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*UNLOCKING THE ASSETS: ENERGY AND THE FUTURE OF CENTRAL
ASIA AND THE CAUCASUS*

RUSSIA AND CENTRAL ASIA: EVOLUTION OF
MUTUAL PERCEPTIONS, POLICIES, INTERDEPENDENCE

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Introduction

With a territory of almost four million square kilometers and nearly 60 million inhabitants of diverse ethnic and religious background, the Central Asian region (1) has strong economic potential as a possible leader in natural gas and cotton production, among other areas. But inside the former Soviet Union, contemporary Central Asia is better known for its human miseries and "man-made" tragedies, including wide-spread poverty, high mortality rates, sweeping epidemics and diseases, as well as bloody fratricidal conflicts, population dislocations, ethnic cleansing, criminality and corruption.

Unless steps are taken to rectify the region's situation, the majority of Central Asian states face a bleak future. The region has traditionally occupied a fairly insular position in world politics and economy. That is now changing with independence, however, and degradation of social and human conditions in the region may have disastrous consequences for neighboring regions and states, and even the international stability at large.

Clues to Understanding Central Asian Human Emergencies

The experience of Central Asian countries in nation-building remains limited. To the ruling elites, predominantly composed of the members of traditional Soviet "nomenklatura," retaining Soviet-style institutions in substance, while making only cosmetic changes to the facade, seemed at the outset as the most "logical" and comfortable way of initiating post-independence reforms.

In many instances, the post-Communist elite could gain ascendancy over their opponents only by usurping political power. As the result, no orderly transition to greater openness, much less democracy, could be registered in Central Asia. Throughout the region, there have emerged autocratic regimes, centered around the institute of the presidency. The difference between individual states may be in the degree of "enlightenment" of the quasi-absolute new rulers, and their tolerance towards other branches of power and/or officially recognized, and usually fairly docile, opposition groupings. Civil societies in Central Asia remain at embryonic stages of

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development. In some states, e.g. Uzbekistan, practically no alternatives to ubiquitous central authority is allowed. Political violence, suppression of dissident views, violations of human rights and liberties are encountered almost everywhere in the region, adding to social instability.

Economic development is not keeping pace despite opportunities. Lack of developed industrial infrastructures, coupled with faltering agricultural production in most areas, have resulted in the emergence of huge "surplus" populations that are unable to provide for themselves economically. To exemplify the bitterness of the situation, in the early 1940s, at least 0.6 acre of irrigated arable land per capita existed in the region. (2) By the beginning of the 1990s, this figure had dwindled to one third of an acre, or lower to 0.15 acre in some most populous areas. Clearly contributing to this situation are high birth rates (3) and stagnation in regional development. At the same time, not unlike many other developing countries, rural populations have been uprooted and moved to unfamiliar and often hostile urban environments, threatening traditional cultural values and ways of life.

Another serious source of trouble for the region is uneven distribution of natural resources (including water), as well as economically and ecologically unsound methods of their use. The Southern part of the region, including most of Tajikistan and the Fergana Valley, administratively divided between Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan (4), find themselves in a much less advantageous situation than Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan which are richer in natural resources. Some 90% of local arable lands in the Fergana Valley - traditionally the most fertile "oasis" of the entire Central Asia was shifted to production of cotton as the result of the voluntaristic policies of the Moscow "Center." This monocultural emphasis of the local agrarian sector led not only to serious imbalances in the subregional economic development, but to disastrous ecological problems as well, accompanied by large-scale social, health and other "human-emergency" consequences.

Over the years, extensive production of cotton in the Valley, requiring large amounts of irrigation, destroyed the ecology of two major water arteries of the region - the Amur Darya and the Syr Darya - and, eventually, of a large inland lake - the Aral Sea. The entire Aral zone has consequently been turned into a disaster area, where the population suffers from massive epidemics and acute diseases, including those of hereditary nature. It is at the background of

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serious demographic, economic, ecological problems that Central Asia began to be engulfed into numerous ethnic and religious tensions and conflicts. Some of them, e.g. between Uzbek, Kyrgyz and other groups in the Fergana Valley, are primarily rooted in problems of land- and resource-sharing. However, they have many other negative dimensions and involve intense rivalry between different nationalisms, as well as elite groups (i. e. local "clans"). In many cases local animosities and conflict situations are accompanied by outside interference.

The revival of Islamic religion tends to augment the intensity of intergroup tensions. The war in Tadjikistan is a typical example of such factors at play, contributing to such a disaster: from the power struggle between local "clans" (i.e. Kulobis vs Badashonis), to the competition between religious factions. It may also be used as a "classic" illustration of third parties' involvement in internal conflict situations. In this connection, it is particularly important to underline the role of the "Russian factor" in Central Asian politics and many of the complicated situations developing there. Recently this "factor" was tightly connected to the fate of ethnic Russians and other Russian-speaking minority groups residing in Central Asia.

Even though numerically these Russian groups have been dwindling over the last two or three decades (5), their demographic, economic and socio-political role remain important. In some cases (e.g. in Northern Kazakhstan), treatment of Russian minorities is becoming a serious "bone of contention" in relations between the Russian Federation and Central Asian states. Political groups in Russia are intensifying their propaganda and activities against what they perceive as the policies of "ethnic cleansing" by some Central Asian regimes that are accused of pushing Russians out of their traditional "niches" (6) in the region, causing deprivation and emigration. Other outside powers are similarly exploiting arguments based on principles of ethno-religious solidarity in order to attract local societies and particular groups of population to their side, which may potentially lead to additional exacerbation of Central Asian interethnic and interreligious rivalries.

Therefore, it has to be recognized that there exist a wide spectrum of diverse factors, preventing the attainment of stability and prosperity in Central Asia. These factors tend to exert cumulative negative effect, occasionally producing large-scale and severe situations of human devastation and misery in the region.

