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Russian Policy in the Caucasus and Central Asia

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Russia is a Eurasian power with ambitions to be one of the most important powers on a global scale. The key to achieving this goal is its position in Asia, which is politically and economically the fastest-developing region in the world. However, though Asia offers Russia tremendous opportunity, it also presents the greatest threats. Russia is now trying to deal with both these questions.

A fundamental aspect of Russia's efforts to strengthen its superpower position is how it achieves or maintains the fullest possible political and economic control in the region of the former Union of Soviet Socialist Republics. This clearly applies to Central Asia and the Caucasus, both regions in which the power struggle is at its most severe. Russia still dominates in this region thanks to political and economic instruments, as well as the internal weakness of the new states during the transition period. However, it is not certain whether Russia will be able to maintain and fully exploit what appears to be the recent erosion of the region's net of political, economic, and cultural dependence. Above all, it remains uncertain whether Russia will be able—as it has thus far—to dictate security in the region. Russia's position and its strategic goals in the region have acquired special importance since September 11, 2001.

More than ten years have passed since the collapse of the Soviet Union. Since 1991, Moscow has systematically lost status as one of the world's two superpowers. For the first time in two hundred years, Russia—against the will of all political forces in the country—was absent from the first rank of countries that create the world order, a direct result of the disproportion of forces between the United States and other world powers. It now appears

that Russian foreign policy aims mainly to combat the unipolar global system (focused on the United States), and to fulfill its desire to obtain a leading place in the world, even if this has to be divided into equal shares with other states within a multipolar global order.

Parallel with the loss of its superpower status, Russia's spheres of influence have clearly shrunk in the last decade. Since 1991 Russia has significantly limited its global policy; it has almost completely withdrawn from Africa and Latin America, lost control over central Europe, and was obliged to put the brakes on its expansion in Asia. Its most spectacular loss involved the Soviet republics that did not join the Russian Federation: the Baltic states, Ukraine, Belarus, Moldavia (now Moldova), the southern Caucasus, and Central Asia. For more than two hundred years, these areas had been subject to Russia, regardless of whatever shocks it experienced. Now, Russia's capacity for keeping and restoring the strongest possible control and a supraregional power monopoly on "Asiatic" areas (the Caucasus and Central Asia) has extreme importance for the future of Russia's position in global policy. Russia's control of this region is strong enough now, but it is getting weaker year by year.

The third factor that seems to be of ever greater significance for Russia and its position in the world is Asia's unprecedented growth in importance. This has been especially noticeable since the end of the Cold War, as the economic, technological, and demographic development of the Asian countries (or even of civilization itself, in political scientist Samuel Huntington's sense of the word) has begun to achieve international political significance. This is as true for China, India, and Japan as for Islamic civilization (from Pakistan via Indonesia to Iran, by way of such supranational movements as fundamentalism).

Russia, as a Eurasian power, needs to conduct very active policy in Asia. On the one hand, Russia finds full sympathy in Asia for its idea of a multipolar world order, and has political (and economic) partners with similar thoughts. But on the other hand, it must play an intensive game in order not to become an object of Asian expansion. Asia will decide the future of the Russian Empire. Without doubt, the changes that have come to the world since September 11, 2001, will strengthen the importance of each of these three factors even further, and will oblige Russia to cultivate them.

RUSSIA AND CHINA

Russia has traditionally taken a predominant interest in India, Iran, and above all China. The weakness of Russia's economy does not allow for intensive trade exchange, or even an exchange of investments. Yet the above-mentioned countries do receive Russian strategic export goods, including weapons and military technologies.[1] For Russia, this is a way to

provide more funds for government coffers and maintain its own military industry: it is one of the most important instruments for efforts to bring some balance to the global distribution of power.

China is obviously the most important of the aforementioned countries, because of the potential of its surroundings, and also it shares with Russia the philosophy of keeping its distance from the United States. One important stimulus that brought China and Russia closer together was the intervention by the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) in Yugoslavia in 1999. NATO's actions showed both countries that the alliance (specifically the United States) could use force to solve problems outside its sphere of influence without taking into consideration the attitudes of Moscow or Beijing. Russia and China announced that they placed strong emphasis on mutual friendship, a common vision for the distribution of global power, and the need to increase economic cooperation. This series of declarations was crowned by a friendship treaty between Russia and China, which was signed on July 16, 2001, during Jiang Zemin's visit to Moscow. Both countries aim "to support the world's strategic balance and security."

This cooperation between Russia and China was reflected in a burst of activity in the reconstitution of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) at its summit meeting in June 2001. (Originally founded in 1996, the SCO—once known as the "Shanghai Five"—originally comprised Russia, China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan, and concentrated on solving border-related problems and instilling confidence in China and neighboring post-Soviet countries. Uzbekistan joined at the June 2001 summit.) It is becoming clear that the SCO's goal is to weaken the international position of the United States. Numerous events point to this conclusion: the meeting between Chinese President Jiang and Russian President Vladimir Putin received more emphasis than the Russian-American summit; the SCO expressed disapproval of the National Missile Defense (NMD) project; its position in the region (how Moscow and Beijing interpret Uzbekistan's accession to the organization); and the settlement of supraregional conflicts (China's attempts to include Pakistan in the organization are still being attacked by Russia).

