

FORMER SOVIET  
SOUTH PROJECT

The Russian  
Policy  
Debate on  
Central Asia

*Irina Zviagelskaia*

THE ROYAL INSTITUTE OF  
INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS 

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POLICY DEBATE  
ON CENTRAL ASIA

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*August 1995*

I.Z.

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# SUMMARY

The Central Asian region (with the exception of Kazakhstan) does not feature high on the scale of Russia's political priorities. Within the CIS as a whole the Slavic republics and Transcaucasia are considered to be of much greater importance to Russia.

Russia is still trying to work out a coherent strategy towards the Central Asian republics. If at the initial stages of independence Russian politicians seemed almost to ignore Central Asia, later on it was recognized as an integral part of the zone of Russia's special interests.

The intensive debate on Russian policy in the area testifies to the fact that actual approaches to the countries of the region are still in a state of flux. The official position has changed dramatically, as have viewpoints expressed by various political factions. Only the Communists and Russian nationalists appear to demonstrate any consistency on the matter. More often than not the debate reflects acute domestic political struggles, with different groupings, parties and lobbies all trying to use the issue in order to strengthen their own positions.

This paper analyses the various approaches towards Central Asia suggested by participants in the debate, which centres mainly around models of coexistence, and economic and defence issues. Although the debate may have only a marginal impact upon Russian policy-making, owing to the serious economic and political problems the country is facing, it has become an important element of the Russian political scene, throwing light on Russia's interests in the region as well as revealing the obvious obstacles on the way to their realization.



# I INTRODUCTION

Since the collapse of the USSR the Central Asian region has attracted the attention of different forces and states. A search for national identity and economic self-sufficiency was an important factor in making the newly independent states turn first to the countries which were geographically, culturally and ethnically close to them. In a broader international context they were perceived by many observers as a future part of an expanded Middle East. The activities of the nearby countries, including Iran, Turkey, Pakistan and China, demonstrated that within the foreseeable future developments in the region might lead to further changes in the geopolitical situation. There was much speculation about the growing Chinese presence in southern Kazakhstan and China's intention to exert influence in certain areas of Kyrgyzstan, about the likely spillover of the Afghan conflict into Tajikistan as well as about the impact of the Tajik civil war on the region. Rivalry between Iran and Turkey (though sometimes overestimated) has been widely discussed in the context of an eventual choice of either an Islamic or a secular model by the Central Asian states.

With the exception of Kazakhstan, Russia has not perceived Central Asia as a region of special importance. Even within the CIS, Transcaucasia has had a higher priority, not to mention the Slavic republics. Russia's practical policy, especially in the initial stages of its independence, seemed almost to ignore Central Asia. The severance of economic ties, the process of erosion of a single cultural space, and Russia's obvious reluctance to make economic sacrifices to meet the needs of the republics made their search for new partners more intense. At the same time, continuing dependence upon Russia as well as disappointment in the ability of foreign investors to rescue them from the crisis made a majority of the republics strive for reintegration, or at least for a higher level of cooperation with Russia than its leaders were ready to offer at the time.

The formulation of a strategy towards Central Asia is also made more complex because the countries of the region are heterogeneous and do not make up a single whole, despite all the arguments about a single Turkestan or a Central Asian union. The idea of a Central Asian union raised fears in Russia that any security dimension of

collaboration among the Central Asian republics might push the region towards cooperation with foreign countries in the sphere most sensitive to Russia.

The countries of the region possess different economic potentials and resources. Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan are the most developed, while Turkmenistan's economic situation may improve thanks to its gas and oil and a small population. Kyrgyzstan is a comparatively poor republic, and Tajikistan, devastated by the civil war, ranks last in terms of development.

The republics are also dissimilar in their geographical relations with Russia. Kazakhstan and Russia share a long border (over 7,000 km), but the other republics have no common border with Russia at all. Militarily, Kazakhstan, with its nuclear potential, is of special significance, but a serious military challenge comes from Tajikistan, where Russian frontier troops are engaged in combat operations.