Involvements by Outside Power: Russia and its Periphery

A crucial question, related to contemporary central Asia, is whether or not local societies will be able to achieve lasting internal stability, thereby contributing to the stability of Asia and the entire system of international relations. Given the circumstances that accompanied the dissolution of the USSR and the historically insignificant time period that has transpired for nation-building in the region, the term "stability" must be understood in a rather narrow sense: more like the preservation of a tentative and fragile status-quo, than anything else. Not surprisingly, Russia appears to be the main outside player in regional affairs. However, neighboring Turkey, Iran, China, as well as many other Asian and European powers and the US are trying to promote their interests in Central Asia, considered by many to be destined to emerge as a more important new geopolitical region of the world in the next century. For purposes of the current analysis, only Russian policies towards Central Asia are to be analyzed in detail.

As the result of intense and often controversial internal debates about the direction and substance of Russia's relations with Central Asia (14), the following loose national consensus has emerged on how the Russian Federation should understand the meaning of Central Asian stability, in terms of Russian interests.

For many in Russia, stability in Central Asia essentially means the absence of major regional conflicts that may pose threats to the Russian hinterland, its borders and interests. The example of Tajikistan demonstrates that regional conflicts are ripe with direct Russian military involvement, that may become extremely costly in economic and political sense.

Secondly, stability in the region is looked upon through the socio-economic prism and is gauged against the relative effectiveness of local economies and the ability of Central Asian regimes to resolve complicated social issues confronting their nations. Socio-economic stability of Central Asia, preferably accompanied by successful market reforms, is a sine qua non on of close cooperation between them and the Russian Federation.

Thirdly, Central Asian stability is understood in terms of benign evolution of ethnic relations that involve Russian minorities. For various reasons (i.e. the prominence of ethnic issues in internal Russian politics, the heavy burden of caring for immigrant and refugee population, etc.) concern for the fate of Russians outside Russian borders and especially in non-Christian, Islamic societies, has been steadily mounting for the last few years.

Fourthly, the ecological and demographic situation in Central Asia is progressively becoming crucial in evaluating the region's stability and chances for orderly development. Man-made catastrophies, i.e. depletion of the Aral Sea and unrestrained birth rates may eventually turn parts of Central Asia into disaster areas.

Fifthly, there are many other less visible problems, that have direct bearing on regional stability and therefore Russian interests: production and trafficking of narcotic substances; illegal trade in arms; disruption of communication infrastructures, violation of human rights, spread of corruption and criminality; and political or ethnic violence.

Given its limited resources, Russian leadership is faced with a difficult choice: either to allocate a huge share of these resources to stabilizing neighboring states or to concentrate entirely on internal Russian problems, without assuming extensive foreign policy obligations including those in the military-political sphere. In other words, Moscow faces a choice between external activism and isolationism.

The Russian body politic is split over these issues, which is unavoidably reflected in Russian Central Asian decision-making. In all probability, Russian Central Asian policy will be characterized by contradictions and inconsistencies for the foreseeable future. This will contribute to regional complications, including human emergencies.

Russia and Central Asia: Evolution of Mutual Perceptions and Policies

Current political and academic discussions in Russia reveal three distinct influential "schools of thought" regarding external relations. The first of them may be called the "Western school,"

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which asserts that Russia's future should be intimately linked to Western civilization, whence the solution to the contemporary Russian situation is bound to be drawn. The followers of this school pay minimal attention to the Orient, including Central Asia, and consider the Central Asia as largely irrelevant to Russian interests.

The second school -defined as an "Asiatic" or "Oriental" school - expounds a totally different view and claims that Russia should recognize and reconfirm its roots in the Asiatic cultural stock and historic experience. This school argues that Russia should opt for close ties with Asian countries, especially those in Central Asia - thereby abandoning the futile search for illusory linkages with the West.

A third "school of thought" represents a blend of ideas promulgated by the two others and emphasizes the uniqueness of Russia's geopolitical, historic and cultural position as a "bridge" between Europe and Asia. According to its followers, Russia should take advantage of these peculiar qualities and enrich itself by establishing ties with both the West and the Orient. Furthermore, the "Eurasian" line of thinking stresses the need to assert Russian values and not to subjugate them to anyone else's interests. At the same time, proponents of the "Eurasian" approach contend that Russia may perform exceptional functions both for Europe and Asia, including Central Asia, as an intermediary between them in economic, political, military and other affairs.

Practically speaking, Russian Central Asian policy of the last few years has suffered under the constant conflicting influences of all three of these different conceptual paradigms. From this perspective, it has become more versatile but also less predictable, compared to the "good old Soviet times" when fewer basic factors were at work shaping up its main parameters.

As the Soviet Union was nearing its demise, the regional balance of forces began to acquire important political meaning in the fight for succession within the Soviet hierarchy. The Central Asian political elite supported Gorbachev and his plan of saving the Union by redistributing power within it for a number of important reasons. Had the Soviet Union been miraculously preserved under the liberally-minded but irresolute Mikhail Gorbachev, Moscow-Central Asian relations could have evolved towards a "perfect" feudal-type relationship, with a nominal

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"sovereign" in the "Center" and powerful "barons" in the periphery ruling their "principalities" totally at their will. However, the fairly symbiotic relationship between the last Communist regime in Moscow and Central Asian "feudo-Communist" elite was brought to an abrupt end by the "Belovezhskaya Pusha" agreements of late 1991.

To Boris Yeltsin and his supporters, the Union had to be destroyed exactly for the same reasons Central Asian and other parochial vested interests wanted it to be preserved and eternalized. Firstly, their personal political ambitions could be met only with the removal of the last General Secretary and the powerful political, security and military potential remaining at his command. Secondly, Yeltsin and his supporters wanted to demolish the entire nomenklatura system throughout the former Soviet Union, including Central Asia, so that their power base could rest with the bureaucratic class. Thirdly, early Yeltsin and numerous opposition groups that made him their champion and leader were seriously contemplating democratic political and sweeping economic reforms in Russia that to many seemed totally unrealistic provided Russia would be still tied up to the heavy "ballast" of backward, conservative and culturally "alien" Central Asian societies.

Gradually, Central Asian leaders became fully aware of the significance and ramifications of the Belovezhskaya Pusha agreements. In the face of an imminent economic and political disaster, they tried to react by creating the so-called "Turkestan Confederation". Open confrontation between former Slavic and Muslim parts of the already defunct Soviet Union could be avoided only by energetic efforts at conciliation by such prominent leaders as Nursultan Nazarbaev who helped negotiate Central Asian membership in the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS).