One of the SCO's main goals is to fight separatism, Islamic fundamentalism, and extremism in the region. The organization is preparing formal conditions with China and Russia for a common regional security policy and military cooperation (that is, a practical local alliance). However, it appears that both Russia and China (especially China) are trying to strengthen their own positions in Central Asia at the expense of the other. For example, China directly interfered in Kazakhstan in the Uighur case and armed Uzbekistan during the Batken crisis (attacks by mujaheddin from the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan [IMU] on Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan). This broke Russia's regional security monopoly, including its monopoly on arms. Furthermore, the common Russian-Chinese declara-

tions against fundamentalism have nothing to do with their opinions of the Taliban. The Russian-Chinese alliance against fundamentalism is really a propaganda slogan, or even a form of competition, rather than a real basis for cooperation.

A number of other important discrepancies are concealed behind Russia and China's "alliance." Despite some emergency actions taken by President Putin, such as depriving Yevgeny Nazdratenko (who was strongly prejudiced against China) of the governorship of the Maritime Territory, and closing the Russian naval base in Cam Ranh Bay in Vietnam in June 2001, the scope for cooperation may become narrower.

Apart from long-term economic, military, and demographic perspectives, which are disadvantageous for Russia and in sharp contrast with Chinese indices and prospects, a number of current issues also remain unsettled. Although certain agreements have been concluded, and discussions of border issues between both countries have resumed, Beijing continued to express a cold attitude toward the border agreements signed by imperial Russia and China.[2]

The most serious conflicts may soon appear within the territories of Central Asia, which Russia treats as its own sphere of influence. China is much more concerned about its western territories. As a result, it is drawing up plans for huge investments to develop towns and industry in the western provinces.[3] Thus, the countries of Central Asia now have a strong economic and political center linked to transport routes, which deprives Russia of its monopolist position.[4] Moreover, a number of other major regional problems have resurfaced. These concern international borders (a very controversial border shift between China and Kyrgyzstan in spring 2001) and water resources (Chinese management projects for the Ili and Irtysh Rivers would be disastrous for east Kazakhstan and, to a lesser degree, for Russian territories located in the drainage area of the rivers).[5] Relations between China and Central Asia have been growing more strained due to disagreements over Uighur bases in Kazakhstan despite the efforts made by the government in Astana. The growing importance of China to the Central Asian countries may be an opportunity to analyze the wide discrepancies between Beijing and Moscow: Moscow does not want to lose its control over the economy, the transport routes, or the shape of the states of the former empire.

The relations between Russia and China bear more resemblance to a game than to a long-range alliance. They are focused predominantly on declarations, gestures, and prestige, and not on real cooperation, which could be transformed into a strategic partnership. Moreover, each country would prefer to become the dominant party in an agreement, which in turn remains unacceptable to the other party.

THE CAUCASUS AND CENTRAL ASIA

Central Asia and the Caucasus have decisive importance for Russia's position in Asia and its imperial character. From a geopolitical viewpoint, there is a range of contacts and collisions between Russia's influence (which today is undoubtedly the strongest) and the leading political centers of Asia. The latter include China and (indirectly) India, as well as "Islamic civilization" in its political dimension (Iran, Turkey, Pakistan) and its ideological dimension (i.e., that the region is attractive to fundamentalist movements such as Afghanistan's Taliban). In this region, the game between superpowers, as they play the field for collaboration and for conflicts, is most apparent.

A number of the countries in the region have common interests in Afghanistan (e.g., supporting the Northern Alliance), which represent an opening for Russia's ever closer cooperation with Iran and India. As a result, Moscow has an indirect influence on Pakistan's position in its conflict with India. Russia's joint position with Tehran regarding the division of the Caspian Sea allows it to use Iran as a pawn to weaken Western influence. One example is the Iran-Azerbaijan crisis of August 2001, which forced BP AMOCO to withdraw from controversial strata on the sea bed, and notably weakened the interest of Western businesses in getting involved in such an unstable region.

The ongoing contest regarding the antiterrorist coalition and military operation in Afghanistan under U.S. command confirms and strengthens the region's importance. Russia's hostile attitude toward the coalition would definitely not have allowed the United States to use Uzbekistan for actions in Afghanistan. In fact, Russia's influence over the Northern Alliance in Afghanistan allows it to control the course of operations in Afghanistan. It also ensures that Russia will have a key voice in establishing the country's future status. Russia may play an especially important role vis-à-vis the ongoing controversies between the United States and Pakistan, and between Russia and Iran, about the participation of the Pashtun or so-called moderate Taliban in a government after the success of the military operation.

