstain from entering into blocks hostile to each other conducting consultations on security matters and coordinating their defence policies.

Russia also signed a number of bilateral agreements with individual countries of Central Asia. On 25 May 1992, President Nursultan Nazarbayev and Yeltsin signed "Treaty on Friendship, Cooperation and Mutual Assistance for 25 years." On 30 May 1992, Russia and Uzbekistan concluded a bilateral agreement i.e. "Treaty on the Fundamentals of Interstate Relations". With Kyrgyzstan, it signed the "Friendship and Bilateral Cooperation and a Bilateral Assistance Treaty" on 10 June 1992. Soon after the conclusion of the treaty Boris Yeltsin proclaimed that "the

⁴ Ponton, Geoffrey, *The Soviet Era, Soviet Politics From Lenin to Yeltsin*, Blackwell, Oxford, 1994.

Treaty raised bilateral relations to a new level, putting the two states on absolutely equal footing.”⁵. With Tajikistan, it signed a bilateral treaty, “Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation and Mutual Assistance and an agreement on the status of Russian forces in Tajikistan” on 5th July 1993 in Moscow. In June 1993, to guard the Tajik-Afgan border, under Moscow’s initiative, a peace-keeping force jointly financed by the Russia and all Central Asian countries except Turkmenistan was formed. This demonstrated the fact that Russia’s influence in Central Asia is not declining despite its Atlanticist orientation in this period. It must be remembered that the Central Asian states are dependent on Russia for ensuring their security except Uzbekistan, which has its own armed formations, the other four states largely look up to Russia for safeguarding their security.

In the economic field as well as, Russia remained an important partner. In 1992 alone, Russia accounted for 68% of Kazakhstan’s imports, 51% of Kyrgyzstan and 48% of Tajikistan and Turkmenistan. At the same time, Russia absorbed 61% Uzbekistan export, 54% of Kazakhstan and

⁵ Yeltsin, Boris, *Against the Grain: An Autobiography*, Pan Books, London, 1990.

39% of Kyrgyzstan. However the Russian influence in economic field in Central Asia began to decline following investment by Turkey and Islamic countries like Iran, Saudi Arabia and Pakistan etc. Russia was not in a position to rebuild the Central Asian economy due to its own collapsing economy. In the economic sphere also the Central Asian states were highly integrated into the command style economy of the Soviet Union. Some feel that the economic interaction of the Soviet Union with Central Asia reflected a colonial pattern of development. Hence, the economic dislocation caused by the breakup had an impact on the Central Asian states as well.

After 1994, Russia's approach towards Central Asia marked a departure from its earlier policy of identifying with the west and declining influence on Central Asian Republics. There were several factors responsible for the change in Russian perspective towards Central Asia.

(1) Andrei Kozyrev, a pro-West, Foreign Minister, who favoured a closer cooperation with the west, was replaced by Y. Primakov, who advocated strengthening relations with Central Asian countries. The latter proclaimed that, "if we

pull out from Tajikistan, a wave of destabilisation may sweep the entire Central Asia. Another important factor was the decision in the mid nineties to expand NATO eastwards. In Russia this was interpreted as an attempt to marginalise it and also that its partnership with the west would not be on equal terms. Russia would be a junior partner.

(2) During the Soviet period, most of Russian industry heavily relied on Central Asian natural resources. But after the disintegration of Soviet Union, it became difficult for Russian industry to get natural resources especially cotton from there. So, the influential business circles in Russia demanded some sort of closer cooperation with Central Asia in order to get uninterrupted supply of natural resources. Similarly, many western countries sought to exploit the natural resources of Central Asia, particularly oil, and plans were being made to exclude Russia from this also influenced Russia to take great interest in this region.

(3) There emerged some ultra-nationalistic movement in Russia that demanded a reassertion of Russian superiority over the former Soviet Republics of Central Asia. The ultra-nationalists argued that, unless Russia is able to assert its

supremacy in Central Asia, the problem which Russian minority is facing there cannot be solved.

All these above factors provided impetus to reassertion of Russian interests in Central Asia. The first document, determining strategy in regard to the newly independent states, was the Decree of the President of Russian Federation of 14 September 1995.

Soon after assuming office, Primakov, initiated policy changes which emphasized the Asian factor of his foreign policy.

❖ In order to counter balance the western influence in Central Asia, Primakov, initiated developing friendly cooperation with other non-western countries like India, Iran, Iraq, China and Syria. Its objective was that since Russia alone cannot checkmate western countries led by the USA in Central Asia, those countries can help Russia to spread its influence, which can be act as a counter balance to west.

❖ Russian foreign policy sought to ensure closer cooperation with Central Asian and other former Soviet republics through certain of multilateral cooperation organizations that can ensure Russian co-operation with these countries. In particular, Primakov fostered creation of 'Group of Four'

— Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan – which brought together those states which have maintained closest links with Russia. This led to setting up of Customs Union in December 1995. Tajikistan joined the Treaty later in February 1999.

- ❖ Russia's policy towards Central Asia was to secure a settlement of conflict in Tajikistan. The settlement of Tajik conflict provided Russia greater leverage in Tajikistan and helped to maintain Russia's dominant position in Central Asia. It may be added that long and a tortuous peace process brokered by the United Nations brought peace in 1997. Since then Tajikistan is the only country to have a coalition government.

The second phase of Russia's engagement which started after coming to power of Primakov, provided some sort of stability to Russo-Central Asian relationship. Russia followed both bilateral and multilateral level of cooperation of strengthen its position in Central Asia vis-à-vis other actors. And in due course Russian foreign policy accorded top priority to its relations with the CIS. It considered the CIS as its sphere of vital interest.

At the military level co-operation between Russia and some states of Central Asia is evident. On 9th July 1998, Kazakh, Kyrgyz and Russian officers completed a three day staff exercises at a military base outside Almaty. The dostyk/Druzbbba (Friendship) -98 exercises, the first of its type rehearsed joint operations. The basic objective of the exercises aimed at checkmating the western influence in this region demonstrate the fact that Russia still is a force to reckon with. This exercises also acted as a counter balance to the US military exercises conducted in September 1997. Along with Kazakh-Kyrgyz-Uzbek joint battalion in the US Army's 82 Airborn Division participated in the exercises that was organised by the US central command. In 1994 all the Central Asian states had joined the Partnership for Peace Programme of the NATO.

At the same time Russia also concluded certain bilateral agreements with Central Asian countries. In October 1998 the, then Russian President Boris Yeltsin and Kazakh President Nazarbayev signed a military agreement, which included fight against trans-border terrorism and drug trafficking. The same month Russia also signed a bilateral Treaty with Tashkent.

Uzbekistan later showed dissatisfaction towards growing Russian presence in Central Asian Republics. This was reflected in its policy of joining a group called (GUUAM) Georgia, Ukraine, Uzbekistan, Azerbaijan and Moldova which was formed in 1997. GUUAM. Was basically created in order to dilute Russian influence in Post-Soviet space and the western countries led by the US, supported it. GUUAM's founding documents were signed in Strasburg and New York. The group was regarded as a more legally competent organization than the CIS. During Yeltsin time the west found a suitable ally in Uzbekistan to promote their interest in Central Asia.

Thus, we find that during Yeltsin period Russia's relations with the Central Asian states moved from no significance to a level. Whereby Russia accords top priority to the CIS including the Central Asian States. Since the mid nineties Russia has moved further to re-establish its presence in Central Asia's strategic and economic field. Meanwhile the Central Asian states have tried to reach out to the west in order to create strategic space for themselves.

CHAPTER – II

RUSSIAS GEOPOLITICAL STRATEGIC AND ECONOMIC INTERESTS IN CENTRAL ASIA

INTRODUCTION

The sudden collapse of the Soviet Union left Moscow with problems far greater than those faced by Great Britain, France, the Netherlands, Belgium and Portugal after the decolonization of their imperial domains. Unlike its European counterparts, Russia lost considerable contiguous territory and a reassuring protective buffer zone, 12-15% of its ethnic Russian population, and substantial parts of its military – industrial infrastructure. The shock waves from the periphery severely shook the centre. Economic linkages and basic security doctrines had to be recreated.