However, the activities of the new Russian state, (i.e. radical economic reforms started without any consultations with CIS Central Asian members, predominantly pro-Western orientation of Russian foreign policy, creation of independent Russian Armed Forces, introduction of national currency, etc.), demonstrated that at an earlier stage of Russian independence (at least until mid-1993) Central Asia was regarded as secondary and even tertiary to Russian immediate and long term interests.

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The quasi-isolationist course pursued during this period was often characterized by officially and unofficially expressed disdain and paternalism, as far as the capability of Central Asian societies to modernize and assure their own democratic development was concerned. Such notions gained special prevalence around 1992-early 1993 when Russia made particularly strong efforts at getting integrated into Western economic and political structures. At that stage, it was evidently concluded in Moscow that Russia's ties with Central Asia may prevent it from being accepted by the West (22). Further events and on-going intellectual debates on the state and fate of Russian internal and external policies demonstrated that the idealistic and fairly self-centered, albeit egotistic positions of early Russian "democrats"(23) did not reflect any stable national consensus on the principles and format of Russian-Central Asian relations.

Early- to mid- 1993, there emerged a rather peculiar coalition speaking in favor of restoring Russian-Central Asian "special relations". Firstly, it included influential industrial groups dependent on Central Asian raw materials and semi-finished products as well as on local markets for their own goods. Secondly, some groupings within remaining Communist factions could also be found in that coalition as preserving ties with Central Asia viewed as one of the ways to restore the legacy of the USSR.

Thirdly, there were also groups of Russian nationalists that considered Russian-Central Asian relations as a prerequisite for "Eurasian unity." In actuality for many so-called nationalists, "unity " meant assertion of Russian imperial power over parts of the "traditional Russian sphere of influence." For others, it was a sensible way of resolving the painful problem of Russian-speaking minorities in Muslim regions of Central Asia.

Finally, segments of the Russian military-industrial complex that perceived the disintegration of the Soviet strategic space and depth, especially at the Southern flanks, as a direct threat to Russian security interests. (24) The "Reintegrationalist" approach to Central Asia got the upper hand in the new important government structure - the Russian National Security Council. That fact may be illustrated by the "Main Aspects of the Concept of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation" adopted by the Council in April 1993. (25)

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Bitter internal political conflict in Russia of October 1993 and the ensuing move towards Presidential rule in the country ushered in a new stage in Russian foreign and Central Asian policies, characterized by the integration of some opposition views and demands on Central Asia into official pronouncements and positions.

The following principles were of special importance among them:

*Russia may not "leave" the Central Asian region without putting all of its Southern "underbelly" in jeopardy.

*Attempts to make its borders with Kazakhstan and other Central Asian republics secure and "impregnable" will be extremely costly and largely counterproductive. Therefore, preservation of Russian control over CIS borders in Central Asia is a much more effective and desirable goal.

*The issue of the presence of Russian troops and bases in Central Asian republics should be resolved in a priority fashion since the latter should be looked upon as part and parcel of the overall infrastructure providing for Russian national security.

*Russia can ill afford the disruption of its economic ties with Central Asia without precipitating the collapse of numerous enterprises and whole branches of national economy dependent on the supply of Central Asian raw materials and parts.

*Central Asian markets should be preserved for Russian exports even if this implies extending preferential treatment to Central Asian partners.

*Russia should strive at creating free trade zones, mutual tariff, custom and currency regimes, joint capital and labor markets based on coordinated budgetary, taxation, crediting, production, labor policies, etc.

*Mindful of numerous ethnic, religious, territorial and other contradictions and rivalries in the region that also involve sizeable Russian minorities residing in Central Asian republics, Russia should effectively contribute to preventing, managing and resolving existing and future local conflicts, in particular by creating effective peace-keeping and peace-making mechanisms taking advantage of Russian military capabilities and power.

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*Russia should conduct its foreign policy in such a way as to prevent third parties from interfering in Central Asian affairs or taking unfair advantage of local difficulties, contradictions and weaknesses of socio-economic, political and ideological nature. (26)

These general perceptions, with some modifications, created the foundation for practical Russian policies in the Central Asian region in 1994-1995. In the meanwhile, the factor of "outside influences" acquired progressive importance in Russian assessments of its regional policies. Russian perspective on its relations with the West was changing. As it perceived Western intentions more negatively, Moscow's approach to third party involvement in Central Asian politics and economics shifted. It was suddenly recognized that by "abandoning" Central Asia and reducing its presence in the region Russia created vacuums that began to be filled up by others, particularly Western countries, including Turkey as a NATO member, as well as China, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan.

Turkey was considered to be a particularly alarming case because of its geographic, cultural, ethnic, religious proximity to many former Soviet republics, as well as its economic potential and political backing from the US and other leading Western countries. Nor was it overlooked that Turkish secular model of development could be highly attractive to the majority of Central Asian regimes that were looking for examples to follow. Turkey's appeal also fit in to worries among regional Central Asian leaders about the possibility of Islamic revival in general and the emergence of powerful fundamentalist oppositions inside their countries in particular.

Furthermore, Turkish inroads into Central Asia was progressively viewed as a "plot" to create an artificial "cordonne sanitaire" around Russia. (27) In May 1993, a quasi-official article by the Ministry for Foreign Economic Relations was published in the "Nezavisimaya Gazeta" that lashed out against the decision adopted by five Central Asian countries to create the Central Asian Regional Council (presumably on the example of the Gulf Cooperation Council) that was intended to exclude the Russian Federation. V.Yurtayev and A.Shestakov writing on behalf of the Ministry asserted that Central Asian intra-regional integration was hostile to Russian interests, undermined previous agreements on "single CIS military-strategic space" and effectively neutralized the CIS Treaty on Collective Security.