Ethnically, too, Central Asia is not a single entity. Although dominated by the various Turkic peoples, it includes the Persian-speaking Tajiks as well as significant Russian, Ukrainian, Korean and German populations.

Finally, the republics of Central Asia are not homogeneous from the point of view of stability. A grave threat to the entire region and to Russia comes from the situation in Tajikistan, where the already protracted conflict has led, owing to its growing internationalization, to permanent military tension on the border with Afghanistan. Experts predict that instability will increase in Kyrgyzstan, and that the latent inter-ethnic problems in Kazakhstan could, if aggravated, develop a most destructive character.

The debate on Central Asia shows that the region is becoming a focus of greater attention among various political forces in Russia. The evolution of different positions, testifying to the fact that Russia still lacks a strategy *vis-à-vis* the region, has acquired an importance of its own, which can contribute to an understanding of the interests and limitations which shape Russia's approaches towards Central Asia.

## 2 THE SHAPING OF APPROACHES

The Foreign Minister of Russia, Andrei Kozyrev, stated in July 1995 that relations with the CIS countries were now at the top of Russia's foreign policy agenda, but the actual policy of the Russian Federation towards Central Asia, although it has considerably matured since 1991, is still in a state of flux. No clear-cut objectives have been defined and, consequently, no set of adequate methods has been found for their realization. Russia's political line, not being the product of a well-thought-out strategy, is often subordinated to immediate tasks and is merely a reaction to events.

Such a situation is due, above all, to objective circumstances. The collapse of the USSR, which has led to the emergence of a number of new states little prepared for independence, has taken unawares not only Central Asia but also Russia itself. What we see here is not so much the break-up of some sort of empire, where the periphery had been rather poorly connected with the metropolis and where, moreover, the process of separation of its parts had taken a long period of time that blunted many sharp edges, but a sudden disintegration of a unitary state. Actually the USSR never was either a federation of republics or a voluntary union, regardless of what was written in its constitution. It was not even a direct continuation of the Russian Empire, since its component parts found themselves cemented much more rigidly than in the past by the political structures, the defence system, economic ties and ideological goals. The unprecedented unification of the mode of life of the different peoples attained in the USSR could not but leave its imprint both on Russia and on Central Asia.

Finding itself at the heart of a system of international relations that had never previously existed, Russia was unprepared for this role that required it to develop a new conception of its place in a transformed geopolitical environment. The approaches to Central Asia by which it is guided are at present of a transitional character; they are not settled and are being adjusted under the influence of the changing situation.

The subjective factors which also shape Russia's political course with regard to Central Asia may be said to include the contradictions between the executive and legislative powers, the lack of coordination in their approaches to many problems, as well as in the work of the various rival departments, the personal ambitions of

politicians and the military, and the tendency to make practically any question concerning Russia's strategy a subject of acute internal political struggle. Moreover, the discussion of Russia's real interests in the different regions of the post-Soviet space, including Central Asia, and of its main policy priorities, is often replaced by attempts by individual groupings, parties and leaders to use a given subject for their selfish ends: to attract attention, to obtain the support of certain forces in Russia itself or to strike a blow at the opponents.

At various stages of post-Soviet development, the arguments and disagreements that were taking place among Russian leaders, in the circles of economists, the military, and so on, underwent an evolution resulting from the emergence of all sorts of lobbies and groups of interests on the one hand, and from the gradual decline of the pro-Western trend in Russian politics on the other. The complications in Russia's relations with the West and its disappointment at the lack of readiness (or capability) among Western states to ensure its comparatively swift recovery from the economic crisis redirected Russia's attention to the post-Soviet space. In addition, the need to deal with the challenges coming not only from the East but also from the West induced Russia to seek new ways and means of providing defence, with stress laid on the creation of a reliable security system within the framework of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), including, naturally, the Central Asian states.