Finally, from Moscow's point of view, the importance of both the Caucasus and Central Asia is quite measurable and straightforward. This is the focus of Russia's most crucial economic interests and direct external threats. It is impossible to overestimate the role of energy resources in the Russian economy,[6] as energy exports are of the highest importance for the country.[7] One of the most important products is Caspian gas, set to become a key Russian export, as the domestic gas industry has a number of problems. Russia may apply higher prices when exporting gas to the western countries; furthermore, the payments and the political benefits Russia is supposed to receive are more secure than those obtained from

domestic entities. Russia does not have sufficient financial means to exploit new deposits; but if it takes control of Caspian oil and gas deposits, it may increase its budget revenue (obtained from transit activity or from its share in such deposits) and strengthen its ability to influence the global prices of raw materials.

The southern part of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) is still the "soft underbelly" of the Russian Federation. Setting aside Russia's role in the development of the regional situation, both the Caucasus and Central Asia have enormous potential for destabilizing the Russian Federation. Russia's withdrawal from the region resulted in the loss of a well-adjusted border area that in the past separated the Soviet Union from its southern neighbors (including Turkey, which is a NATO member). The existing border between Russia and Kazakhstan, as well as the border running through the Caucasus, do not offer any security, nor do they allow any control over the flow of people and goods. Taking into consideration such problems as the number of conflicts in the southern territories of the CIS, social delinquency, and the emergence of radical fundamentalist terrorist groups, this is not a purely theoretical problem. It is also impossible to overestimate the transit role of the southern parts of the CIS and Russia in global drug trafficking. This is a multilateral problem, as it includes a purely criminal aspect (particularly involving organized crime),[8] a social aspect (an increase in the number of drug addicts),[9] and political and economic aspects (the enormous amount of capital remaining outside state control).

There is relatively little time left for Russia to strengthen its position in Central Asia and the Caucasus, regardless of the post–September 11 events. Moreover, demographic trends in Russia are extremely disadvantageous (a negative birthrate in Russia, a population explosion in Central Asia, and Russians leaving the region).[10] The society currently emerging in Central Asia and—to a lesser extent—the Caucasus is only marginally connected with Russian culture (as was the case with the Soviet Union). Therefore its links with Russia, which today are of decisive importance, may well become less and less cohesive, and the resistance to Russia's presence in the region and the influence of its competitors will gain in strength. The most viable cultural alternative is the one offered by Islam, which will become even more dangerous as it starts adopting fundamentalist features (which tend to affect the whole spectrum of life—including its social, economic, and political aspects—for both individuals and groups of people).

Thus, for Russia, loss of influence in the region may imply not only that it has renounced its aspirations to become a world power (not a superpower), but also has lost its strategic prospects. For all these reasons, Moscow is making and will continue to make every effort to maintain its present position.

From the point of view of the Caucasus and Central Asian countries, Russia remains the most important reference point, despite the fact that

almost ten years have passed since the eight Soviet republics in the region became independent states. The initial fascination with Western political, social, and economic patterns was quickly suppressed by local limitations and "the way to democracy based on specific cultural features," and/or the need to renounce the adoption of Western concepts of state, society, and economy. The discrepancy between the appetites of local elites and the careful policy of Western states has become glaring. The countries of the Caucasus and Central Asia are still unable to solve their strategic problems themselves without taking Moscow's opinion into account. This includes regional political problems, contacts between the region and other countries, and relations between individual states. Although the countries in the region have huge reserves of natural resources (such as oil and gas in Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, and Azerbaijan),[11] as well as geographical locations that offer good transport potential, nobody has managed to come up with an alternative solution for Russian transport routes or how to get the countries' economies out of Moscow's control.

For Russia, the need to rebuild the country is an important obstacle in carrying out its own policy. The differences between the economies of Kazakhstan (definitely the best), Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan, or between the efficiency of the democratic mechanisms of Kazakhstan or Armenia (undoubtedly the most efficient) and those of Turkmenistan or Tajikistan, are huge. Today, the democratic political and social institutions of those states, as well as their free markets, constitute a mere facade. All those countries are bound by numerous limitations, and are endangered by government systems based upon clans. The main problem is that power is concentrated in the immediate inner circle of the president and those related to him by consanguinity, common origin, political past, or place of birth. For these reasons it is much more difficult to adhere to an effective policy, as there are grounds for conflicts about prestige and people-related issues, not about programs. The limited economic possibilities, together with a population explosion in Central Asia, the marginal role of the opposition and regional elites, and hidden ethnic conflicts, all have enormous destabilizing power. The elites that wield power in each country constitute another anxiety factor vis-à-vis the ability to function independently of Moscow. The presidents of six of the eight countries are former members of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union; with Russia's help, the presidents of Georgia and Azerbaijan "replaced" the democratically elected leaders, and two others (President Robert Kocharian of Armenia and President Emomali Rachmonov of Tajikistan) won their political positions thanks to Russian military support.