However, Russia was instrumental in creating the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), seeking thereby to promote political stability, prevent conflicts on the territory of the former Soviet Union, foster economic cooperation among the Newly Independent States (NIS), and to build a system of security by forestalling the rise of hostile coalitions of republics that might be tempted to obtain support from outside powers.

Only Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania have elected to go their own way. If the Idea of CIS is able to transform the

relationship of Russia with former Union Republics the geopolitics of Europe, Transcaucasia, Central Asia and the Middle East is likely to undergo a profound change. The focus of the present chapter is to understand the Russian interests in Central Asia.

GEOPOLITICAL FALLOUT

Breaking a country after 450 years is a traumatic experience. With the undoing of centuries of expansion and conquest of diverse ethnic and religious peoples came Russia's retreat to its own "heartland" and the liberation of the "borderlands" of ethno-linguistically distinctive people, described by Lenin as "the prison of nation". Post Communist Russia is a fundamentally different state from the Soviet Union. Its borders have been pushed several hundred miles eastward in Europe and more than twice that northward, in Transcaucasia and Central Asia. Most of its previous ports on the Baltic and Black seas have been lost. Although still well-endowed in natural resources, Russia has lost the Ukrainian "bread basket", and is far more dependent on its neighbours for access to Europe, and for transportation and processing of manufactured goods. It faces new security problems at home,

as in Chechnya and also along its periphery. Ethnic tensions are present in the NIS and threatens to weaken Russia's quest for security and national unity.

For the first time in several hundred years, Russia has become a marginal actor in the Middle East. Its security and economy demands are focused on Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan in the Caucasus, and Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan in Central Asia, (regions that now insulate Turkey, Iran and Afghanistan). As Russia looks ahead to deal with Central Asia, it sees that what worked in the past is no longer feasible. The earlier elaborate security system created at huge costs has disappeared. The Russian core cannot hope to recreate the conditions that once enabled it to dominate the non-Russian periphery. Several factors make Russia to be less active in Central Asia.

First, the Russian army is demoralized, under financed, poorly – led and trained, and is likely to be preoccupied for decades with regime – maintenance, rather than expansion.) In reality the dissolution of the Soviet Union has left the Armed Forces in a state of disarray.

Second, ethnic conflict and the manipulation of ethnic nationalism place Russians living in the Central Asian countries at risk.

Third, Russian out-migration from the "Near Abroad"¹ (as Russia calls the non-Russian areas of the former Soviet Union with Russian minorities) is well underway. This exodus from the borderlands is the first Russian demographic retreat since the medieval period. Estimates are only approximate, given the of Russian statistics, but they suggest that about 400,000 experienced personnel with much needed skills have been leaving Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. Perhaps as much as 20% of the Russian population of Central Asia has left since 1992. The Russian concern became even more acute with the growth of religious extremism in Afghanistan. The fear that this phenomena could affect Central Asia was the cause of worry. From Central Asia it could spread to Russia.

Fourth, the technological diffusion and destructive power of modern weapons make economically motivated military adventures extremely costly. Occupation of hostile peoples for

¹ Rajan Menon, "After Empire : Russia and the Southern "Near Abroad" in Michael Mandelbaum," *The New Russian Foreign Policy*, New York, Council on foreign relations, 1998, p. 101.

imperialistic purposes is a no – win situation. Indeed, imperialism itself is out of fashion : too expensive, difficult, unrewarding.

Finally, the absence of imperial minded powers and rivalries make major wars for the borderlands south of Russia proper an unlikely eventuality. Nevertheless Russia's Military Doctrine of 1993 stated that the main threat to Russia arose from regional conflicts, which were present in some form in South, that is South Caucasus and Central Asia. Central Asia's geopolitical location and raw materials has attracted major as well as regional powers.

CENTRAL ASIA IN FLUX

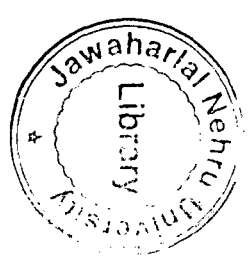
Central Asia was a force in Eurasian and Middle East affairs from the eleventh to the early fifteenth centuries. However, the opening of new sea routes from Europe to the East and this discovery of America combined with systemic stagnation of the Central Asian khanates, resulted in the region losing most of its importance until the collapse of the Soviet empire. The much written about and greatly exaggerated significance of the Anglo-Russian 'Great Game' in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in Persia and Afghanistan has lost

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whatever centrality it may have had. On the other hand, many believe that the Great Game is being played out presently in a new version.

In December 1991, the five Muslim republics of Central Asia – Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan – became independent. Although the nationalism of their peoples is weak, the appeal of nationhood is a potent force. The ruling elites face serious problems, but this is hardly surprising given their lengthy subjugation to Russian power.

Uncertain boundaries haunt their futures. None of the borders has any historical basis; none is ethnically coherent or militarily defensible, and none encompasses a territory that is economically viable, unless in cooperation with its neighbours. The administration of Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan is poor, with civil strife in the former, and rampant corruption in the latter. Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan are far better, having enjoyed stability though not economic development. All the elites are secularized and highly Russified. No real opposition is permitted and elections have been rigged to ensure their Continuation in power beyond



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2000. In their attempt to develop a sense of nationalism, all the rulers draw on symbols from their past. The aim is to forge modern, ethnically – rooted states.

The central Asian leadership share a secularist, state dominated outlook akin to Turkey's Ataturk model and are hostile to Islamist groups, whom they see as threats. Clans and local networks, rather than mass political organizations are their principal sources of power. In economic matters they tend to be conservative, more comfortable with the Soviet – style command economy than the market – oriented and open economy they are grudgingly starting to permit. All of them share a commitment to close ties with Russia.

Economic development is their top priority. Traditionally among the poorest of the former Soviet Union republics, these countries no longer receive substantial subsidies from Russia. Their task is complicated by the continuing exodus of skilled personnel back to European part of the CIS.

Kazakhstan is the second largest of the CIS members with an area of 2717000 square kilometers. As Russia's land bridge to the rest of Central Asia, it neighbours both Russia and China, Essentially indefensible and sharing 4000 miles of border

with Russia, Kazakhstan faced under the worst possible circumstances, enormous problems of state – building, including the need to develop a sense of national identity and cohesion, train local elites, and build institutions suitable to its people, political culture, economic potential, and limited defence capability. And all of that must be pushed without triggering an interventionist response from Russia.

The northern part holds the bulk of the six and a half million Russians and Russian speakers the southern part most of the seven million Kazakhs (of whom perhaps one – third speak Russian and not Kazakh as their primary language); the remaining four million are a mix of Uzbek, Tatars, Germans and others. Ethnic considerations, stable security relationships with powerful neighbours, and technical dependence on non-Kazakhs constrain Nazarbaev's options. Though solidly entrenched, he is, in the view of some observers, flirting with political peril.

Kazakhstan manages economically because of income from the Tenghiz oil field at the northeast and of the Caspian Sea. It also has rich soil and significant agriculture in the north, animal husbandry in the south major non-ferrous mineral

deposits, and an iron and steel industry centre in Karaganda, which is the centrepiece of almost 200 industrial enterprises involved in military production of some kind or other. However, their productiveness depends on Russia's market and cooperation, and for the time being, Russia has had few economic success stories².

Tensions loom over a series of issues : Yeltsin's decree of September 14, 1995 on Russia's "strategic goals" within the CIS, is more hegemonial than partnerly; divergent views on how much Russia should benefit from control of the oil pipelines to be built; and alleged discrimination against Russians living in Kazakhstan.

But overall relations are good. At the all – important national security level, Kazakhstan and Russia have reached agreement on the important issue regarding the joint use of the Baikonur space centre, the largest in the world. Under the 1994 agreement, Kazakhstan leased the cosmodrome to Russia for twenty years with the option of an additional ten years. In return, Russia pays \$ 115 million annually in lease payments. Baikonur is considered "Russian territory for the

² M. Ashimbaev, Director of Kazakh Institute of Strategic Studies, holds this view.

duration of the lease period where all Russian laws will have equal force as in the rest of Russia. Another significant, related agreement covers the dismantling, protection, and removal of strategic nuclear forces temporarily stationed in the Republic of Kazakhstan.