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It was also claimed that these "devious" integratory attempts were being orchestrated by Turkey and other Western powers and were intended to isolate Russia from the Islamic world and particularly such important geostrategic partners as Iran and Pakistan. (28) In the summer of 1993, the majority of Central Asian states supported a Turkish idea on creating a custom and tariff union. Then First Deputy Prime Minister of Russia A.Shokhin declared that Central Asian regimes have only one choice to make - between integration with Turkey (alternatively with Turkey and Pakistan) or with Russia, Ukraine and Belarus. In the opinion of the influential Russian politician, Central Asia could not be involved in both communities.

Additionally it may be noted that in line with mounting suspicions about third party intentions, an opinion began to be formed in Russian official circles that the West, and the US in particular, were objectively interested in preserving a relatively high degree of tensions in Central Asia, since, allegedly, local instability may effectively enhance Western role and influence in this and nearby areas - all the way to the Persian Gulf region, while at the same time limiting Russian capabilities of making positive impact on local politics.

Concurrently Russia became more perceptive to what could be considered as "positive" opportunities for closer relations with Central Asia states. For example, a proposal on creating a "confederate union" between Kazakhstan and Russia was put forward at a congress of the Socialist Party of Kazakhstan (the legal heir to the Kazakh Communist Party) that took place on March 14, 1992. (30) At a later stage, some other Kazakh political groups, notably the People's Congress party headed by O.Suleimenov, supported the idea of Russian-Kazakhstan Confederation, though other such groupings of nationalistic orientation rejected the idea, fearful of the eventual "degradation" of such a confederation into a federation and the reestablishment of total Russian control over Kazakh independence and sovereignty. (31) The official Kazakh plan on the creation of the Eurasian Union announced by President Nursultan Nazarbaev may have been to a certain extent influenced by concepts of the "Eurasian school of thought", though its implications were quite different from those expounded by Russian "Eurasianists", primarily concerned with Russian and not Central Asian interests.

Peculiarities of Practical Russian Policies

Russian policy towards Central Asia develops along three intertwined venues: political, military and economic.

Political exchanges deal with most general issues of bilateral and multilateral affairs: the future of the Commonwealth of Independent States, problems of borders, and local conflicts, status of minorities and foreign nationals, etc. Dialogues that are happening within the political ambit bear a fairly formal character and as a rule are called upon to minimize or even conceal differences. The greatest progress in developing contacts of this nature and achieving practical results out of them was registered in Russia-Kazakhstan relations. By mid-1995 the two countries came closely together on such key issues as customs control, coordination of foreign policies, etc. Military relations comprise even more involvement. They include military-political cooperation, resolution of issues related to the presence of Russian troops, installations and property as well as conduct of joint peace-keeping operations. Economic relations are the largest and in many respects vitally important area for the interests of Russia and its Central Asian counterparts. In view of their salience, this paper concentrates primarily on the military and economic aspects of Russian practical policies towards Central Asia.

Military-Strategic Aspects

In a most general sense, Russia's military relations with its Central Asian neighbors are to be regulated by the Treaty on Collective Security signed in Tashkent on May 15, 1992. (46) That treaty sets out the obligation of non-use of force or threat of force in relations between its members. The latter states that the signatories should also resolve their differences by peaceful means, abstain from entering into blocks hostile to each other, conduct consultations on security matters, create the Council on Collective Security (CCS), coordinate their defense policies, etc. However, three years after it was put into effect the Treaty is nowhere near implementation. From this perspective, it met with the same fate as almost two hundred other treaties and agreements concluded within the ambit of the CIS. (47)

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One of the immediate Russian concerns after the dissolution of the USSR was preserving for itself as much of former Soviet property left in Central Asia as possible. Negotiations on installations such as the Baikanur launching facility and bases for Russian troops, as well as the presence of these troops in Central Asian republics began at an early stage of independence of former Soviet republics. Appropriate agreements were concluded to establish general frameworks and payments for the use of these installations. Though the financial burden for Russia that was thus being created (for Baikanur alone Russia was supposed to pay \$1 bln in rentals) is substantial in many cases Moscow simply had no other choice.

Economic and political pressures associated with Russian military presence in Central Asia could run two ways: lead to eventual Russian withdrawal from appropriate republics or push Russia toward more aggressive policies aimed at securing additional benefits and alleviating perceived hardships created by the receiving nations.

In contrast to dividing former Soviet property, regional peace - keeping efforts proved to be more productive in terms of Russian - Central Asian cooperation. Given its social, ethnic, demographic complexity, the Central Asian region is prone to various conflict situations. Russia has been and will continue to be involved in these conflicts and participate in conflict resolution for reasons of geopolitics, economics, cultural ties.

Early attempts at regulating joint Russian-Central Asian activities in conflict managements, including peace-keeping, go back to March 1992 when a CIS decision was adopted on creating military observer groups and collective peace-keeping forces. Originally the creation of "classical" peace-keeping forces was foreseen, i.e. small contingents monitoring agreements, facilitating disarmament, contributing to peaceful negotiations, etc. These forces were not supposed to undertake combat missions, and they also had to be "impartial" to all sides in a particular conflict. Their mandate could become effective only upon termination of actual hostilities, modeling the example of traditional UN peace-keeping operations (48).

Events in Tajikistan were the most important test of the desire of local powers as well as Russia to devise new tactics of peace-keeping that implied fairly wide use of military force as a measure of counterforce to existing conflict.

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At an earlier stage in the Tajik conflict (49), Moscow tried to avoid direct involvement and concentrated on safeguarding the republic's outside borders. But one Russian motorized division deployed in the republic had particular trouble in staying "neutral" since it had many Tajik conscripts within its ranks. Despite this, Russia's task was performed with some relative success. Until late 1992, Russian troops could limit their role to protecting strategic installations in the Tajik territory, i.e. the Kurgan Tube chemical works, the Nurek hydro-electric station and the Dushanbe railroad and airport. Then, Moscow adopted a decision to support the Rakhmonov government(51) and gradually replaced Uzbekistan in performing important power projection functions both on the Tajik-Afghan border and inside Tajikistan.

It is noteworthy that it was during the Tajik war that in September 1992 a new CIS Agreement on collective peace-keeping forces was adopted which modified the latter's mandate to include the functions of "collective defense". To support that decision the Joint Command of CIS peace-keeping forces was created.