What seems most dangerous is the lack of clear-cut mechanisms for transferring power. In the southern Caucasus, the changes in government structure were brought about by civil wars (Georgia) or coups d'état (Azerbaijan and Armenia). The only change that occurred in Central Asia

resulted from the civil war in Tajikistan. This kind of situation can threaten further implementation of current policy. The two most acute examples are Georgia and Azerbaijan. In the case of Azerbaijan, President Geydar Aliev's desire to assure succession for his son Ilham has led to a visible rapprochement of relations with Russia, which is inclined to support the move. In fact, President Putin expressly stated this during his visit to Azerbaijan in June 2001. Also important is the fact that most political-opposition activists from the Caucasus and Central Asia have found refuge in Moscow.

The main obstacles to Russia's exclusive dominance over the southern republics of the CIS are economic. At present, Russia is unable to bring either the southern Caucasus or Central Asia under its economic control. It lacks not only the resources to make investments, but also the capacity to use Caspian oil and gas deposits on its own. All Russia can afford to do is prevent its competitors from taking control of those areas: for example, to block all communication routes that do not pass through its territory or interfere with exploitation of deposits. Economic limitations have prompted Russia's strong criticism of the Atyrau-Baku-Ceyhan pipeline, of its own involvement in the Afghanistan war (which prevented activation of the gas pipeline from Turkmenistan to Pakistan), and its cooperation with Iran on the status of the Caspian Sea. The fact that the problem has not been resolved is an important obstacle to the exploitation of the areas in question and to any activities performed in the sea. Economically speaking, therefore, in the economic field, Russia presents a rather conservative approach to the existing distribution of power.

Another challenge is reflected in the development of the Collective Security Agreement (CSA). Initially aimed at establishing a common security area, the CSA seemed to offer a perfect legal basis for creating regional rapid reaction forces in Central Asia, the southern Caucasus, and Belarus. Regional rapid reaction forces were established at the CSA summit in Bishkek in 2000, in response to the Batken crisis. Surprisingly, progress in establishing these forces is quite advanced, as is work on creation of the antiterrorist center in Bishkek. Although the emergency forces (supposed to number between 1,500 and 1,700 soldiers) are not particularly strong—due to both the number of soldiers and to their organizational and logistical deficiencies—they constitute evidence that Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan looked to Russia for help and accepted Russian military units in the region because they felt endangered. The CSA itself only acts as a screen for bilateral military arrangements between its members and Russia. Nevertheless, the informational and legislative contributions of the CSA to Russia's increasing importance in that region cannot be underestimated. The proposed Eurasian Economic Community may have similar objectives, as it is aimed at consolidating the economic, customs, and legal policies of its member states. At present it is still in the planning stages, but in the future it may become a gateway for Russia to the markets of its member states.

EXPLOITING INSECURITY

For ten years, Russia's most important tools for modifying the situation in the southern part of the CIS have invariably included both military influence and the ability to provoke or control conflicts. These conflicts seriously restrain the political independence of the countries involved, and create economic and social problems. Moreover, they destabilize the region by making it unattractive for Western investors (including projects involving transregional transportation routes) or Western political involvement. The conflicts always tend to affect countries looking for an alternative to Russia (Georgia and Azerbaijan in the Caucasus; at first Tajikistan in Central Asia, and currently Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan).

These conflicts are both provoked and resolved by the Russian military presence, as Russian bases were and remain important support for brewing Caucasus-area separatist movements (the Abkhaz and Ossetian movements) and for those about to boil over (Armenian separatism in Javakhetia and Adzhar separatism). The Russian military presence—and the conflicts strongly connected with it—are still important trump cards in the negotiations held between Moscow and Tbilisi. (For example, the problem of dismantling the base in Gudauta, Abkhazia, was raised at the end of June 2001.) Discussions regarding new Russian military bases in Central Asia raise similar issues. It is impossible to ignore the fact that Caucasus and Central Asian airspace is fully controlled by Russia.

Although military activity in the southern Caucasus had been suspended since 1994, the existence of independent "para-states" has made development and regional cooperation for both countries impossible. (The para-states were established with Russia's help and can only be maintained with Russian help. They comprise Nagorno-Karabakh in Azerbaijan, and South Ossetia and Abkhazia in Georgia.) Russia imposed visas on Georgians and not Abkhaz or Ossetians; this appeared to be clearly anti-Georgian, as work in Russia made it possible for hundreds of thousands of Georgians to earn a living while staying in the country. In addition, despite the enormous efforts made both by mediators (recently the United States and France) and the presidents of Azerbaijan (Geydar Aliyev) and Armenia (Robert Kocharian), there is little chance that the Karabakh conflict will be resolved, as it is very easy to raise social objections to the president's position. (Former Armenian President Levon Ter-Petrosian was pushed out of office because of his willingness to make concessions on the Karabakh issue.)

Russia's main problem in Central Asia is Islamic fundamentalism. At the beginning of the 1990s, Russia supported the government of Tajikistan in its struggle against the Islamic opposition. Russia took full control of the state, and by maintaining its own military bases there, managed to dominate Tajikistan much more thoroughly than the other CIS states. We should

not forget, however, that the peace treaties signed under the patronage of Moscow ensured the opposition a strong influence in the country. The Russian army has been entrusted with the role of arbitrator in political events, a role accepted by both parties to the treaties.

