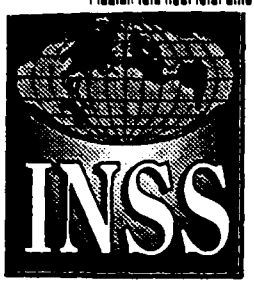

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A Challenge for American Policies

Russian Vital Interests

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Conclusions

- In exchange for help in suppressing the parliament last October, Russian military leaders apparently were granted their position that Russia's own vital interests—not cooperation with the West—be the basis for Moscow's security decisions.
- The current Russian concept of vital interests rejects the old Soviet dogma regarding a struggle between two social systems. However, it falls short of embracing the idea of Foreign Minister Andrey Kozyrev that it is essential for Russia to collaborate with the West on security matters. Nor is the concept dependent on Russia's integration into the Western-dominated international system.
- Although Russia's new security premise increases the chances of the United States and Russia disagreeing over security issues, the policy is not inherently confrontational. Russian actions and statements so far have reflected a belief that securing one's vital interests also requires dialogue, compromise, and the avoidance of conflicts with other powerful nations.
- While most within the Moscow decisionmaking community, including the new, conservative-dominated legislature, accept the notion that Russian policies should be based on vital interests, there is still no consensus on how to translate this principle into action—particularly in what they call the "Near Abroad."
- Russia's new concept of vital interests represents both a challenge and an opportunity for American policy, but not necessarily a return to Russian expansionism. Russia's de-emphasis of integration with the West, combined with the growing risk that an ultra-nationalist might come to power in Moscow, challenges the United States to re-examine its policies, not just toward Russia, but toward the entire region of Europe formerly controlled by the Soviets.

Kozyrev Loses a Policy Fight

Russian Foreign Minister Kozyrev postulated the basic premise of Russia's security policies in December 1991, when Russia, along with Ukraine and Belarus, abolished the Soviet Union and declared itself an independent state. Concluding that the major threats to Russia's security were economic and political isolation, Kozyrev decided that Russia had to pursue revolutionary economic and political reform and, most importantly, join with the Western world. Kozyrev believed that Russia could achieve security only through integration, not confrontation or competition, with the West. Moreover, his integration strategy advocated development of normal, cooperative relations with the other former Soviet republics.

Kozyrev's policies came under immediate attack from those who believed that Russia should entrust guardianship of its security and its place within the international community only to itself. This group argued that Russian security policies ought to focus on

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securing Russian vital interests—especially in "the Near Abroad"—not integrating into an international system controlled by the West. The debate, which continued for two years, ended abruptly early in the morning of October 4, 1993, when President Yeltsin rushed to the Ministry of Defense asking the military to put down the rebellion in the streets of Moscow. According to knowledgeable sources, in exchange for tanks, Yeltsin made several concessions to the military—including acceptance of vital national interests as the basis for future security decisions.

Russian Vital Interests

The Russian concept of vital interests de-emphasizes Kozyrev's idea that collaboration with the West on security matters is essential, but still rejects the old Soviet dogma regarding a struggle between two social systems. Further, the concept is not dependent upon Russia's integration into the Western-dominated international system.

A Yeltsin advisor maintains that the pursuit of one's own security interests also requires...avoidance of conflicts with other powerful nations. From this perspective, it would be wrong to view Russia's policy as inherently confrontational.

Few Russians have as yet specified what Russia's vital interests might be. However, at a May 1992 Moscow conference on military doctrine, Colonel-General Igor Rodionov, Chief of the General Staff Academy, listed a series of national goals:[1]

- The neutrality of Central and East European countries or their friendly relations with Russia;
- Free Russian access to seaports in the Baltics;
- Excluding "third-country" military forces from the Baltics and non-membership of the Baltic states in military blocs directed at Russia;
- Preventing Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) countries from becoming part of a buffer zone separating Russia from the West, South, or East;
- Maintaining the CIS states under Russia's exclusive influence;
- Preserving good-neighbor relations with states of the Middle and Far East.

Although Russian decisionmakers are still debating specifics, official statements (and Russian actions) suggest that many of these goals have been accepted in practice by Russian leaders.

Emphasizing the difference from the approach advocated previously by Kozyrev, one advisor to Yeltsin has made the point that while Russia wants to cooperate with the West on security issues, it would not hesitate to pursue its own policies when national interests are involved. The advisor fully expects that differences between Moscow and Washington over how to handle international problems will occur more frequently in the future. But he maintains that the pursuit of one's own security interests also requires dialogue, compromise, and the avoidance of conflicts with other powerful nations. From this perspective, it would be wrong to view Russia's policy as inherently confrontational.

The Implementation Problem

Although most within the Moscow decisionmaking community, including the new, conservative-dominated legislature, accept the notion that Russian policies should be based on vital interests, there is still no consensus on how to translate this principle into action. In fact, Russia continues to struggle with the question of how best to maintain its influence in the countries of the CIS. Various approaches have been discussed over the last two years, but no single one seems to satisfy all needs. The five general models that have been discussed in Russia are:

- Incorporation (in total or in part) into Russia. (The USSR model.)
- Total political and economic domination by Russia, but nominal independence. (The old East European model.)
- Direct Russian control (formally or informally) over all security forces, but political autonomy.
- Russian training and logistical support of indigenous forces, but political independence. (The "Nixonov" doctrine.)
- Extensive Russian influence over security decisions, but political and economic independence. (The old Finland model.)