Further events in the Tajik civil war lead to the escalation of direct Russian military involvement. But the majority of Central Asian elite were by and large prepared to accept Russia's role as an intermediary and a direct "legitimate" participant in the process of conflict resolution, if not a guarantor of regional political settlements. Interestingly, opposition forces in Central Asian states recognized Russia in such a role as well. When the Tajik opposition gained power for a brief period in 1992, it immediately appealed to Moscow for armed interference for purposes of stopping the local conflagration. (52) In this regard, Central Asia is a unique region, compared to other former USSR states. The reasons for this are multifold. Firstly, the Central Asian states are surrounded by militarily powerful neighbors and need Russia as a counterbalance to potential external challenges. Secondly, the Central Asian states still experience serious handicaps in their military construction. They lack experienced officer corps composed of their own nationals. Furthermore unlike Ukraine and Belarus, they could not acquire sizeable parts of former Soviet military arsenals. Kazakhstan may be an exception from this point of view. However it is unable to operate numerous bases and sophisticated installations such as the Baikanur launching center on its own, while much of its military production potential is situated in Russian dominated Northern areas.

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Russian experience of involvement in Central Asian conflict resolution demonstrates that in the future the need for direct interventions may grow. For now, Russia appears to be the only outside power that may be summoned to do the badly needed "dirty work" of disengagement and appeasement of warring factions. At the same time it is evident that efforts required for fulfilling peace-keeping missions go well beyond what others, including the US, had to come up with in compatible situations in other regions including Campouchia, Haiti, Somalia, Bosnia (with the only recent possible exception of the Gulf War). Therefore it appears that by and large Russia is faced with a "no win" situation in the military-political area in Central Asia.

Whenever a serious regional conflict erupts, Russia is almost unavoidably drawn into it for reasons of proximity; former "Imperial" involvements; the need to protect Russian populations; the remaining presence of Russian troops in Central Asian republics; the internal pressures on behalf of the segments of the Russian political spector that insist on "activist" Russian foreign policies and demand that Russia "shows its colors."

However, once direct Russian involvement becomes a reality, it creates unbearable psychopolitical and economic burdens. The obvious reasons are internal divisiveness of Russian politics that prevents "monolythic support" of foreign policy actions enjoyed by previous Communist regimes; lack of financial resources for large-scale and protracted military efforts (the Chechen war seems to be an exception, however even its approximate cost has not been calculated nor tentatively appraised in terms of recovery); inability to master real regional and international support on the analogy of what the US could accomplish in situations of the Gulf War type, etc.

Russian populations inside the Federation remain wary of their regime's military involvements outside and inside Russia's borders. The bitter experience of Afghanistan, combined with the tragedy of "restoring constitutionality" in the Chechen republic contribute to such sentiment, while Russian attempts to police the Tajik-Afghan border as if it was the Federation's border and to keep a particular regime in power in Tajikistan remain fairly unpopular in the Russian mind.

In view of all these and other peculiarities, Russia will be well advised to continue refining multilateral mechanisms that may assist it in the performance of onerous duties of conflict resolution in Central Asia. Additionally, it may try to attract greater international (UN, OSCE,

NATO, US, European) attention to the mounting Central Asian problems so as to be able to master additional support for its peace-keeping activities in the region in case its own and other regional efforts turn out to be insufficient.

Russia's Economic Role

As was mentioned before, the eagerness with which Boris Yeltsin and his supporters agreed to the dissolution of the Soviet Union was in large measure predicated on the conviction that Russia "did not need to continue carrying the burden" of subsidized "alien" republics such as those in Central Asia. Not a single Central Asian leader was present at the Belovezhskaya Pushcha meeting where the decision on dissolution was to take effect.

However, the importance of Central Asian economic links became increasingly clear. After the commencement of radical economic reforms in Russia, Central Asian economies remained important partners for Russian industries. In 1992 alone, Russia provided 68% of Kazakhstan's imports, 58% of Uzbekistan, 51% of Kirgizstan and 48% of Tajikistan and Turkmenistan. At the same time, Russia absorbed 61% of all of Uzbek exports, 54% of those of Turkmenistan, 53% of Kazakhstan and 39% of Kyrgyzstan. (53) But the Yeltsin government moved, at the beginning of 1993, to protectionist foreign economic policies that created serious difficulties for Central Asia. Russian steps towards establishing world price levels for its oil and gas exports and the "squeezing out" of Central Asian states from the so-called "rouble zone" were particularly damaging. The monetary reform undertaken by Russia led to 150-300% increases in consumer good prices in these states over the period of a few days. Local financial institutions were brought to the verge of bankruptcy while economic activities came to a virtual standstill. (54)

Russia also put forward certain conditions for admitting Central Asian states into the "new rouble zone" and providing them with new currency notes that actually prevented them from conducting independent economic, budgetary and financial policies. (55) Eventually the countries of Central Asia decided to move rapidly towards introducing their own national currencies.

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High hopes were also raised in Central Asia with the idea to create a regional common market by expanding the Organization of Economic Cooperation (OEC). (56) In 1992, Turkey seemed to have started to invest in the region, offering a potential solution to economic problems. That year alone Ankara provided as least \$1 billion in credits to Central Asian states and began a number of impressive business projects primarily in transportation and communications. Moreover, over 10,000 students were invited to attend Turkish schools and universities. (57) But by late 1993, it became evident that neither Turkey nor Pakistan or Iran had the colossal resources needed for the reconstruction of Central Asian economies. Financial support from Japan, the US, the European Community, and Saudi Arabia was also disappointingly small. At the same time, international economic and financial institutions were setting up conditions for offering credit that were even more severe than those imposed by Russia. Western institutions required particularly unattractive conditions because of the linkages established between extension of loans and credits and the necessity to introduce democratic changes into local political structures and regimes. (58) The Central Asian states were unprepared for the model of development that demolished traditional patterns and failed to compensate for galloping inflation, monetary crisis and social deprivation.

It is not surprising that under these conditions many dormant ethnic and other conflicts began to enter virulent stages. Nostalgia for "good old Soviet times" became more acute as did political polarization of local societies.