In any case the severance of contacts between individual republics met with resistance from realities capable of only extremely slow change. Geographical proximity, the existence of communications and trade routes, economic interdependence, dependence on one another in the sphere of security and defence, and the common 'cultural space', all required a sober appraisal of the objective possibilities for both Russia and the new independent states of Central Asia, which found themselves unprepared for a separate existence. At the same time, during the first stage of independence, the debates about the place of the Central Asian states in the system of Russia's foreign policy priorities were not infrequently determined by ideological considerations. Paradoxically, the new Russia, while destroying the former communist regime, borrowed from it at the initial stage the principle of ideologizing political approaches, although the ideology itself had qualitatively changed.

As E. Pain, the chief of one of the sections of the Analytical Centre under the President of Russia, wrote:

Here we see the idea of the 'national liberation' (i.e. separatist) movements of the non-Russian peoples as allegedly the only and inevitable form of realization of their democratic strivings. Since the rise of the first 'national fronts' in the republics of the USSR, this idea proved so popular among the Russian democrats that it somehow became

customary to overlook the nationalists' major and minor sins, to forgive them first their quiet lawlessness and then open violence.<sup>1</sup>

In Central Asia the national fronts and opposition movements were not much in evidence. The main exception was the organized opposition in Tajikistan, initially supported by the Moscow Democrats, who sympathized with the struggle against the communist *nomenklatura* since they themselves were at that time combating the remaining Union structures and counted on the assistance of the new forces in the republics. Moreover, Askar Akayev preserved a democratic halo. As to the leaders of the other Central Asian republics, their communist past was too obvious, as was their continuing adherence to Soviet methods of administration and control. In these circumstances, most Russian leaders and the democratically minded public were inclined to regard the prospect of a rapprochement with the Central Asian states as damaging to Russian reforms.

In the opinion of the specialists in the International Research Centre of the Moscow State Institute of Foreign Relations (MGIMO), who by no means denied the necessity of seeking forms of cooperation with the states of Central Asia, a Russian–Central Asian union was undesirable because of ‘the danger of degeneration of the declared “union for reform” into an anti-reform alliance with the conservative elites remaining in power in Central Asia’.<sup>2</sup> The conception of the countries of Central Asia as a kind of post-communist conservative impediment to political and economic progress in Russia itself has by now been pushed into the background by more practical considerations.

In the early 1990s, to associate the question of stability in the region with the retention of power by the Party apparatus was seen by the Russian Democrats as an unacceptable deviation from declared principles. In this light the 1992 assertion of the Russian observer Konstantin Pleshakov that ‘our priority is not democratization but stabilization’ was perceived as outright conservatism.<sup>3</sup> With the rise of new threats to stability in the post-Soviet space and the growth of pragmatism in government and presidential circles, however, the authoritarian regimes of Central Asia began to be seen by the Russian leaders as much less odious. Credence was no longer given to the belief that the opposition in Central Asia was necessarily the bearer of democratic values. While the need for a free press and for the emergence of new parties and public organizations as a counterpoise to the official system was not denied in principle, there was a growing acceptance that the specific features of traditional societies should also be taken into account. A multi-party system in such societies often leads to the mobilization of the population on a regional, clan, or ethnic basis, which actually perpetuates the contradictions existing in society. The slogans used by Central

Asian oppositions carry, besides, a strong charge of nationalism, serving to aggravate tension.

The Russian Democrats, while still sympathizing with the opposition members and giving them refuge in Russia, now clearly understand that their eventual advent to power in the states of Central Asia in the present situation would by no means guarantee the observance of human rights and the realization of reforms but might well destabilize the situation instead.

As the American researcher Graham Fuller rightly observed: 'In the end, Moscow is likely to prefer authoritarian leadership in the new Central Asian states precisely because it does offer a chance to "keep the lid on" and avoid turmoil – at least in the short run. The last thing Russian President Boris Yeltsin needs right now is conflagration in the former Soviet republics, which only fuels the ambitions of neo-imperialists and Zhirinovskiy.'