Turkmenistan has the smallest and most homogenous population in Central Asia — about 75% being Turkmen. Despite enormous reserves of oil and natural gas and a productive but expensive mono-agriculture based on cotton, it is underdeveloped and one of the poorest countries in the region. Geographic location accounts for its importance – as a land bridge between Iran and the outside world, on the one hand, and Central Asia, on the other.

Good relations with Iran are integral to Turkmenistan's independence in foreign policy. Expansion of the railway system that provides an outlet, through Iran, to the sea and to contacts and commerce with the outside world, is essential for Turkmenistan. The Turkmen – Iranian relationship is important to both countries, because for Iran Turkmenistan affords in entry to much of Central Asia. Iran's contiguity to Pakistan and Afghanistan, as well as to Turkmenistan, gives it

geo-strategic³ and economic significance in the Gulf-southwest Asian area.

In 1995, a trunk line at Sarakhs in Northeast Iran, enabling goods to be shipped by rail from Turkmenistan to the Iranian port of Bandar Abbas was completed. A new extension links Central Asia with Turkey via Iran; and a planned 1100 mile link from the Iranian port of Chah Bahar to Sarakhs would reduce time and costs even further, and would permit Pakistan to use Iran as an alternative to Afghanistan for trade and natural gas.

Uzbekistan with 23 million people is Central Asia's most densely populated state. Among the population approximately 75%, ethnic are Uzbeks. As part of its nation - building strategy, the government seeks to instill a sense of national pride in the population, to make an ideology of patriotism. Aside from the attention to Tamerlane, whose powerful empire once encompassed much of Central Asia, numerous manifestations³ are to be found throughout the country's streets and squares in formulaic expression such as

³ The evolution of Turkmenistan's armed forces", *Asian Defence Journal*, 7/94, Richard Woff, "The armed forces of Turkmenistan", *Intelligence Review*, March 1994.

“Uzbekistan A state with a Great Future”, in monuments to more recent heroes, such as the Basmachi – the anti – Soviet Uzbeks who fought communist rule in the 1920s and in republication of the works of writers and poets purged by Stalin, allegedly for being “nationalist”. The driving force behind all of this is President Karimov.

The Uzbek government believes in a strong, secular, centralized state, which cannot afford the luxury of western – imported ideas such as political pluralism or preoccupation with human rights. Karimov’s foreign policy was earlier based on close ties with Russia. He sees it as the only natural ally, the great power willing to maintain, out of strong historical, cultural, economic, and strategic interests, peace in the region. But since last few years Uzbekistan foreign policy is pro – US in several aspects.

Ultimately, the future economic well being of the Central Asian countries is highly interdependent. Due to their shared past the Central Asian states were well integrated into the Soviet System. To this end, there is need for a network of meaningful bilateral relationships, expansion of inter-republic trade, joint investment projects of mutual benefit, especially

in the areas of water resources and conservation energy, transportation and communication and, finally, reassurance to Moscow that the civil rights of minorities are being protected.

RUSSIAN OBJECTIVES

For Russia the deconstruction of the Soviet Union mandated a new national security strategy. Foreign policy was driven by a number of strategic concerns. First, that crucial military – industrial infrastructure whose functioning depended on cooperation with CIS states be kept intact; the manufacture of high performance aircraft whose vital components were produced in Russia, Ukraine and Kazakhstan is a case in point; secondly civil strife in Transcaucasia (Armenia, Georgia and Azerbaijan) and Central Asia (Tajikistan) be contained in order to prevent a possible spill – over effect; and thirdly, given the inordinate number of active and latent border problems, that interstate conflicts be prevented on the space of the former Soviet Union, Particularly complicated were Russian relations with the Near Abroad. While technically they fall under the category of foreign policy, the fate of Russians living in these countries that had only recently been

an integral part of Russia's empire was an issue that resonated in domestic politics, particularly with respect to the Russians who were at risk in non-Slavic countries.⁴

Central Asia posed a number of military problems : how to balance its requests for assistance with Russia's own internal military needs; how to fashion agreements that would not be viewed as threatening, and how to legitimize the retention of vital installations, especially in Kazakhstan.

Military ties have been established – on a bilateral basis in the case of Turkmenistan – in great measure because the Republics' leaders want a residual Russian military connection as protection against internal challenges to their rule, and because of their dependency on competent Russian officers, weaponry, and logistics. As mentioned in the earlier chapter all the Central Asia, except Uzbekistan are highly dependent on Russia for ensuring their security. They have yet to create a viable military force. These ties have enabled Russia to retain important basing facilities in Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and Turkmenistan. Treaties of

⁴ Tim Heleniak, "The changing nationality composition of the Central Asian and Transcaucasian states", *Post-Soviet Geography and Economics*, Vol. 38, No. 6, 1997, p. 369. 373.

Friendship and Cooperation buttress the legal and institutional frameworks of cooperation in the realm of defence. In all of the treaties the reaffirmation of existing inter-republic borders is a small step toward stable relationships, suggesting as it does, that Russia has no territorial designs on the sovereign status of the Central Asian republics. Moreover, unlike its quite different behaviour pattern in the Caucasus Russia has not destabilized any of the Central Asian republics, in its policy there, the proposition that the empire is striking back is hard to justify. The longer these states can hold Russia Committed to correct international legal norms of intercourse, the greater becomes the international costs to Moscow of their gross violation.

In the economic realm, the Russian - Central Asian relationship are far less robust. Russia's promotion of an economic union of all the CIS shows little success. Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan formed an economic union. But this recent attempt to breathe new life into CIS integration is meeting with the same difficulties as before. Russian - Central Asian trade for example, remains below what it was in 1990-91, though the rate of decline is

decreasing. In 1995, the volume of their gross domestic product (GDP) showed that Russia's GDP was 63% of pre-crisis levels, while Uzbekistan's was at 45%. Hardest hit was production and trade in light industry, especially as regards consumer goods. Across the span of Eurasia, the quality-of-life index is falling, though the "free fall" period of 1992-93 appears to have ended. If there is a glint of better times ahead, it is in the data showing that each country's trade with the outside world is registering some signs of improvement.

Vast oil and natural gas reserves in the Caspian Sea basin help account for Russia's interest developing in a "special role" for itself in the region, though the legal status of the Caspian itself is in dispute. Till date several meetings have been held but no solution to the vexed issue of Caspian Sea's legal status is in sight. Meanwhile the resources are the common property of all the riparian states and any decision regarding the use of the Caspian's resources must be made on the basis of consensus by all the parties. By contrast, Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan insist that the Caspian is a sea; and, accordingly, each of the riparian states has a right to exclusive jurisdiction and control of the oil, mineral, and

fishing resources out to a distance to twelve miles. The oil is however being pumped; the more pressing struggle being waged is for the laying and control of the new pipelines that would transport it. Russia has emerged a major winner, on two scores: first in the announcement in October 1995 of the intention to build two pipelines from Azerbaijan, starting with one that will cross Russia in the northern Caucasus to Novorossiysk on the Black Sea, and the agreement was signed in April 1996, and the second is between President Boris Yeltsin and Nursultan Nazarbaev calling for greater investment in the development of the Tenghiz oil field.

On the eve of the Russian Presidential election in June 1996, Yeltsin's campaign headquarters released a document entitled, "The National Security Policy of the Russian Federation (1996-2000), which outlined his domestic and foreign policy priorities. As was to be expected, there were no surprises. In regard to Central Asia, top priority was accorded to intra-CIS cooperation and integration on a voluntary and mutually advantageous basis. All the parties understand that economic necessity should link them more closely together, but the problem is mustering the will and wherewithal to implement the adaptations required. It is now apparent that decades will pass before the countries of Central Asia have

industries that are able to compete on the world market. Creation of a preferential trading market within the CIS would give a boost to all their economies, but bureaucratic inefficiency and political suspicious are though hurdles to be overcome in any progress towards meaningful integration.

Cultural ties more powerful than language – serve as an integrating force, and as a window to a cosmopolitan community. In commerce and science the Russian language will remain the lingua franca of the CIS for the indefinite future.