The second upsurge of Islamic fundamentalism in Central Asia, which has focused on Uzbekistan, is a much more complex problem. A number of issues have coincided: political (the marginal position of the Fergana clan, or the suppression of political opposition in all its forms), cultural (Uzbekistan's strong Islamic background and the lack of ideology after the Soviet Union's collapse), and social and economic (a baby boom and increasing unemployment). All these events have established ideal conditions for the Uzbek opposition to become more Islamic and more radical. In addition, the Uzbeks have found friendly support in Tajikistan and Afghanistan. The activity of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (currently, the Islamic Party of Turkestan), which has declared its intention to overthrow President Islam Karimov and to establish an Islamic state in the Fergana Valley, was reflected in the Batken crises, which shook the whole region. Due to Russia's inability to solve the problem on its own, and because of the breakdown in regional cooperation, Russia has become the sole state that can guarantee security in the region. This has resulted in closer political and military cooperation with Russia, a reformulation of the CSA, and the granting of almost unanimous permission—or even encouragement—for the Russian army to come back to the region. The return of the Russian army would be based upon the establishment of regional emergency forces, new military bases (as in Chkalovsk, Tajikistan), or the reinforcement of existing ones. Such a situation is a blow mostly against Uzbekistan, which has been attempting to become the region's leader and replace Russian influence with the cooperation of the United States, Turkey, and China.

Indeed, since it gained independence, Uzbekistan has tried to take advantage of its military and demographic potential (including Uzbek minorities in neighboring countries) to achieve political hegemony in Central Asia. The main area of Uzbekistan's expansion was in Tajikistan, where Tashkent supported post-communist forces during the civil war (1992–97), and still supports the Uzbek minority and the Khujand clan (including opposition politicians who escaped to Uzbekistan). The same situation exists with the Uzbek minority in Afghanistan, and the Uzbek forces of General Rashid Dostum, which it backs. Also, Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan are seriously troubled by Uzbekistan's arbitrarily changing borders between the countries. Moreover, Tashkent forces pricing conditions on them for using Kyrgyzstan water, as well as forcing them to buy Kazakhstan coal and sell gas for Kyrgyzstan. Uzbekistan's policy is to strengthen relations between the region and Russia.

For Uzbekistan, the most important goal is to find serious support among those countries that compete with Russia in the region, including China, but mainly the United States and Turkey. Any sign of a close relationship with the West (declarations, visits, military support, equipment, training, etc.) strengthens Uzbekistan's position toward Russia. It should be mentioned that President Karimov has tried to have his own (that is, neither Western- nor U.S.-oriented) regional policy. For example, he exhibited his independence very strongly when he criticized the Western concept of democracy and human rights during the 1999 Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) summit in Istanbul. He also froze relations with Turkey in 1999, because Turkey granted asylum to his opponents. However, Uzbekistan is the most important and independent player in Central Asia, and could be the best partner for the West (specifically, the United States—as can be seen after September 11) for stopping Russian and/or Chinese influence in the region, and rebuilding security and the political system.

In Central Asia, Islamic fundamentalism—the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan/Islamic Party of Turkestan (IMU/IPT), instead of the Hizb-ut-Tahrir party—which is mainly Uzbekstan's problem, plays a role similar to that played by the para-states and ethnic conflicts in the southern Caucasus. Fundamentalism also provides a very convenient justification of Russia's military presence and political supervision in that region, an argument that is presented in the Russian media and generally accepted in Central Asia. Paradoxically, Russia's implicit support for the IMU/IPT seems rather obvious; Russia tolerates the movement's bases in Tajikistan (although it has sufficient resources to suppress them), and it allows the Russia-dependent government of Tajikistan to support IMU/ITP activities (the government thus attempts to weaken Uzbekistan's position, and prevents the Uzbeks from taking any actions against the IMU/ITP bases). Also, Uzbekistan has many times threatened to bomb those camps, but Russia and Tajikistan have objected. Finally, it is impossible to overlook the fact that the country which is Russia's closest neighbor and still under Russian control has in fact been broken up into sovereign principalities governed by specific camp commanders (representing the government and the opposition). Therefore, it is not unlikely that Tajikistan will become an example of Russian order in Central Asia while having no power sources of its own. Tajikistan determines the limits of Russia's expectations from that region in regard to its military control, its position as super-arbitrator in a decentralized state, and as a blockade against the influence of other powerful states.