Especially important in Fuller's thesis appears to be the conclusion that instability in Central Asia plays into the hands of the enemies of the present leadership in Russia, which therefore continues to be personally interested in supporting the forces that ensure stability in the region, regardless of their political orientation.

The range of different points of view concerning Russian policy in the Central Asian region has not narrowed since the 'near abroad' was proclaimed to be Russia's 'zone of vital interests'.<sup>5</sup> It continues to include highly polarized positions, from Russia's complete withdrawal to the re-establishment of a single state. There is, however, enough room between these poles to choose more realistic intermediate alternatives.

A specific feature of the political debate around Central Asia is that similar attitudes are frequently shared by representatives of diametrically opposed forces in the political spectrum. For instance, the conceptions of the Slavic Orthodox community, presupposing the 'rolling back' of the Turks in one way or another, echo the ideas of supporters of the pro-Western trend, which is also unsympathetic towards the Turkic element.

The emerging national idea of Russia is a direct result of the country's changed status, its need to find a place in a new geopolitical environment and to develop a more distinct state ideology. These concerns are reflected in the ongoing discussions about whether Russia belongs to the European world or whether it is a Eurasian state serving as a kind of bridge between the West and the East. Whereas policy formation has been influenced by practical considerations and has undergone a certain evolution, in broader terms Russia's national idea has shaped the approaches to the 'near abroad' of various political forces including the government.

Russia's neo-isolationism at the initial stage after the break-up of the USSR was due to practical, if not infrequently contradictory, considerations. The future of the



CIS was initially seen as quite vague. The Commonwealth was regarded both as a transitional vehicle to future reunification, and as a possible means to alleviate the possible complete disintegration of the post-Soviet space by retaining close contacts only within the nucleus of the leading (mostly Slavic) states. In 1991–2, the political leaders showed no interest in the development of integration processes inside the CIS. The focus of attention was shifted in the main to the development of Russian statehood proper and to bilateral relations with the former Soviet republics. Russia's unwillingness to promote the rise of supranational structures was dictated by fears that the major states in the Commonwealth would unite and form a considerable counterbalance to Russian influence in the CIS. Finally, there existed the opinion that the Central Asian republics, being economically dependent on Russia, would not melt into thin air while the Russian leaders were busy accomplishing more important tasks of national revival; in short, that this was an issue that would not go away, and that could be dealt with in due course.

It was only in the summer of 1995 that Andrei Kozyrev stated that Russia was ready for any level of integration that would be acceptable to other CIS members, and that the CIS should be turned into a normal regional organization. These points illustrated a change of emphasis in Russia's approaches to the post-Soviet territory, but they were far from realistic; the gap between declarations and practical policy remains very wide. Russian officials have realized the propaganda benefits of speaking about reintegration. It is well known that the majority of the Central Asian countries have been pressing for reintegration since 1991. First and foremost they were striving to preserve economic ties and to keep Russia as a donor for an indefinite period. Russian leaders were extremely reluctant about this, and new accents in their statements do not indicate any substantial change: the level of economic relations between Russia and the Central Asian republics is declining. They are gradually becoming similar to relations among foreign countries, with such attributes as agreements on customs, system of payments, and the like. The links between Russia and Central Asia still have more to do with interdependence than with conscious choice.

The debate concerning the purposes and content of Russian policy in Central Asia has attracted representatives of political and military circles, entrepreneurs and the academic community. The positions of various institutions or officials are undergoing continuous change, so it seems that it is not particular points of view but rather main currents and tendencies that are really important in the debate.

## 3 POLITICAL DEBATES

### Russia's interests

Russia's long-term interests in Central Asia, those that are directly connected with its national security and guarantees of normal socio-political and economic progress, can be summarized as follows:

- political and economic stability (the absence of interstate and internal conflicts and acute economic crises);
- the preservation of the various contacts between Russia and the Central Asian countries and the prevention of a vacuum that can be filled with forces hostile to Russia;
- ensuring Central Asia's ecological security;
- the prevention of the spread of chauvinism and Islamic extremism;
- the prevention of the spread of terrorism, drug-trafficking and arms-smuggling;
- the preservation of communications crossing Russia and access to new transport arteries and to oil and gas pipelines oriented to the 'far abroad';
- ensuring the security of the Russian population.