Finally, financial constraints make independent defence policies for the Central Asian countries an impossibility; cooperation with Russia, if carefully confined to vital issues and sectors, can enhance their security and affirm their sovereignty.

THE CHINA FACTOR

The changing configuration of Great power politics in Asia, in particular Russia's entente with China, is having a ripple effect in Central Asia. Although still a nuclear superpower, Russia is a status quo power and lacking the capabilities or regional opportunities that enable it to acquire an empire in

Asia in the eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth centuries. It is no longer viewed as a serious threat by its Asian neighbours, with the exception (a big one) of Kazakhstan. It should be borne in mind that normalization of relations with China was in the national interest of the two countries. A reconciliation after three decades of tense, acrimonious ideological tension was started by Mikhail Gorbachev in the late 1980s, but never gained momentum. Under Yeltsin it has developed into a far-ranging political, military and economic relationship. Arms sales is the essence of Russo-China relations. Unable to find an outlet in hard currency markets and largely out-manoeuvred and out-financed by western competitors in lucrative Middle East markets, Russia has opened its arsenal of high-tech conventional weapons and nuclear technology to China; and corrupt elements of its defence establishment relish the red carpet treatment and generous 'gifts' bestowed by their Chinese counterparts. By purchasing, massively in all the three wings of the military China's leadership is giving Russia strong reasons for strengthening ties and avoiding strategic rivalry in Asia.

Highlighting the growing friendship between Russia and China were the several summit meetings held in either China,

or Russia. With each meeting the relationship was taken to new heights. Russia, China Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan also formed the Shanghai Five, on April 26, 1996. Russia and China reaffirmed their observance of the earlier boundary agreements and were determined to settle the remaining issues as soon as possible. China upheld. Russia on Chechnya and Russia acknowledged that “the Government of the people’s Republic of China is the sole legal government representing the whole of China, and Taiwan is an inalienable part of the Chinese territory.” And that Tibet is “an inseparable part of China”.

In Shanghai, the Presidents of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan joined their Chinese and Russian counterparts to sign an “Agreement on confidence -Building in the Military Field in Border Areas”. The culmination of years of negotiations, the agreement limits the size and operations of military forces stationed within 100 km along the 7000 kilometers long border, the longest land boundary in the world.

The Shangai-5 has several advantages for the Central Asian Countries. First and foremost, it enhances their sovereignty and legitimacy by virtue of Russia’s and china’s

acknowledgement of their status as independent nations. Circulation of the agreement as a UN document is part and parcel of this implicit acceptance.

Inevitably, the 'Great Powers'⁵ interest in removing a potential source of tension between them and improving their relationship raises the importance of the Central Asian actors. Shortly after the signing of the Shanghai agreement, Kazakhstan's Deputy Foreign Minister, Vyacheslav Gizzatov, announced that Kazakhstan is considering a project to lay an oil pipeline to link to China, though he added that calculations of cost and profitability still needed to be explored in detail.

Finally, being at the junction of Russia, China and the Islamic world, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan can, as secular states, help in the struggle against religious militancy and ethnic separatism. Thus, Kazakhstan has cautioned the Turkish speaking Uighurs in China's Xingjiang province against attempting to secede or exploit "the Islamic factor", and Kyrgyzstan has also started to place curbs on the separatist activities fomented by its Uighurs.

⁵ "Russia and Central Asia", Roy Allison and Leen Johnson (eds.) Brookings Institution, Washington D.C., 2001.

OBSERVATIONS

There is a steady out-migration of Slavs from Central Asia. Militarily, this translates into an edge for defenders against a would be occupier; in addition, the lethality of amply available low-tech weapons can raise the anti of adventurism to counterproductive and unacceptable levels. Empires are out of fashion, no matter what fringe figures such as Vladimir Zhirinovsky may peddle to their deluded partisans.

The environment in which Russia and Central Asia will be interacting in the foreseeable future warrants a measure of optimism about the durability of the new states. Yeltsin's Russia has accepted their independence. True, disputes over territorial boundaries exist, but Russia has shown no disposition to use force to settle them given that historically speaking quarrels, over real estate have been the single most salient source of inter-state conflict. The prospect of war between Russia and the Central Asian state can be ruled for sure in the foreseeable future.

Russia's concern over the plight of Russian's in the Near Abroad is abating : fears of gross violations of human rights or loss of life in Central Asia have not materialised. Judging

by the 1996. presidential election campaign, neither the calls for Russia to reassert a major 'Eurasianist' orientation out of a putative responsibility for Central Asia nor laments about the loss of empire had much resonance among the electorate. Finally, as a country that has traditionally placed great store on treaties and legal codes in the field of international law, Russia has been pressing a myriad economic, commercial, environmental and political conventions, treaties and agreements on the Central Asia states. Intended to bind them more tightly to the Russian - dominated CIS, inadvertently, they serve to reinforce the independence of these countries.

Rising Profile of Russia – Post 9/11

Post 9/11 there has been a sea change not only in the overall geopolitical situation in Central Asia but also in the Russian policy towards this region. The changing matrix of relationship among regional and extra regional powers and Central Asian response to this dynamic situation has provided favourable condition for Russia to reassert its position in the region. The growing American military presence in the region is already raising alarm for China, Russia and Iran. The Central Asian Republics are trying to score more long-term benefits from Americans in exchange of their support to US led antiterrorist campaign. But at the same time they are also strengthening their ties with the regional powers like Russia, China, Iran and Turkey. According to one group of analysts this situation will strengthen these republics and bring greater stability to this region. Whereas other group of analysts feels that current developments would aggravate the existing societal and regional tensions as well as lead to heightened activities by terrorist groups and suppressed political parties⁶.

⁶ Patrick Mccrann & Bea Hogan, "Experts See Security Risks Connected with higher US profile in Central Asia", October 15, 2001 <<http://www.eurasianet.org>>

In response to increasing US profile in Central Asia, Russia has already begun to reassert itself. On one hand it is increasing its ties with the west, cooperating in Central Asia with US in its war against terrorism and on the other hand is increasing, its military, economic and political profile in Central Asia, Russia's hold in Central Asia is underpinned through bilateral cooperation with each Central Asian Republics especially with Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan.⁷

Though Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan offered the full support and provided the base facility and over flight to the US with an intention of securing more economic benefits⁸ yet maintained their strong ties with Russia. While offering support to US they carefully balanced their relations with the other great powers in the region. Both Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan agreed to the Russian led Collective Security Treaty Organizations (CSTO). During his recent visit to Moscow Kyrgyz President Askar Akaev while defending Russian presence in Kent said, "Today, for Kyrgyzstan, there is no other country in the world that is closer or dearer than Russia, I am convinced that this

⁷ *The Times of Central Asia*, Vol, 4(3) (150), January 17, 2002. p. 5.

⁸ *Kyrgyzstan Daily digest*, September 1, 2002. In <http://www.eurasianet.org/resource/kyrgyzstan/hypermail/news/0052.shtml>

(air base) will increase Russia's important role as an inalienable factor in ensuring stability and security not only in Kyrgyzstan but in the whole Central Asia region"⁹.

Kazakhstan remains major ally of Russia in the region. Recently it has also renewed the lease deal of Space Centre for 50 years with Russia. It has strong economic and military ties with Russia. Turkmenistan, which declares a policy of complete neutrality, has not provided any military bases for NATO allies and US. It only provided over flight right. In fact Turkmenistan has looked more towards Russian backing rather than US. Russia has levers to influence the Central Asian leaders. Uzbekistan though is the major ally of US yet it continues to value its relations with Russia. The recent bombings and shootings which rocked the Uzbek cities have once again created a situation where Uzbek officials are reexamining the value of its close relationship with US. President Karimov has already expressed a desire for a rapprochement with Russia.

Russia's participation in the economies of Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan should not be ignored.

⁹ Ibid.