AFGHANISTAN BEFORE AND AFTER SEPTEMBER 11

Another important political factor exploited in the relations with Central Asia is Afghanistan. Apart from fundamentalism, the menace created by the

Taliban is an equally important reason for Russia's presence in the region. For Russia, the war in Afghanistan is a guarantee that the region will be blocked off from the south, both politically (from the impact of Islamic countries, in particular Pakistan) and economically (from a possible blockade of pipelines). This may be an explanation for the resolute support Russia provided to the Northern Alliance after the Taliban's spectacular victories in the autumn of 2000. The effect could have become even stronger through direct military actions by Russia in Afghanistan. This was suggested both by the regular preparation of Russian society for unavoidable conflict with the Taliban, and by the obvious fact of the strengthening of Russian military forces in that region (the regional emergency units, reinforcement projects for military bases, and personnel changes in the Russian army). Such a scenario would obviously have been supported by the majority of soldiers and the war industry lobby. Afghanistan offers the opportunity to demonstrate Russian force and tighten the traditional cooperation with India and Iran, which is one of the most important issues for Moscow's power policy.

Together with the attacks on Washington and New York, Russia has been confronting new challenges since September 11. First of all, it has appeared that Islamic terrorism is a real threat of global character, which potentially threatens Russia itself. (Russia's Muslim population is estimated at 20 million, and in the whole area of the CIS at more than 70 million); in addition, the threat of Afghanistan as a base for fundamentalism has ceased to be merely apparent and has become a reality.

Second, the prestige of the United States as the only superpower was significantly impaired. This forced Washington to organize an act of retaliation, supported by a broad coalition, aimed at terrorist centers in Afghanistan—a borderland of Russia's vital interests. The necessity of preparing a political base for the military action in Afghanistan was naturally linked with a sudden animation of American diplomacy in the region of the future conflict (Pakistan, Iran, India, and the countries of Central Asia). Russia confronted a dilemma: to compete with the United States and the coalition, and thus weaken the world order constructed by the United States, or to join in with the action. In a similar situation in 1999 (the NATO intervention in Kosovo), Russia chose to boycott, a move that brought it no benefits and marginalized it in the Balkans. This time President Putin has joined in, albeit after hesitations and with many ambiguous signals. However, it would appear that not all his people, especially those in the so-called power departments, support his move. Russia is counting on a fundamental rebuilding of its relations with the West, and above all on achieving the status of a strategic, essential, and equal partner in the eyes of the United States. Putin spoke openly about approaching Western structures (NATO and the European Union) during his visit to Brussels. Russia could then increase its international authority, thus weakening NATO's potentially threatening (to Russia) structure.

It was unavoidable that Central Asia would find itself at the center of the antiterrorist coalition and the operation in Afghanistan. In the face of frozen American-Iranian relations (despite signs of both sides' desire to normalize) and the uncertain situation in Pakistan (owing to resistance from very influential Pakistani fundamentalist circles, as well as from Pakistan's links with the Taliban), the countries of Central Asia could become an alternative base for military operations. The first suggestions of cooperation from within the coalition demonstrated an awareness of the situation and a desire to take advantage of the coalescing factors: on September 15, Kazakhstan proposed "help by all available means," and two days later Uzbekistan made its bases available, assuming the United States would approach with such a request. At first, Moscow saw this as a threat to its own interests, and forced the presidents of the region to distance themselves from these offers. However, in the face of active efforts by the diplomatic services of America, Kazakhstan, and Uzbekistan, and also in connection with devising a position of its own that would be open to cooperation with the coalition—as seen in Putin and his representative's consultation with the "departments of force" in Sochi on September 22—Russia agreed to American involvement in the region. In effect, an American military base is currently operating in Uzbekistan (a minimum of 1,000 soldiers from the Tenth Mountain Division, intelligence agents, etc.), at the military airport in Khanabad; a de facto Uzbek-American alliance has also appeared, as revealed on October 12. Uzbekistan will allow the United States to use Uzbeki territory as a base for its military presence in the region, in return for which it offers limited guarantees for Uzbekistan's security, and creates mechanisms for cooperation in case of any threat to the Uzbekistan's stability and territorial integrity. This agreement forms a basis for building stability and security in the region in support of the United States.

At first glance, the events of September and October 2001 signify Russia's expulsion from Central Asia to the benefit of the United States, and the literal breaking of Russia's monopoly on creating regional security. At this moment it is the United States that has a military presence in the region, and it is they who are militarily liquidating the regional threats. The Uzbek-American agreements also indicate that Washington does not intend to withdraw from the region upon the conclusion (especially upon a quick conclusion) of the operation in Afghanistan.

Superficially, it may seem that all these developments are happening with Moscow's consent. It may appear that Moscow is collaborating with the United States, does not object to American soldiers in the region, and has declared its desire for a long-term rapprochement with West. However, a closer analysis of the situation reveals the range of Russia's bargaining chips. First of all, Russia is becoming a reliable partner of the West (especially Western Europe); it has declared the same values, cooperates, and