A general list of this kind does not, of course, give an idea of the debate in Russia about policy towards Central Asia; nor does it take into account the differentiation within the region itself. The main trends indicated above do, however, form the pivot around which different points of view and different groups of interests clash.

Broadly speaking, three main problems – conflicts, political Islam and the fate of the Russian-speaking population – have become the source of the most acute contradictions and are most extensively used in the internal political struggle.

#### *1. Conflicts*

The thesis that Central Asia is a zone of conflicts, in a 'hot' or latent state, is doubted by no one. Such a conclusion is based on the existence of disputed territorial issues

(according to the Institute of Geography, the Russian Academy of Sciences, the region has at least 19 disputed zones whose present borders can be called into question);<sup>6</sup> the weakness of state structures, leaving the Central Asian states unable fully to perform the functions of administration and control; the aggravation of ethno-national problems as the consequence not only of the active quests for national self-identification, but also of the inter-ethnic economic rivalry and the struggle for water resources, land, a greater share of privatized property, and so on. The conflict in Tajikistan, burdened, moreover, by an Islamic dimension, has demonstrated the persistence of conflict situations in the region, their tendency towards rapid internationalization and the complexity of political settlement.

An analysis of conflictual factors, as well as of Russia's practical actions in Tajikistan, give grounds for the experts' search for models of policy towards conflicts which best correspond with Russia's interests.

We do not intend to examine here possible scenarios for the progress of conflicts. Some analysts think that a repetition of the Tajik pattern is not impossible first in Kyrgyzstan and then in Uzbekistan;<sup>7</sup> others see the possibility of a spreading Tajik conflict gripping Uzbekistan, parts of Afghanistan and perhaps also the territory of Kyrgyzstan.<sup>8</sup>

However the conflict, or conflicts, may develop, Russia is confronted with a choice: either to try to stabilize the situation or immediately to quit the conflict-ridden area. This choice is complicated by the fact that it does not have its own fortified borders, to which it could withdraw its armed forces and reliably protect itself from the violence, narcotics and arms being exported from the zone of instability. Moreover, the question of where any line separating Russia from Central Asia should pass is scarcely a geographical question. Would the situation in Russia itself be improved by the creation of a frontier with Central Asia, cutting off the millions of Russians living in northern Kazakhstan? Finally, would Russia, the self-proclaimed successor to the USSR, gain by pursuing in the 'near abroad' a policy that would leave to their fate peoples with whom it shares a Soviet heritage and a common historical past?

It must be admitted that the danger of Russia's efforts to stabilize the situation turning into an instrument for the support of one regime or another is already apparent. In any case, the greatest threat of the politicization of military commitments lies in unilateral guarantees and measures, should the Russian leadership find it possible to resort to them.

Nor can Russia turn its back on those conflict situations which have a tendency to internationalization. As the Kazakh researcher Assan Nougmanov put it: 'there is one circumstance that may to a great extent shelter Central Asia from instability, although not eliminate it completely. This circumstance is Russia's role in Asia and the Near

East. Central Asia is certainly within the sphere of Russia's geopolitical ambition. This is an inescapable fact'.<sup>9</sup>

The attempts to rid Russia of the burden of conflicts in Central Asia and simultaneously the recognition of the existing realities preventing its immediate withdrawal have given rise to the conception of a staged withdrawal of the Russian presence based on defence in depth: initially Tajikistan as the first line, then Uzbekistan, then the southern borders of Kazakhstan and the establishment of the line of retreat across the northern regions of Kazakhstan – the Aral-Balkhash line.<sup>10</sup>