It is already in a process of enhancing economic cooperation through Eurasian Economic Community (EEC). Russia is also trying to strengthen its hold through Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) and Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO) in 2002 with new charter and Russia as dominant player. The (CSTO) conducted large number of exercise in southern belt of Central Asia and in the Caspian Sea. Russia forging its ties with China and CARs in SCO. It does not intend to reduce its military presence in the region there has been increase in its military ties with the CARs. Recently it has acquired military base and stationed military aircrafts at the Kyrgyz air base in Kant, 30 km. from Bishkek. These Russian aircraft will support the collective Rapid Deployment Forces, the military Component of the CST. The aim of the CST is to focus their attention on joint action against possible external threats. This way Russia has created a counter balance to western air bases in Central Asia. Russia maintains military presence in 10 out of 12 CIS countries.

In addition to above, the new defence concept presented in Moscow in October 2003 speaks of Russia's reassertion. The new concept says Russia is ready to use its military force to

defend its interests in the former Soviet states. While explaining Russia's new defence policy the Defence Minister, Sergei Ivanov said, "The CIS is an extremely important security zone for Russia... . Russia retains the right to preventive use of military force including in CIS countries". It could deliver pre-emptive strikes not only if threatened militarily, but also if faced with attempts" to limit Russia's access to regions that are essential for its survival, or those that are important from an economic or financial point of view"¹⁰.

On 11 March 2004 top-ranking Security officials from Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan met in Shymkent, Kazakhstan to discuss increased cooperation in the fight against drug trafficking and extremist organizations. The joint exercise with Russia's 201st Motorized Infantry Division, Tajikistan's 3rd Motorized Brigade, and Russian border guards from the Panj border detachment took place from 9-13 March 2004 outside Dushanbe and along the Tajik-Afghan border. Again on 24 March 2004, Nikolai Bordyuzha, the secretary general of the CSTO, arrived in Tajikistan to kick off a three country tour of the region that will also bring

¹⁰ Vladimir Radyuhin, "Russia Flexes its muscles", *The Hindu* (Delhi), Nov 4, 2002.

him to Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. After meeting with Tajik President Imomali Rahmonov on 25 March, Bordyuzha suggested that a Russian military base in Tajikistan be built. This could be integrated into the framework of the CST. There have also been talks about opening up of avenues for the Central Asians to join Russian forces. In fact Russia's new assertiveness towards the former Soviets republics should be seen as a part of a broader revision of its defence doctrine post 9/11. Under this new doctrine Russia is also reviving the concept of nuclear deterrence.

Despite American moves to control the energy, routes from Caspian, Russia still has an edge over US in this region. Most of the Central Asian existing pipe line pass through Russia. Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Viktor Kalyuzhny, the president's special representative on the status of the Caspian Sea, met with Turkmen President Saparmurat Niyazov, in March 2004 telling reporters that the two countries have no differences on Caspian – related legal issues. Turkmenistan has signed a major gas deal with Russia, Russia could be seen as a partner with Turkmenistan rather than US¹¹.

¹¹ RFE/ Central Asia Report, Vol. 2, no.38, 3 October 2002. Stephen Blank, "The Russian-Turkmenistan Gas Deal Gone Away", *Central-Asia Caucasus Analyst*, July 2, 2003.

Russia's Gazprom has signed 25 year strategic cooperation deal in gas sector with Tajikistan to develop and explore gas fields in Central and Southern Tajikistan on 28 November 2003 Russian oil and Gas producers and Uzbekneftegaz national holding company signed a memorandum on cooperation in Tashkent. There has been exchange of views on development of, and prospects for, cooperation between Russian oil and gas companies and Uzbek partners, and the development of oil and gas fields in Uzbekistan¹².

Russia contributes about 15% of the oil supplied to the US¹³. Herman Gref, the Russian Minister of Economic Development and Trade, declared : "Russia can freely compete with the Arab Countries to supplement oil to the American market"¹⁴. US has supported the Caspian pipeline consortium as part of the overall goals of multiple regional pipelines. In future one is likely to see some limited cooperation between the two powers in the energy field.

In the context of current development, it is important to note that despite Putin's newly accommodating relations with the US, it is unlikely that Russia will drop its interest in

¹² Itar-Tass News Agency, Moscow, 1647 gmt 28 November 2003.

¹³ <http://www.rambler.ru/db/news/msg/html?mid=2839696&s=260000532>

¹⁴ <http://www.mn.ru/lenta.php#139141>

strengthening its influence in 'near abroad'. In this respect colonel General Valery Manilov, a member of Russia's federation Council and until recently, first deputy Chief of the General Staff made the Russian position clear by stating that "If Washington does move to set up permanent military bases in Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzsta, the new situation will have to be viewed within the context of integrated system for formulating the Kremlin's over all political strategy for asserting our national interests there", Mr. Ivanov has expressed similar views recently as well¹⁵.

Moreover, Russia is much more a part of a Eurasian community than the US can ever be. Despite its socio-economic problems, Moscow still has a few wild cards up its diplomatic sleeve that gives it more clout than it seems to have on paper in dealing with the United States. Moscow has more leverage than it did in a pre 9/11 context. The shared vision and understanding between Bush and Putin remain largely rhetorical and the various statements represent more a matter of temporary convenience than reflection of reality. But it should be noted that Russia does not want any confrontation or conflict with US rather it wants to have

¹⁵ The Current Digest of the Post Soviet Press, vol. 54, no. 5, Feb. 27, 2002.

CHAPTER - III

RUSSIA'S POLICY IN CENTRAL ASIA

cooperative mechanism with US. It seems that even US is careful not to ostracize Russia, at least on the surface, letting Moscow have its say on issues critical to Russia's interests. Currently Washington needs continued Russian cooperation in the post war reconstruction in Iraq and Afghanistan, peace settlement in West Asia, and the nuclear crisis in North Korea. Therefore, in the immediate future one can anticipate certain amount of Shadow boxin between the great powers to keep CARs on their side to promote their interest in the region on one hand and on the other hand current developments in and around this region would force Russia and US to adopt the Cooperative mechanism in the region, but with some elements of competitiveness in their relations. Given the historical legacy of Russia's control over the region, its increasing ties with each republic, ability to influence the events within these states and its military strength; Russia's influence is unlikely to diminish.

The overall historical character of Russia's relations with Central Asia is often not fully realized. It tends to be ignored that these relations are older than the birth of Soviet Union in 1917. Together with Russia, the Central Asian region formed part of a single state system under Tsarist Empire and the USSR for more than one and a quarter century. The economic and cultural links are much older. In fact, Russia's relations with the Trans-caucasian and Central Asian region have long history beginning with the Kamu Bulgars and extending over a millennium.

The enduring character of the Russian – Central Asian ties was recognized even by British geographer Halford Mackinder who called the Russian Eurasian Empire a “unique institution” representing a remarkable correlation between natural environment and political organization.... Unlikely to be mattered by any possible social revolution”.

Historian G.V. Vernadsky had Russo-Muslim Cultural cooperation and co-existence in mind when he wrote, “The Russian state is a Eurasian state and all separate nationalities of Eurasia must feel and recognize that it is their state”. This view was endorsed by leading modernist reformer,

Tatar educationist, Ismail Bey Gasprinsky. Thus there is not much substance in the view about “Civilisational divide” that has of late gained currency in the aftermath of disintegration of the Soviet Union and is subscribed to even by President of Kazakhstan Nursultan Nazarbaev. The view point of President of Uzbekistan, Islam Karimov, which envisages Central Asia as a “buffer” is equally confusing? If the former (the concept of civilisational divide”) messes up religion with civilization, the latter (the idea of ‘buffer’) is a misrepresentation of “geographical continuum” which joins and does not divide as a ‘buffer’.¹

The past historical links were useful for Russia in building a new basis for its relationship with the Central Asian countries. In the last chapter we examined the nature of Russian interests, and in the present chapter we shall focus on the kind of policy pursued to accomplish those interests.

President Vladimir Putin launched his Presidential term in 2000 on the foreign policy plank of defending national interest and playing a more important role in world affairs including a

¹ Islam Karimov, *Uzbekistan on the Threshold of the Twenty First Century*, Richmond, Surrey, Curzon press, 1997.

more pro-active policy towards the west which became known as the 'Derzhavnik' course (Great Power nationalist course).

