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A New Consensus in Russian National Security and Foreign Policy

Russian thinking on foreign and security policy is undergoing a fundamental transformation. The consensus of the Gorbachev and Yeltsin eras that had promised to launch the Soviet Union and Russia on the path of strategic rapprochement and even partnership with the Western alliance has been replaced by a new consensus. The new consensus puts far less emphasis on maintaining a cooperative partnership with the West and promises to push Russia toward a more aloof position relative to the Western alliance. This consensus is preoccupied with regions and countries along Russia's immediate periphery ("the near abroad"), is prone to outbursts of great-power assertiveness, and is seeking to rebuild Russia's sphere of influence. At best it is a consensus about Russia's special responsibility in the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). At worst it is a consensus about Russia's special right in the former Soviet Union as its presumed exclusive sphere of influence.

This research, which was completed in 1994 before the recent problems in Chechnya, examines how this new consensus emerged and assesses its implications for U.S. interests and policy.

EMERGENCE OF A NEW CONSENSUS

This shift in Russian foreign policy is the result of the domestic political and economic transformation of Russia following the breakup of the Soviet Union. The shock of early post-Soviet reforms, which were closely identified with the pro-Western course of the Gaydar cabinet, has produced a significant degree of disillusionment with the West and the United States, as well as with the course of a close partnership with Washington. The depth of Russia's economic decline and the long road to recovery would, in the eyes of many Russians, effectively preclude Moscow's participation in that partnership as an equal. Hence, Russia needs to pursue its own independent course in foreign and security policy commensurate with its means and consistent with its great-power aspirations. The grad-

ual replacement of Western-oriented "market romantics" in Moscow's policymaking arena with "pragmatists" who identify more closely with large state interests has been accompanied by a change in rhetoric that has come to emphasize closer relations with the post-Soviet states—the near abroad—as a key goal of Russian foreign policy.

The new foreign and security policy consensus has been reflected in the deliberations of individual analysts and of private think tanks, as well as in institutional positions of the key players in the seemingly erratic and ill-organized Russian policy process. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs, under the leadership of Andrey Kozyrev (once thought to be the successor to Shevardnadze and the pillar of Russia's Western-oriented foreign policy), has pursued a tough rhetorical line on the near abroad and become a staunch defender of Russia's much-debated national interests.

Russia's military establishment, already marred by allegations of widespread meddling in various regional conflicts in the former Soviet Union, has embraced the notion that the near abroad will remain a sphere of vital interest and exclusive influence of Russia. The refocusing of the Russian military's attention on the near abroad has been amply demonstrated in the military doctrine adopted in 1993.

This picture of institutional consensus is complemented by the legislative branch—the Duma. The presence of large statist interests—communist, agrarian, nationalist, and industrialist—virtually guarantees that the new legislature will not engage in aggressive pursuit of a pro-Western foreign and security policy course any more than the last one did, and that its efforts will be devoted to the task of defining and protecting Russian interests in the near abroad.

The new foreign policy consensus has been demonstrated in Moscow's reaction to the two critical Western policy initiatives—the expansion of NATO and the



Russia and the Near Abroad

U.S. recognition of sovereignty, independence, and territorial integrity of the newly independent states around Russia's periphery on the one hand and Russian aspirations for a special role in the "post-Soviet space" on the other. And that balancing act must occur within the context of desiring to sustain continuity in U.S.-Russian relations.

In maintaining this balance, policymakers will need to decide each case on its own merits, bearing in mind that the right to sovereignty, territorial integrity, and self-determination is not absolute and that, in some instances, the recognition of the newly independent states may have been premature. In some instances, according to

Partnership for Peace. Whereas the former was deemed downright harmful to Russian interests, the latter received a lukewarm welcome that holds out the promise of a reluctant minimal participation at best, rather than a true partnership.

However, Russian aspiration to play the role of the sole arbiter and enforcer of security and stability throughout the near abroad is counterbalanced by a growing pragmatism—a deeply rooted and persisting realization that the cost of a sphere of influence, let alone full-scale empire, would put a severe burden on the already strained Russian treasury. Fiery rhetoric and Monroe-like doctrines expounded by Russian foreign policy ideologues have so far been left unmatched by concrete action when it comes to the practical details of closer association with the neighbors whose economies show no sign of improvement. Even the most ardent neoimperialists pause at the thought of reintegration with Belarus or Ukraine.

IMPLICATIONS FOR U.S. POLICY

In confronting this emerging consensus, U.S. policymakers face the difficult challenge of balancing between

this research, stability, security, and prevention of conflict and loss of life should be placed above recognition of sovereignty. Policymakers must also recognize that Russia already does play a special role in that sphere and has special interests there. To deny this would be unrealistic, unfair, and unwise.

Clearly, no easy solutions are available to Western and Russian policymakers to find the formula for Russian involvement in existing or future contingencies in the CIS. Even formal recognition of Russia's special role of security manager throughout the former Soviet Union (however difficult it would prove to codify) still begs the question of Russia's ability to play that role.

What, then, can Western policymakers do? Admittedly, the Western community has little leverage over Russian policies, both real and declaratory, toward the former Soviet Union. But it can play a constructive role, albeit one on the periphery. Stabilization through economic assistance to the "lesser equals" in the CIS could prove beneficial to Russia's own interests. Perhaps, given Russia's uncertain stance in relation to its neighbors, the best the West can do is to help create a more stable environment around it.

RAND research briefs summarize research that has been more fully documented elsewhere. This research brief describes work done for the Strategy, Doctrine, and Force Structure Program of RAND's Project AIR FORCE; it is documented in Russian National Security and Foreign Policy in Transition, by Eugene B. Rumer, MR-512-AF, 1995, 57 pp., ISBN 0-8330-1615-6, \$15.00, and is available from RAND Distribution Services (Telephone: 310-451-7002; FAX: 310-451-6915; or Internet: order@rand.org). Abstracts of all RAND documents may be viewed on the World Wide Web at <http://www.rand.org/>. Publications are distributed to the trade by National Book Network. RAND is a nonprofit institution that helps improve public policy through research and analysis. RAND's publications do not necessarily reflect the opinions or policies of its research sponsors.

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