Most likely, Russia will approach each country individually, taking into account the country's strategic value, likelihood to resist Russia's efforts, potential drain on Russian resources, and lure to the other major powers.

[1]Igor Rodionov, "Approaches to Russian Military Doctrine," speech given at the General Staff Academy's Military-Science Conference from 27-30 May 1992; reprinted in *Voyennaya Mysl* July 1992 Special Edition, (Moscow: Krasnaya Zvezda, 1992).

The American View

A key assumption of United States policies towards the region of the former Soviet Union is that the Soviet successor states, especially Russia, will develop policies congenial to the United States if the region as a whole becomes market-oriented and democratic. However, Moscow's de-emphasis of integration with the West, combined with escalating instability among its neighbors, and the fact that many of the successor states have shown no inclination for political and economic reform, undermines this basic assumption.

If the U.S. wants to continue following its current policies it should expect more difficulties in American relations with Moscow. Some Western analysts have already started to advocate changes to American policies.

It is also premature for the West to give up on the original goal of the Cold War: a leadership in Moscow that eschews expansionism in Europe and rejects the inevitability of a Europe divided between East and West.

The sudden change in Russian foreign policy announcements starting last fall was initially labelled by some in the United States as a return to imperialism. They urged NATO to quickly expand eastward to incorporate Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic, and even the Baltic states. Failure to expand was portrayed as a new form of appeasement. The argument amounted to a claim that the Cold War had been fought over Central Europe, so failure to incorporate that region into NATO would amount to a betrayal of the people who suffered under the harsh control of the Soviet Union.

However, that argument appears to be revisionist history. The West did not fight the Cold War in order to incorporate the former communist region of Central Europe into the Western alliance. The Cold War was forced on the West by the aggressive policy of the communist leadership in Moscow; it was fought to prevent the expansion of communism. Moscow's political and military domination of the area we again call Central Europe was a manifestation of Soviet expansionist policy that resulted in Europe being divided into two armed camps. In fact, today there is good reason to believe that if NATO were to expand into Central Europe, Europe would again end up divided into two armed camps. However, it is premature for the West to give up on the original goal of the Cold War: a leadership in Moscow that eschews expansionism in Europe and rejects the inevitability of a Europe divided between East and West.

A Challenge for American Policy Makers

The challenge to the United States is to soberly reassess U.S.—and Western European—interests in Central and Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States. In this reassessment, Russia's involvement in Central Asia and Transcaucasia need not be viewed as a threat to the West, considering the region's instability and resistance to economic and political reform. Similarly, Russia does not—and should not in the foreseeable future—pose a threat to the newly formed states of Central Europe, and, therefore, to Western Europe.

In fact, the urgency of bringing the Central European states into the Western security alliance (through the Partnership for Peace Program or otherwise) would depend, in part, upon Moscow's military intentions towards the West.

If Russian intentions remain non-threatening, then the major U.S. interest in Central Europe is making sure this region remains free of threatening military forces—in other words, keeping the region at least neutral.

From a security viewpoint, NATO needs only to seek actual incorporation of the newly independent states of Central Europe should Russia adopt an ultra-nationalist philosophy and decide to confront the West by expanding its control into Central Europe. In fact, a premature attempt to incorporate these states into the West might decrease our security by forcing Russia to adopt a much more confrontational stance. Such an attempt could make the emergence of an authoritarian, expansionist leadership in Moscow more likely.

The United States major interest in Ukraine rests with its potential to serve as a military counterweight to a revanchist Russia. It would serve the interests of the United States and Western Europe if Ukraine developed into a fully independent state, buttressed by a large military force, adding to the stability of Europe. However, Ukraine may not be a viable state—at least, not within its current borders. And if it is not, no amount of American aid and encouragement will keep Ukraine whole and sovereign.

Further, the United States ought to consider what would happen to Ukraine's present military force if the country, in whole or part, reverted to Moscow's control—through legal incorporation into a greater Russia or by becoming a willing satellite. The most likely case is that the bulk of the Ukrainian armed forces would also return to Moscow's control—even if present-day Ukraine splits in two.

Policy Recommendations

The United States should consider:

- Acknowledging that Russia has vital security interests, while opposing territorial claims by Moscow that would conflict with security interests of Western Europe and the United States.
- Increasing the priority we place on Russian stability, even at the cost of the priority we place on near-term marketization.
- Reaffirming that the West has a vital interest in Central Europe remaining at the least neutral and that the United States does not consider Russian military dominance over the countries of Central Europe to be an appropriate Russian vital interest.
- Maintaining a military capability allowing NATO to mobilize forces to move into Central Europe if a future expansionist-minded Russia indicates that it might try to do the same thing.
- Continuing strong support for Ukrainian independence but recognizing that it may not be a viable state and could fragment in the future.

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