The Westerners course which formed the bedrock of the 1992 foreign policy concept was substituted by a new direction of "healthy programatism and realism" outlined in the July 2000 foreign policy concept. While stating that Europe remained a "traditional priority", it also underlined that "Asia was acquiring great and ever-increasing significance in the foreign policy direction of the Russian Federation".

So far as the Russian policy towards the Central Asian region was concerned, a change could already be noticed during the Yeltsin period itself. The Russian Military Doctrine of 1993 aimed at creating "zones of influence". It declared the whole of the former Soviet territory as an area of "vital interest" for Russia and claimed the right to defend the Russian speaking population living outside Russia. After assumption of the Foreign office charge by Yevgeni Primakov, the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) including Central Asia became an area of high priority. Under Primakov, the policy of "Strategic alliance" with the United States was transformed into a policy of "equitable partnership". As Head

of the Foreign Intelligence Service, Primakov, had prepared a report that the west in general and the US in particular were undermining Russian efforts to integrate the CIS and to recover a great power position.² The report pointed out the changing situation in Central Asia and the foreign involvement in the region by both western and Muslim states.

The new Russian Military Doctrine, published as a draft in October 1999 and signed by President Putin in April 2000 and the National Security Concept of February 2000 reflected Russia's reaction to changing strategic scenario. These documents provided a conceptual basis for criticism of US policy and in favour of tactical alliance to counter a growing US and Western influence in the Caucasus and Central Asia with the key words of 'multipolarity' and 'unipolarity'. The main threats were associated with the West and the eastward expansion of the NATO. The Islamist offensives in August 1999 in Southern Kyrgyzstan and Dagesten followed by the war in Chechnya contributed to the Islamist threat being redefined as a threat of "international terrorism" in the National Security Concept of February 2000. The events in

² Ivanov Igor, "An Overview of Russian Foreign Policy", *Encounter*, March/April 2001.

Kyrgyzstan initiated a wave of Russian activity to promote military and security cooperation with Central Asian States.

It was reported that the Chechen conflict brought President Putin to power by ensuring his victory in the Presidential election. Nine days before his appointment as acting President of Russia, in his address to the Federation Council on 22 December 1999, Putin gave a new emphasis to relations with Central Asian Republics. In fact, his first visits abroad after he became Prime Minister were to Tajikistan in November 1999 followed by visit to Uzbekistan in the following month. As newly elected President he first went to Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan in May 2000. Putin's Uzbekistan visit resulted in signing of bilateral agreements on Military – Technical Cooperation which he described as a strategic partnership. Putin was quick to make use of the events in Dagestan, Chechnya and Kyrgyzstan for renewed efforts to woo back the Central Asian states on a common platform to fight religious extremism and terrorism.

The year 2000, the first year of Putin's Presidency – saw Putin actively pursuing his "Great Power" course. His visit to China in July 2000 was followed by visit to India in October when he

signed the Indo-Russian Strategic Partnership Declaration. In November 2000 Putin in his speech at Brunei at the APEC summit spoke about the negative consequences of globalization. Putin's visit in December 2000 marked the APEC as a new "Great Power" course in Russia's foreign policy. In Central Asia Russia conducted a military exercise – Commonwealth Shield – 2000 – in the mountains of Tajikistan and Uzbekistan in which forces of the Central Asian Republics participated in a rehearsal of anti-terrorist operation.

However, the year 2001 witnessed a dilution of the Eurasian and Asian direction of Putin's Foreign Policy course. In the wake of 9/11 terrorist attacks, the US – Russian relations entered a new phase. As Mc Faul observes acceding to American troops in Central Asia was as if "Russian troops came into Mexico". By supporting President Bush, Putin totally revised his previous geo-political orientation Mc Faul's observation is fully endorsed by Anatoli Chubais, who stated that "Putin has turned Russian Foreign Policy 180 degree....

There has never been a change on a similar scale in all of the history of Russian statehood".³

Other American analysts however think that Putin's turn to the west does not represent a sea-change but a continuation of a westward shift started by Gorbachev and continued through the Yeltsin years. To the question posed to him by the US press about territorial competition between Russia and US over Central Asian and where he 'draws the line' in terms of Russia's strategic interests, Putin remarked that 'what was important in the former frame of reference is becoming largely irrelevant at present. If Russia becomes a full-fledged member of the international community, it need not and will not be afraid of its neighbours developing relations with other states, including the development of relations between the Central Asian States and the US. Putin added that Russian and US policies should not be guided by their former fears. Rather, there were real geo-economics benefits to be had from cooperation and deal making in the region. Putin's stress on geoeconomics over geopolitics was the result of sharp debate within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and of Defence in which

³ Cited in John O'Loughlin, Gearoid O. Tuathail and Vladimir Kolossov, "A Risky Westward Turn? Putin's 9-11 Script Ordinary Russian" in *Europe-Asia Studies*, Vol. 56, No. 1 January 2004, p. 4.

the arguments of individuals favouring cooperation with the US government an upper hand over the supporters of the traditional territorial geopolitical line.⁴ This was reflected in Putin's State of the Nation Address of April 2002. In his address President Putin stressed that the creation of a new general system of security through a permanent dialogue with the US and the need to change the quality of Russia's relationship with the NATO. This in his opinion would ensure the strategic stability in the world. Although Asian aspect was not mentioned in his address, cooperation with the CIS found a place among the list of foreign policy priorities. In his speech later at a conference of Russian Diplomats in July 2002 President Putin once again harped on strategic stability through 'confident partnership' with the US as one of Russia's clear – cut priorities. To an extent this is understandable because Russia still requires Western credits and aid to help it in its still incomplete transition.

However, it would be too much to read in President Putin's remark made during his visit in September 2002 signifying marginalization of traditional sphere of influence that is Europe thinking in favour of only economic consideration. It

⁴ Ibid.

was soon to become clear that Russia was preparing a response to the American preemptive unilateralist policy in Iraq. If publicly Putin tried to minimize Moscow's differences with the US over Iraq, at least in his public statements, and did not show any sign of emotional criticism of the US action, he did not miss this opportunity to take maximum advantage of widely anticipated 'Shifts' in the global geopolitical landscape, with global attention fixed on the crises in the Gulf, Russia was quick to exploit the opportunity for promoting its interest in Central Asia and the post-Soviet space. The Chairman of the State Duma Committee on CIS Affairs Andrei Kokoshin stated at a discussion of the session of the Council for Defence policy in Moscow that "The World is now at the threshold of huge redivision and that in many ways resembles the events of the beginning of the 20th century. Each country seeks to create its own security sphere of interests in the post – Soviet space." Kokoshin referred to the so called 'Putin doctrine' which is based on the establishment of a highly integrated core of key states surrounded by a loose grouping of other CIS members. The components are the Union of Russia and Belarus, the Collective Security Treaty (CST) the Eurasian Economic

Community and the CIS anti – terrorist centre. The formation of CSTO on 28 April 2003 at a summit in Dushanbe marks the second edition of the Warsaw pact based on commonality of security interest in Eurasia. Russia is also trying to capitalize on the fears haunting the Central Asian leaders in the aftermath of the overthrow of the Saddam regime in Iraq by the US and its allies who considered Saddam to be a corrupt tyrant. Such fears have become story after the ouster of Shevardnadze in Georgia through a US inspired “Velvet Revolution”.

The visits of President Putin to Tajikistan, Uzbekistan Kyrgyzstan in 2003 and to Kazakhstan in January 2004 as well as the visit of President Niyazov to Moscow in April 2003 have resulted in further deepening of bilateral relations between Russia and the Central Asian republics. During his visit to Tajikistan President Putin told Commanders of 201st motorized infantry division that Moscow would soon strengthen its military presence in Tajikistan in view of the reports about increase in activities of the Taliban and the Al Qaeda structures who are believed to be regrouping.⁵ President Putin made a stopover in Samarkand while

⁵ <http://www.eurasianet.org/resource/Tajikistan/hypermail/200304/0021.shtml>

returning from his visit to Malaysia to hold talks with his counterpart Islam Karimov. The two leaders discussed expansion of economic cooperation, particularly in view of a 20% decline in bilateral trade during the year 2002. This decline was in the opinion of two leaders due to a poor cotton crop in 2002. Both Presidents discussed improvement in their trade relations by launching new projects in oil and gas industry, energy and irrigation. They also discussed plans to cooperate in aircraft in Taskent. The Russian defence ministry placed an order for two such plans.