actively engages in constructing a post–Cold War security system. Secondly, it is becoming an invaluable partner of the United States in the Afghanistan conflict; it has cooperated politically by sharing both intelligence and military facilities (by supporting anti-Taliban forces). Its role will presumably grow in tandem with the lengthening operation in Afghanistan. Such influence ensures Russian influence over the Northern Alliance, as well as a convergence of interests and cooperation with Iran regarding Afghanistan. Paradoxically, the U.S. victory over the Taliban will allow Russia to strengthen the positions of its clients (Northern Alliance) in Afghanistan. (True, it is difficult to imagine that in the face of Washington's consistent pro-Pashtun and pro-Pakistan policy, the United States could succeed in weakening Russia and Iran's influence among the Tajiks, Hazaras, and Uzbeks. However, the cooperation between the United States and Uzbekistan allows some certain room for maneuvering.) Thirdly, U.S. involvement in Uzbekistan will inevitably entangle Washington in a range of this country's internal structural problems, ranging from its economic problems to the fundamentalism in the Fergana Valley. A solution to these problems would require enormous political and financial investment from the United States before Uzbekistan became a reliable partner and ally.

Finally, Russia seems still to have control over the "entry" of the Caspian region into the wider world: Afghanistan, pervaded as it is by war, will not be suitable for this for a long time yet. Iran still does not seem ready for close cooperation with United States, while the Caucasus is still experiencing successive tremors (Georgia, the unresolved Chechen question—after September 11, suggestions appeared in the Russian press to "liquidate the bases of Chechen terrorists" that Georgia supposedly harbors, also commenting that the U.S. operation in Afghanistan may serve as a precedent—and the currently growing Abkhaz problem). At the beginning of October 2001, Georgian-Abkhaz relations worsened following the appearance of a Chechen division that had fought its way through from the Pankissi Ravine (in the east of the country) to the Kodori Ravine in Abkhazia. Air bombardment of Georgian border villages by (most likely) the Russian air force also began opportunely. This conflict will significantly worsen, and such bad Russian-Georgian relations call the withdrawal of the Russian base in Abkhazia into question (especially as Abkhazia has renewed its request to join the Russian Federation). This also speaks very badly of Georgia's internal stability: giving the Chechens passage through the country is undoubtedly an element of the contest between President Eduard Shevardnadze and the opposition (presumably focused around the leader of parliament, Zurab Zhvania, and the minister of internal affairs, Kakha Targamadze). The crisis in Georgia, and the evident Russian instruments of influence on the situation in this country, guarantee Moscow that Georgia would be ruled out as a political partner for anyone, and also as a transit region for Caspian raw materials.

In October 2001, once Caspian oil began flowing onto the European market via a Russian pipeline to Novorossiysk, the plan for an Atyrau-Baku-Ceyhan pipeline supported by United States underwent another crisis because of the conflicts between Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan, and between Iran and Kazakhstan. In September 2001, Azerbaijan significantly distanced itself from the proposed trans-Caspian oil pipeline from Kazakhstan.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

As the antiterrorist coalition has expanded, the new era of U.S. involvement in the south of the CIS has become fact. Never before has the United States had a direct military presence here. This creates both enormous opportunities and enormous dangers.

The presence of the United States in the region seems inevitable: a state that wants to play the role of a superpower cannot allow itself to be absent from a place where the influences of the greatest powers of Asia (at once partners and rivals of the United States) clash, four of which have nuclear weapons (Russia, China, Pakistan, and India). This is especially true as Pakistan, hitherto the linchpin of U.S. support, is undoubtedly experiencing immense internal tensions that threaten destabilization with far-reaching results beyond the region's borders. Thus, it becomes key to provide enormous and constant support—both political and economic—for building independent and efficient states in the region.

U.S. involvement also seems beyond debate in a region where the Islamic fundamentalism that has given birth to terrorism plainly has perfect conditions for development (both in Afghanistan and Tajikistan, the entire Fergana Valley, and the northern Caucasus, Chechnya, and Dagestan). The problems that accompany (and frequently precede) fundamentalism include uncontrolled trade in drugs and arms, as well as problems both social and humanitarian (such as refugees). Despite its rhetoric, Russia is not able to solve these problems, and even seems to generate them (considering the example of Chechnya, and indirectly Tajikistan). The current Russia-centered defense system therefore requires fundamental revision; otherwise problems will snowball out of control.

Nor does it seem debatable that stocks of Caspian energy raw materials must be controlled, as they may serve as reserves in case American-Arab relations become inflamed. The danger of conflicts of interests with Russia exerts a very strong influence on the elites, counter-elites, and societies of the Caspian region. Another hurdle is the multi-level political, economic, social, and cultural crisis in the countries of the region, which is called "transformation." To overcome its causes and results—which is necessary to stabilize the region and join it to international political and economic

currents—will require many years, even generations. This will entail pressures and efforts, as well as peace at a considerable price. Unfortunately, the costs of such efforts may appear too high for the United States: among other things, it would require a revision of Washington's hitherto inflexible policy of promoting American democratic and civil standards. (The other extreme—supporting local despots, as was done with the Pahlavi family in Iran—is also unsafe, of course.) American society also seems excessively disinclined to sacrifice the lives of American soldiers for this goal.