FOOTNOTES

1 Historically,culturally,economically,etc., Central Asia may be considered to be a unique compact region,currently encompassing the independent states of Kazakhstan,Uzbekistan, Tadjikistan, Turkmenistan and Kyrgyzstan. In most of its parts Central Asia depends on irrigation to sustain any kind of agriculture. Uzbekistan, as the largest Central Asian NIS, claims the population growth rate of almost 30 per 1000 inhabitants each year. Uzbek population is expected to double over the next quarter of a century. Similar rates, perhaps the highest internationally, are being registered in the majority of other Central Asian nations. Tadjikistan is a tradgic exception. In 1991-1992 alone the intense and still contibnuing civil war had resulted in at least 100 000 warfare-related casualties in that country.

4 Besides anything else, many problems of the region are rooted in the arbitrarily drawn state and administrative borders that divide local populations and particularly homogenous ethnic groups.As the "product" of colonial and neo-colonial rule during the Tsarist and Soviet times, this situation was and still is ripe with interethnic animosities and conflicts,particularly in the Fergana Valley.

5 According to available census data,9.5 million ethnic Russians resided in all of Central Asia in 1979,while only 8.5 million remained there at the time of the Soviet Union's collapse. Over centuries and as the result the policy of "Russification", ethnic Russians could occupy advantageous political and economic positions in the region.They also represented some of the unique local elites: from Communist Party "apparatchiks" to highly skilled professionals.

7 Patricia Carley. The Legacy of the Soviet political System on the Prospects for Developing Civil Society in Central Asia. Russian Littoral project Conference "political Culture and Civil Society", October 1994. No. 80, p. 13. Gregory Gleason remarks in this connection:"Ironically, the Soviet structures meshed with the pre-Soviet political culture, especially with respect to regional and local politics. real political activity was typically limited to a small nomenklatura, responding to pressures from above (Moscow) and below (regional loyalties) In spite of the Soviet strategies, there remained the strong, regionally-based tradition of fealty and loyalty that had characterized the previous politicl systems". (See: Gregory Gleason. Fealty and Loyalty:

Informal Authority Structures in Soviet Asia. In the Soviet Studies, vol. 43, No.4,1991, p. 613-628.

9 See: Russel Bova. Political Dynamics of the Post-Communist Transition: a Comparative Perspective. In the World Politics, vol. 44, No. 1, october 1991, pp.113-138; Phillippe C. Schmitter, Terry Lynn Karl. The Conceptual Travels of Transitionologists and Consolidologists: How Far to the East Should They Attempt to Go? In the Slavic Review, vol. 53, No.1, Spring 1994, pp.173-185; Patricia Carley, op. cit., pp. 44-46.

10 See:Road Z. Sagdeev, Susan Eisenhower (eds.), Central Asia. Conflict, Resolution, and Change. Maryland, 1995, p. 295. See: The Brief Review of the Economic Situation in the Member Countries. Documents of the Executive Committee of the International Council of the Republic of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyz Republic and the Republic of Uzbekistan. Almaty, 1995. See: Serik Primbetov. Central Asia: prospects for Regional Integration. Interstates Council of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan. Memeo, pp. 5-12.

13 The difference between ethnic Russian populations and other ethnic groups, using the Russian language as their main communication tool, should be made. It is important in assessing the substance of various regional ethnic tensions, and understanding tendencies in demographic change. For example, the majority of ethnic Russians have the right to return to "mainland" Russia -- the Russian Federation, while representatives of many other Russian-speaking ethnic minorities in Central Asia do not have this option easily available to them.

14 For a more detailed analysis of the evolution of Russian policy towards Central Asia, see Case Study 4. In 1990 the membership of "Birlik" alone had reached 300 000. In 1926, there were 3,717,100 Kazakhs, comprising 57% of the total population of the republic (1,280,100 or 19.8% were Russians, and 861,000 or 13.2% Ukrainians.) In 1959 the number of Kazakhs was 2,787,000 (30%), Russians - 3,972,000 (42.7%), Ukrainians - 761,000 (8.2%). In his widely-publicized essay Solzhenitsyn stressed the fact that Kazakhs were concentrated in the southern regions of the republic, and "in case they want to secede with that area, so God help them" (A.Solzhenitsyn. How Should We Reconstruct Russia. Moscow: "Patriot", 1991, p. 6 (in Russian)).

18 The Supreme Court in November 1992 refused to renew the registration, which actually means banning, the movement "Yedinstvo" ("Unity"), which was founded in 1990 and raised the demand that Russian language be granted equal status with the Kazakh.

19 "Izvestia", 28 September, 1990. Following the arrests in November 1994, the leaders of the Semirechye Cossacks circulated an appeal to the "international community", the government of Russia, Russian Cossack forces and political associations and parties of the former Soviet Union to denounce the policies of the establishment towards the Cossacks. "Nezavisimaya gazeta" 26 May 1994, "Segodnya", 1 March 1995. S.Neil Mac-Farlane. Russia, the West and European Security. Survival, Vol.35, No 3 (Autumn 1993), pp. 7-18. Russian Conception of Europe. Post-Soviet Affairs, Vol.10, No 3 (July-September 1994), pp.241-244.

23 The terms "democracy", "democrats", "democratic" acquired special meanings in post-Communist Russia sometimes devoid of "classical" elements making up Western definitions of these notions. To be "democratic" often meant to be anti-Soviet, proreformist or even anarchistic and apolitical. Many of those, who like Yeltsin himself, would opt for forceful and even violent, military solutions of the country's problems, would still call themselves "democrats".

24 In 1991-1993 a vivid discussion was started in Russian intellectual, academic and political circles on these broad issues to be reflected in numerous publications (see for example: Natalia Narochitskaya. "Osoznat' svoyu missiyu," Nash Sovremennik, No 2, 1993. -Evgeni Ambartsumov. "Interesy Rossii ne znayut granits", Megapolis Express, May 6, 1992. A certain culmination was reached at the Foreign Ministry Conference on "The Transfiguration of Russia" that demonstrated deep divergence of opinions on Russian Central Asian policies as reported in "Mezhdunarodnaya Zhizn" No 3-4, 1992.