In October 2003 President Putin visited Bishkek. After discussions with Kyrgyz President Askar, Akaev the protocol on completion of negotiations between Kyrgyzstan and Russia about the latter joining the WTO and the agreement between the two governments on cooperation in military exports to third countries were signed. President Putin attended along with President Akaev a ceremony of opening in Kant a Russian air base which is an aviation components part of the Rapid Reaction Forces of the CSTO of CIS. Both Presidents repeated that the base at Kant is a permanent one. Incidentally, the Manas base which is being used by the

American led Coalition Forces against terrorism is barely 30 km. away from Kant. Putin also stated that a large Russian contingent would be sent to Kant next year. Russian Defence Minister Sergei Ivanov announced the grant to Kyrgyzstan weapons and equipment worth \$3 million. Later the two Presidents also participated in a meeting of the Russian Kyrgyzstan Investment Forum. Putin decorated Kyrgyz first lady Mairam Akalva with the Russian Order of Friendship.⁶

President Putin's visit to Kazakhstan in January 2004 resulted in raising Russia's cooperation with Kazakhstan to a higher level. Eleven bilateral documents were signed including the agreement on prolongation of the lease of the Baikanor spacedrome from 2014 to 2050 on payment of \$150 million a year. The two sides signed documents on border issues where the main problem is concerned with railway communication. The rail crosses the long border 22 times and over 800 kilometer of Russian railway lines run in Kazakhstan and 150 kilometers of Kazakh railways cross Russian territory. While it is true that Russia enjoys good relations with Kazakhstan, nevertheless any show of independence on the part of the

⁶<http://www.eurasianet.org/resoure/kyrgyzstan/hypermail/2003/10/0040.html>.

latter is treated with displeasure. For instance, Kazakhstan's declaration of the possibility of pumping 10 million tons of oil by the Baku – Ceyhan pipeline on the eve of Putin's visit was not welcomed. Russian Deputy Prime Minister Khristenko described this act on the part of Kazakhstan as uneconomic. He also complained of Russia sustaining losses from the failure of Kazakhstan and Western firms to produce enough oil to comply with their obligations under the agreement on the Caspian pipeline Consortium (CPC). President Nazarbaev, however tried to assuage Russia's ruffled feelings by stating that the transit of Kazakh oil through Russia remains a priority even under the Republic's multi-destination oil export policy and increasing oil production. According to Nazarbaev a record volume of Kazakh oil was exported through Russia – 32 million tons – last year. An important result of Putin's visit was a mutual decision to raise bilateral trade from 5.5 billion dollars at present to \$10 billion dollars a year. Another significant result of Putin's visit to Kazakhstan was increased Russian-Kazakhstan cooperation for production of oil in the Kazakh sector of Caspian Shelf. The Lukoil of Russia acquired 50% share in the Tuyb-Karagan and Atash oilfields through an agreement with the Kazmunaigaz. The cost of this project

will exceed \$30 billions Russia however remains sore about Kazakhstan's decision to call an international tender for creation of an integrated system of air traffic and air defence control. This billion dollar tender for which Kazakhstan has invited French, US & British Firms is viewed by Moscow as a threat to the air defence system within the framework of CSTO of CIS.⁷

During Putin's presidency, Russia's relations with Turkmenistan have witnessed an upswing. Like the US policy of befriending Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan, irrespective of their poor human rights record, Russia has also been keen to extend its economic influence in Turkmenistan ignoring the personality cult of Turkmenbashi. During President Niyazov's visit to Moscow in April 2003 a framework agreement on gas cooperation was signed. The twenty five year agreement on gas supplies to Russia was signed by the Russian natural gas monopoly *Gazprom*. By clinching this deal Russia almost preempted the possible construction, the much talked about Trans Afghan Pipeline. Russia sent a high level delegation to attend Turkmenistan's Flag Day celebration on 19 February,

⁷ The Times of Central Asia, 22 January 2004, p. 5.

2004 which also happened to be President Niyazov's birthday. The delegation was led by St. Petersburg Governor Valentina Matvienko. The visit resulted in the signing of a cooperation agreement covering economic, scientific and cultural spheres. At a meeting on 19 February Niyazov and Makarov head of a gas firm agreed that Turkmenistan would sign a major deal with Russia to develop off-shore oil fields in Turkmen sector of the Caspian sea in the near future on the basis of sharing production. This agreement will be for 25 years and will cover four oil and gas rich blocks in the southern part of Caspian shelf near the Iranian border. Turkmenistan expects to attract up to 26 billion dollars worth of foreign investment in its oil and gas sector by 2020. While President Niyazov has shown willingness to cooperate with Russia in the exploration and exploitation of its natural resources, Turkmenistan is also keen to assert its independence. In April 2003, Niyazov suddenly decided to abolish dual citizenship.⁸ This will certainly put the Russians in Turkmenistan in a tight situation.

⁸ Sergei Blagov, "Russia acts aggressively to enhance Energy position in Central Asia", 26.02.2004, <http://www.eurasianet.org>

The US war on Iraq and the American military doctrine of “pre-emptive” use of nuclear weapons has led to a far – reaching shift in military planning on the part of Russia. President Putin conferred with Russian military commanders on 2 October 2003, soon after his return from United States. The Russian Ministry of Defence released a document called “Unclassified Military Doctrine for Modernization of the Armed Forces”. Defence Minister Sergei Ivanov’s report in this meeting talked in terms of changing the rules for use of nuclear weapons as well as circumstances under which Russia might take preemptive armed action. According to *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* of 3 October 2003, the Defence Minister asserted that Russia does not “absolutely exclude the preemptive use of force, if required by the interests of Russia or its obligations to allies”. Relevant threat to Russian interest would include “interference in the internal affairs of the Russian Federation by foreign nations or organizations supported by foreign nations” as well as “instability in countries adjacent [to Russia], born out of the weakness of their central government”. Russia has, in fact, been working for sometime now on “asymmetric”, response to the threat of a war involving use of nuclear weapons. Putin personally

oversaw the Russian preparation for new models of 21st century weapons. These weapons have since been successfully tested during the strategic military exercises recently conducted by Russia in February 2004. These weapons include an ICBM which is capable of hitting any target regardless of the developed US ABM system. The point that needs to be emphasized is that Russian approach to the military has undergone a change. Russia would not hesitate to use all means including nuclear means to protect itself. At the same time it has started the modernization process of its military.

From the foregoing analysis, it is clear that Russian policy towards the former Soviet Republics including the Central Asian Republics is characterized by a new found assertiveness. Thus one finds Russian Defence Minister reminding the US that Russia agreed to the setting-up of the US military bases in Central Asia and till stabilisation is achieved in Afghanistan and the war against terrorism is concluded successfully. At a NATO conference in Colorado, Ivanov declared that "CIS is an extremely important security zone for Russia. We have boosted our presence in the

commonwealth of Independent states”⁹. The American experiment of regime change in Georgia has made Russia apprehensive about similar US attempts in the Central Asian republics. In this context, Putin’s remark on 12 February at the opening of his election campaign at a meeting held at the Moscow State University, that the demise of the Soviet Union was a “national tragedy of an enormous scale” was quite ominous. This remark by Putin together with Defence Minister Sergei Iavnov’s call for making 2004 a year to reassert Russia’s position in the CIS is being viewed in some western circles as expression of Russia’s desire to “operationalise this nostalgia” for the former Soviet Union. The creation of the CSTO, establishment of an air base in Kant in Kyrgyzstan and conversion of the presence of 201st division in Tajikistan into a permanent base as well as activation of the Russian oil and energy giants in Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan are pointers to a new pro-active Russian policy in Central Asia. The results of the December 2003 Russian Duma elections victory of Nationalist Motherland and liberal

⁹ Aslund Anders, “Russia”, *Foreign Policy*, July/August, 2001.