In the end, the United States has proved very weak at recognizing the terrain and the local problems. Russia, as do Iran, Pakistan, and Turkey, has an overwhelming amount of knowledge of the local realities, and also a network of links with local elites. Stabilization of the region is impossible without their cooperation. In other words, without considering the interests of Russia and Iran, and indirectly of the Northern Alliance, the success of the operation in Afghanistan seems impossible, despite its obvious goal of creating a stable order, liquidating conditions for the development of terrorism, and the possible opening of Afghanistan to the transit of Caspian raw materials. In the long term, therefore, the best guarantee of stability in the region (and beyond it)—and of the protection of American interests—would be creation of a zone of regional cooperation with Russia, and especially with Iran. Nevertheless, while it is true that all three countries would undoubtedly have to make a colossal effort to revise their previous strategic assumptions, hope is raised by the fact that the first signals of readiness for such changes are evident in all three countries.

Without a doubt the Asian countries will contest Russia's future position in the world order, although the United States will also play a fundamental part in this process. Russia's position toward China, India, Pakistan, and the Islamic world will to a considerable degree depend not only on the imperial character of Russia, but also on its internal situation and economic development. The scale of challenges that Asia presents Russia is demonstrated as much by the challenging cooperation and rivalry with China as by the problem embodied by Afghanistan.

The process of reconstructing Russia's influence in Asia gained in intensity after September 11, 2001, because of Russia's importance in the antiterrorist coalition and strong political factions in Afghanistan (especially after the defeat of the Taliban) and the surrounding region. Russia's most important entry point for the future is its position in the south of the CIS, in Central Asia and the southern Caucasus. This is the region that will decide Russia's superpower potential. So far, as a result of traditions and weak economic tools, Russia had been building its influence in this region by playing on weaknesses and local conflicts. This destabilizes the region and hinders its development, but this policy seems to be successful in the short term. In the longer term it may have catastrophic results beyond the region. The great threat for this policy after September 11, 2001, is strong

military, political, and economic engagement on the part of the United States (and the European Union in the economic sphere) in Central Asia and the Caucasus. This calls into question Russia's monopoly, gives a geopolitical alternative for the region, strengthens the independence of the new states, and encourages growth in terms of regional stability.

These opposing tendencies—U.S. involvement in Russia's sphere of influence and the growing role of Russia in the coalition, Russia's particular influence in Central Asia and Afghanistan together with Russian flexibility in Moscow-Washington relations—create a completely new style of policy for Russia in the south of the CIS. Thanks to its position in the region, Russia has become an important player in global (Asiatic) policy and a kind of partner and ally for the United States. Though thus far it is symbolic, the breaking of Russia's monopoly in Central Asia by the United States seems to be a good price to pay for the change in Russia's position, particularly as Moscow has been keeping fairly tight control of political processes in the region. Russia's biggest problem will be keeping these political instruments and finding solutions for the region's social, economic, and cultural problems.

NOTES

1. The value of weapons and technologies to be exported by Russia in 2001 is estimated at U.S.$4.4 billion (with 70 percent falling to China and India): M. Galeotti, "Russia's Arms Bazaar," *Jane's Intelligence* (April 2001). The export of arms to China planned for the next five years is supposed to reach U.S.$15 billion: S. Blank, "Russia Seeks to Profit from Iranian Rearmament," *Jane's Intelligence* (April 2001).

2. See, for example, J. Urbanowicz, "Wejście smoka," *Wprost*, no. 34 (August 23, 2001).

3. G.B. Bessarabov and A.D. Soyanin, *Novyj zapadnyj pohod* (Report of the Transcaspian Project, February 22, 2001).

4. For example, the agreements on the construction of railways from Uzbekistan to Kashgar signed in Shanghai in 2001.

5. D. Biliouri, "Keeping the Lid on Central Asia's Water Dispute," *Jane's Intelligence* (April 2001); I. Amanzolov, "Konfliktnyje istoki transgranichnyh rek 2001," http://www.caapr.kz/show.php?kza0502-02.htm.

6. Katarzyna Pełczyńska-Nałęcz, Russian Gas Industry—Current Condition and Prospects (Warsaw: CES Studies, April 2001).

7. Together with other raw materials: 42 percent of the value of exports sold outside the CIS; 57 percent of the value of exports to the CIS member states.

8. In 1999, there were 216,364 drug-related crimes recorded within the Russian Federation: *Human Development Report 2000.*

9. It is estimated that about two million to five million people in the Russian Federation are drug addicts.

10. According to the average estimates of the State Office for Statistics (Goskomstat), the number of inhabitants of the Russian Federation will decrease from 145.6 million (2000) to 138.7 (2010): www.undp.ru/NHDR/summary_2000_eng.htm. At the same time, the birthrate in Central Asian countries is on the increase. For example, in Uzbekistan, 37 percent of the population is under 14, and in Tajikistan 42 percent are under 14. See Central Intelligence Agency, *The World Factbook 2000* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 2000).

11. A. Wolowska, *Caspian Oil and Gas: The Facts at the End of the Year 2000* (Warsaw: CES Studies, April 2001).