25 In particular the document called for the establishment of "positive relations" with the "near abroad" nations for purposes of overcoming destabilizing desintegratory processes in the territory of the former USSR. Achievement of Russian military and economic interests, including the preservation of its great power status, was declared to be the essence of Russian foreign policy, while actions undermining integration processes within the CIS were identified as presenting worst threats and challenges to Russian national security.(Izvestia, April 16, 1993).

26 For the discussion of these and other views intended to rationalize close Russian - Central Asian interaction see: Eduard Poznyakov, "Sovremennyye geopoliticheskie izmeneniya i ikh vliyaniye nabezopasnost i stabilnost v mire". Voennaya mysl, No 1, 1993, Konstantin Pleshakov "Missiya Rossii. Tretya Epokha." Mezhdunarodnaya zhizn, No 1, 1993; Andranik Migranyan. "Podlinnie i mnimie orientiry vo vneshnei politike". Rossiskaya Gazeta. August 4, 1991; Sergei Stankevich, "Fenomen Derzhavy". Rossiskaya Gazeta, June 23, 1992, etc.

27 Such views began to be shared by the Russian Foreign Ministry. To exemplify, the draft "Concept of Russian Foreign Policy" elaborated by the FM in late 1992 specifically mentioned that Turkey and a number of other close neighbors of the former USSR tried to take advantage of the demise of the Soviet empire in order to create a loose union of states that would be based on principles of ethnic and religious affinity and would serve to undermine Russian security and economic interests. According to the text of the "Concept" Russia "intends to actively oppose any attempts at increasing military-political presence undertaken by third countries adjacent to Russia". ("Kontseptsiya vneshnei politiki Rossiskoi Federatsii". Diplomatische Vestnik, January 1993, Spetsialnyi vypusk, p.8.

28 Nezavisimaya Gazeta, May 13, 1993. See: Dmitri Evstafyev. "Rossiya, islamskii mir i Blizhnii Vostok (geostraegicheskiy obsor)". Assotsiatsiya voenno-politicheskikh i voenno-istoricheskikh issledovaniy. Moscow, 1992, p.17. A resolution of the Congress stated that SPK "sees the future of Kazakhstan within the CIS entirely through confederate arrangements". In May 1993 the joint declaration of the Political Executive Committees of the Socialist Parties of both Russia and Kazakhstan emphasised that the CIS should eventually evolve towards "the conclusion of a confederate Union treaty between former republics of the USSR" (Sovety Kazakhstana. August 26, 1993).

31 Argumenty i Fakty. June 26, 1993. According to IMF data even in 1991 44% of Tadjikistan's budget, 42% of the Uzbek budget, 34% of that of Kirgizstan, 23%, of Kazakhstan's and 22 of Turkmenistan were subsidized from out of Moscow. Sheila Marnie, Erik Whitlock. Central Asia and Economic Integration. RFE/RL Research Report, Vol.2, No.14, April 2, 1993, p.34.

33 S.Neil Mac-Farlane. Russia, the West and European Security. *Survival*, Vol.35, No 3 (Autumn 1993), pp. 7-18. Russian Conception of Europe. *Post-Soviet Affairs*, Vol.10, No 3 (July-September 1994), pp.241-244. The terms "democracy", "democrats", "democratic" acquired special meanings in post-Communist Russia sometimes devoid of "classical" elements making up Western definitions of these notions. To be "democratic" often meant to be anti-Soviet, proreformist or even anarchistic and apolitical. Many of those, who like Yeltsin himself, would opt for forceful and even violent, military solutions of the country's problems, would still call themselves "democrats".

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36 In particular the document called for the establishment of "positive relations" with the "near abroad" nations for purposes of overcoming destabilizing desintegratory processes in the territory of the former USSR. Achievement of Russian military and economic interests, including the preservation of its great power status, was declared to be the essence of Russian foreign policy, while actions undermining integration processes within the CIS were identified as presenting worst threats and challenges to Russian national security (*Izvestia*, April 16, 1993).

37 In Novemer-December 1993 while compaigning for his own election to the State Douma A.Kozyrev startled everyone by making a number of antiWestern statements. Further along the way Russian Foreign Minister considered to be the prime architect of rapprochement with the West under Yeltsin was making one dramatic reversal of position after another. In Spring 1995, for example, he was on record claiming that Russia should defend the rights of Russians - living in other NIS - "with all the means available to it", which was interpreted by many as a thinly veiled threat aimed primarily at Central Asian countries where

ethnic Russians and Russian-speaking populations were subjected to progressive pressures and discrimination.

38 The problem of Russians in Central Asia and other NIS has numerous parameters in Russia. It has not only emotional, cultural and political but also direct economic implications and consequences. Already today, according to the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, Russia is receiving more refugees and immigrants than any other country in the world. Deterioration of Russian Central-Asian relations or internal disturbances in Central Asian NIS may lead to an exodus of hundreds of thousands if not millions of Russians and other Russian-speaking minorities into the Russian Federation that in turn may exacerbate the economic and social situation in some regions of the country to the extreme.

39 For the discussion of these and other views intended to rationalize close Russian - Central Asian interaction see: Eduard Poznyakov, "Sovremennyye geopoliticheskie izmeneniya i ikh vliyaniye nabezopasnost i stabilnost v mire". Voennaya mysl, No 1, 1993, Konstantin Pleshakov "Missiya Rossii. Tretya Epokha." Mezhdunarodnaya zhizn, No 1, 1993; Andranik Migranyan. "Podlinnie i mnimie orientiry vo vneshnei politike". Rossiskaya Gazeta. August 4, 1991; Sergei Stankevich, "Fenomen Derzhavy". Rossiskaya Gazeta, June 23, 1992, etc.

40 Such views began to be shared by the Russian Foreign Ministry. To exemplify, the draft "Concept of Russian Foreign Policy" elaborated by the FM in late 1992 specifically mentioned that Turkey and a number of other close neighbors of the former USSR tried to take advantage of the demise of the Soviet empire in order to create a loose union of states that would be based on principles of ethnic and religious affinity and would serve to undermine Russian security and economic interests. According to the text of the "Concept" Russia "intends to actively oppose any attempts at increasing military-political presence undertaken by third countries adjacent to Russia". ("Kontseptsiya vneshnei politiki Rossiskoi Federatsii". Diplomatičeskii Vestnik, January 1993, Spetsialnyi vypusk, p.8.