Democratic parties also lend public support to the new activist course going to be pursued by Moscow in the region.¹⁰ Russia's stakes in the Central Asian region remain high. There are a large number of Russians in Central Asia. In year 2001 they accounted for 11.7% of the 55 million strong central Asian population, besides Russian – oriented ethnic communities living in the region. The Central Asian republics remain a relatively important source of labour for Russia at least in the medium term. There is abundance of sites in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan of great strategic significance for Russia. The Baikanor space centre in Kazakhstan is the launching site for 70% of Russia's space rockets.¹¹ Russia remains committed to long term responsibilities in the Central Asian region. In April 2003 Russian Defence Minister Sergei Ivanov stated that Russia would begin recruiting citizens from the CIS to serve in its army who would be allowed to obtain Russian citizenship after three years of service. Already there is a sizeable number of Central Asians residing in Russia as seasonal workers.

¹⁰ For a similar view see Ariel cohen, "Facing the Russian Rhetoric in Eurasia" http://www.cacianalyst.org/view_article.php?articleid=2150, 25 February 2004.

¹¹ Dmitry Trofimov, "Russian Foreign Policy objectives in Central Asia" in the *IISS Russian Regional Perspective Journal*, Issue 2, London, 2003.

Russia's long term interests in the region as against the temporary interests of the United States have been recognized by knowledgeable experts in the field of area studies. Thus Nikolai Tlobin, Director of the Russian and Central Asian programmes at Washington – based Centre for Defence Information, stated that while the United States went to Central Asia only to “Solve the Afghan problem”, Russia has more immediate regional interests that compel Moscow to maintain a long term presence. Russia has recently moved to cement its Central Asian position by promoting multilateral organizations such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and the Collective Security Treaty Organisation. According to Tlobin, Russia's security treaties with the Central Asian states, although they focus on the use of military bases, are more of a political statement which is “America won't be there for ever but Russia will be there for ever”.¹²

The Central Asian Security scenario is becoming increasingly complex. While the larger republics – Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan – still see in the present situation opportunity to expand cooperation in addressing regional security threats,

¹² Cited by Todd Diamond “US Unilateralism fuels great power rivalry in Central Asia” in 06 October 2003. www.eurasinet.org.

this is not the case with the smaller Central Asian republics – Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. There are indications that these republics are re-evaluating their relations with the outside powers. There is concern in Bishkek and Dushanbe that much of the resources promised by the USA would be diverted to Iraq. Such concerns have already proven true for Kyrgyzstan which was turned down by the USA for additional economic assistance.

Despite decline in Russia's trade with Central Asia (it is one third of the volume of trade before the collapse of the Soviet Union), Russia still remains the main trade and economic partner. Moreover the Central Asian States are largely agrarian societies. The industrial infrastructure of the Soviet times is under utilized. The economic and political reforms in Central Asia are slow. Another hampering factor is the landlocked status of the region. This makes economic interaction with the outside world a problematic proposition. Consequently, the economic interaction is centred on Russia. By virtue of its historical links, geographical proximity and superior military strength, Russia continues to be a major power centre in Central Asia.

CONCLUSION

In the new unfolding geopolitical situation, Russia is interested in collectively working out a new concept of the world order in the twenty-first century. Russia cannot be indifferent to the fact that the former Soviet republics of Central Asia have become areas of competition. Russia's rule over this region has lasted for more than a hundred years. Russia has always considered this region as an extension of its own soil. During Isar's time Central Asia was important not only economically, but also politically. During this period Central Asia acted as a buffer between the expanding British Empire and the Russian heartland. This region acquired crucial significance during the Cold War period. After the Soviet breakup, this region did not lose its importance as an area ensuring the stability in the Russian heartland. The Central Asian region was considered by the policy makers as an area, which could serve as, a region checking the infiltration of extremist forces from its southern borders.

It has already been stated that Russia, for its past link and geographical proximity consider Central Asia vital to its interests. Initially, Russian politicians seemed to be ignoring Central Asia. Reoccupation with its own political and economic turmoil did not permit Russia to pay much

attention to the other former Soviet Republics. In this context Russian expert, Yury Khromov is of the view that Moscow's priorities and declining interest in the region until 9/11 was due to its "wrong assessment of the situation".

But in subsequent years Central Asian Republics (CARs) were recognized as an integral part of the zone of Russia's special interests. In May 1992 Yevgeni Ambastsumov – then Chairman of the Russian Dunia's committee on International Affairs – observed "Russia is something larger than the Russian Federation in its present borders. Therefore, one must see its geopolitical interest more broadly than what is current', defined by the maps. That is our starting point as we develop our conception of mutual relation with our "own foreign countries".

The necessity of active development of relations between Russia and the Central Asian States was stressed in a document presented by the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs at the end of 1992 entitled "A concept of Russia's Foreign Policy". In December of the same year the former deputy Foreign Minister F. Shelov Kovedyoev in a paper read at a conference of Russian expert said, for instance, "In order not to lose its positions the Russian Federation should have

changed its tactics by July or August, it should have made active use of various means of influence. Upon the situation in the 'new foreign states', including differentiated approaches to the development of economic relations".

There are many strategic interests that compel Russia to seek to retain a sphere of influence in Central Asia. Russia's major interests and objectives in the Central Asian region are mainly to :

- Help transform CIS countries into politically and economically stable states, with policies friendly to Russia. It is in Russia's interest to prevent escalation of inter-state and internal conflicts.
- Strengthen Russia's leadership role in the creation of a new system of intergovernmental political and economic relations.
- Extend and further institutionalize the process of integration among the member state of the CIS :
- Safeguard its economic interest in the region.
- Maintain its hold over the energy resources of the region. To control the Caspian oil transit routes that would be advantageous to Russia.

- Counter the threat of religious extremism and prevention of drug trafficking and arms – smuggling.
- Ensure the Central Asia's ecological security, especially the environmental disaster in Aral and Caspian Sea.

Protect the rights of Russians living in this region. About 9.5 million Russians were reported to be residing in CARs after Soviet break up. But this number has fallen to about 6.9 million today. No government can afford to be indifferent to the well being of Russian's living in Central Asian region. Moreover, Russian's interests are not limited geographically. It has large Muslim population 8 per cent or 14 million people.

Kazakhstan is the second largest petroleum producer after Russia. If we take Uzbekistan, there are large enterprises in the Russian Federation that depend upon cotton imports from Uzbekistan, even now after the Soviet disintegration. There is great amount of interdependence in the economic sector between Russia and CARs. Russia wants an access to new transport routes of oil and gas to "far abroad" It wants to retain control over the supply of metals and strategic and raw material from the region.

Russia has vital interest in oil and gas complex of Central Asia. A number of factors lend special importance to Russia's oil and gas complex in Central Asia. First, this complex is developing vigorously compared with other industries and is successfully overcoming its previous 'enclave' character by integration into the world energy economy. Secondly, it possesses enormous resources. Thirdly, it has successfully formed a joint-stock system, which further the creation of a powerful lobby. Fourthly, while pursuing economic advantage, it is simultaneously fulfilling the, strategic role of ensuring Russian control in the sphere of oil and gas production and transportation in the 'near abroad' and preventing Russia from being isolated, by building new pipelines across its territory. The activity of the Russian oil and gas producing companies and associations in Central Asia is growing above all in Kazakhstan, where a struggle for control of oil export has already started. The same is true to a lesser degree to Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan.

Under the leadership of President Putin, Russia is taking steps to expand, consolidate and further strengthen its ties with Central Asian Republics (CAR). President Putin has shown the ability to promote Russian interests in a more

subtle and effective manner than his predecessor. He has been able to consolidate a seemingly stronger position in Central Asia through its pragmatic policies. The current emphasis is towards greater cooperation with CAR's in political, energy and military sectors. In its approach towards Central Asia, ideas about territorial domination no longer play a significant role in the formulation of Moscow's strategy. While the aim in Central Asia remains the maintenance of stability, foreign policy shapers are accepting the notion that Russian national interests are best served by the exploitation of economic levers of influence. It is also seeking to persuade ethnic Russians living in Central Asia to remain in the region, rather than emigrate. Ethnic Russians living in CARs are now viewed by the Russian foreign policy establishment as key asset in the attempt to tie Central Asian economies to Russia.

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