41 Nezavisimaya Gazeta, May 13, 1993. In a way similar to what could be allegedly observed in the Middle East ever since the creation of the state of Israel.

43 See Dmitri Evstafyev. "Rossiya, islamskii mir i Blizhnii Vostok (geotraegitcheskii obsor)". Assotsiatsiya voenno-politicheskikh i voenno-istoricheskikh issledovani. Moscow, 1992, p.17. A resolution of the Congress stated that SPK "sees the future of Kazakhstan within the CIS entirely through confederate arrangements". In May 1993 the joint declaration of the Political Executive Committees of the Socialist Parties of both Russia and Kazakhstan emphasised that the CIS should eventually evolve towards "the conclusion of a confederate Union treaty between former republics of the USSR" (Sovety Kazakhstana. August 26, 1993).

45 Argumenty i Fakty. June 26, 1993. The Treaty was signed by four Central Asian states with the exception of Turkmenistan. That fifth regional power concluded a bilateral agreement on military matters with Russia in June 1992, which is in many respects similar to the letter and spirit of the above Treaty. For CIS agreements concluded but not implemented see: Ann Sheeky. Seven States Sign Charter Strengthening CIS. RFE/RF Research Reports, vol.2, No.9, February 26, 1993, p.10; Suzanne Crow. Russia Promotes the CIS as an International Organization. RFE/RL Research Reports, Vol.1.3, No 11, March 18, 199 p.33; Elizabeth Hague. The CIS: An Unpredictable Future. RFE/RF Research Reports, Vol.3, No 1, January 7, 1994, p.9.

48 By early 1990ies these "traditional" UN peace-keeping operations were being singled out for intense criticism. Many politicians and specialists began to insist that the new "multilateral international peace-keeping operations of the second generation "should be introduced" implying more resolute and direct use of military force. (See: John Mackinlay. Jarat Chopra. Second Generation Multilateral Operations. Washington Quarterly, Vol.15, No 3, Summer 1992, pp.113-132. Boutros Boutros - Ghali. Report on the Work of the Organization from the Forty-Seventh to the Forty-Eighth Session of the General Assembly. September, N.Y., Geneva, 1993, p.2.

49 The civil war in Tadjikistan came as the result of political, ethnic and regional divisiveness. It was rooted in the power struggle between the opposition using democratic and Islamic slogans against the conservative neoCommunist regime. As the result of this struggle the unity of the Tadjik ethnic group was destroyed leading to a clash between Northern and Southern ethnic groups. The opposition concentrated in the Garsk and the Nagorno-Badakhshanskii autonomous districts. Local military operations led to considerable loss of lives and triggered massive flight of the population towards other NIS and into neighboring Afghanistan. Socio-economic life of

the country was all but paralysed while the ability of central Rakhmonov government severely handicapped. Under these circumstances political vacuums were created that contributed to exacerbation and extension of warfare and outside involvements.

50 Alexandr Dubnov. "Katastrofa v Tadjikistane o kotoroi v Rossii nichego ne znayut". *Novoye Vremya*. No 4, 1993.

51 Mikhail Yusin. "Rossija delayet stavku na novoye tadjikskoye rukovodstvo". *Izvestia*, April 14, 1993. Civil War in Tadjikistan. *Central Asian Monitor*, No 5. (1992), .8; Events in Tadjikistan. *Central Asian Monitor*, No 6 (1992), pp.2-4. A number of Russian industrial giants, i.e. Magnitogorsk and Chelyabinsk metallurgical plants, KAMAZ, VAZ and others depend almost entirely or to a very large degree on imports from Central Asia. Light industry is being affected in a similarly dramatic way.

54 Constantine Michalopoulos, David Tarr (eds.) *Trade in the Newly Independent States*. Wash., 1944, pp.229-235. Erik Whitlock. *The CIS Economies. Divergent and Troubled Paths*. RFE/RL Research Reports, Vol.3, No. 1, January 7, 1994, p.9. In particular these conditions included Central Asian obligations to coordinate its banking, crediting, customs and taxation rules and regulations with Moscow and to bring them in accordance with Russian norms and laws.

56 OEC was created in 1985 to include Iran, Pakistan and Turkey. In November 1992 it was joined by Azerbaidjan, Afghanistan and all five Central Asian states. From the geographic and demographic point of view the organization may indeed become another European Economic Community with a territory of 7.2. mln. sq.km. and a population of 300 mln. *The Economist*, December 26, 1992 - January 8, 1993. In the Western view only Kirgizstan merited to be called a democratic state in all of Central Asia. Other countries were accused of antidemocratic practices and human right violations. See: *Implementation of the Helsinki Accords: Human Rights and Democratization in the Newly Independent Republics*. U.S. Congress, Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe. Wash., January 1993, pp.170-204.

59 While talking about stability or instability in all former Soviet republics an important clarification should be introduced. Given the circumstances that accompanied the dissolution of

the USSR and the historically insignificant time period that was allowed for nation-building in all NIS it is obvious that their "stability" should be understood in a rather narrow sense of the word - more like the preservation of a tentative and fragile status-quo than anything else.

This is especially pertinent in view of several additional factors. Firstly, many of the NIS including those in Central Asia, may hardly be considered states in the classical sense. They are lacking such important attributes of statehood as control over borders, independent monetary and financial systems, monopoly on the use of armed forces within their territories, etc.

Secondly, the legitimacy of regimes established in these countries as the result of sovereignization is often less than clearcut and is usually being challenged by powerful internal (and in some cases external) opposition.

Thirdly, these newly independent entities could so far make no conclusive choices as to the ways of their development in the socio-economic and political sense. It is not at all clear whether in the future they will not be affected by reintegratory tendencies and again lose part or all of their sovereignty.

In this connection external factors - influences by outside powers, Russia in particular, but also Turkey, China, Iran, etc. - may acquire considerable importance. Admittedly, it is much easier to destabilize the situation in Central Asian NIS than to increase their internal stability and legitimacy of existing regimes.