Such a combination of isolationist conceptions with moderate neo-imperialism reflects the search for a strategy in the current situation, in which Russia's practical policies towards Tajikistan are evoking criticism from all political forces. On the one hand, they obviously lack consistency if the aim is to retain Tajikistan within the sphere of Russian influence. Military presence alone is not sufficient for that; it requires more decisive economic support coupled with firmer pressure on the Tajik leadership to demand the observance of human rights, retirement of the more odious leaders, and a fairer distribution of official posts between the individual regions. On the other hand, the military measures that are being adopted do suggest an intention of leaving Tajikistan and can be interpreted as a gradual escalation of Russian presence and, consequently, of involvement in the conflict. With the periodic aggravation of the situation on the Tajik–Afghan border, accompanied by the killing of Russian servicemen, the demands for withdrawal from Tajikistan are particularly vociferous in Russia. The attempts at mediation and political settlement by the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs are capable, to a certain extent, of neutralizing the criticism, but there have been no real and tangible achievements so far.

## *2. Political Islam*

The problem of political Islam in Central Asia likewise raises serious questions directly related to the formulation of Russian policy towards in the region and reflecting the political alignment of forces in the country. It has become especially acute in connection with the civil war in Tajikistan, where the Islamists played a leading role.

Current Russian approaches to the issue can be divided into three main schools: the 'alarmists', the 'rejectionists' and the 'realists'. The first (as a rule comprising politicians and observers with only an approximate idea of Islam) assert that the whole of Central Asia is a zone producing the more extremist forms of militant Islam. No distinction is thereby made between Islam as a religion and political Islam. All Islamic movements are, moreover, deemed to be fundamentalist. The result is a sort of 'demonization' of Islam, and its representation as a direct threat to Russia. Various

possible versions of fundamentalism's offensive are put forward. One apocalyptic scenario predicts the fall of Tajikistan, then Uzbekistan, then the southern areas of Kazakhstan, which will be the intermediate base for the advance on Russia. Pressure from the Northern Caucasus will play an auxiliary part. These two lines are projected to meet in the Volga basin and then to cut Russia in two. As a result the western part will find itself incapable of independent existence and the eastern part will be doomed to disappear as a state from the political map.

Whatever alarm the role of Islamic extremism may cause, the assumption that it is capable of wiping Russia off the face of the earth is obviously sheer nonsense. The authors of such far-fetched prophecies pursue a clear political purpose: to scare the West with Islam to such an extent that it will support all of Russia's efforts in the post-Soviet space. 'The awareness is needed, above all, of the expansion of aggressive fundamentalism as a common problem of the European countries "from the Urals to the Atlantic ocean".'<sup>11</sup> Presented in such a form, the Islamic factor is exploited most vigorously by the Russian or Slavic-Orthodox nationalists, and is also called into service as grist to the mill of the pro-Westerners or 'Atlanticists' in the Russian establishment. These ideas, which provide no serious analysis of the problem, are dictated by the continuing internal political confrontations in Russian political circles.

The supporters of the second trend produce diametrically opposed arguments. Central Asia, they say, was so much secularized under the Soviet government that its re-Islamization will take an indefinitely long time; consequently there is nothing to fear. Such assertions blend with the political plans of those politicians who want to put an end to Russian presence in the region and to create some kind of Slavic union or similar entity, possibly with the participation of Kazakhstan.

Representatives of the third school, experts in these matters – the orientalists, historians and ethnographers – are inclined to appraise the situation much more thoughtfully and calmly. They do not see anything tragic in the apparent movement of the Central Asian republics towards the Muslim world, do not consider Islamic fundamentalism to be the only and inevitable alternative in the development of the local societies, are far from ascribing to Islam anti-Russian or anti-Orthodox moods that are alien to it, and do not see Russia as 'an outpost of the Christian world advanced into the enormous world of Islam',<sup>12</sup> rightly pointing to Russia's own Christian and Islamic character. Muslims in the CIS total some 60 million; in Russia 13 million. In the opinion of one Russian Orientalist, Yuri Gankovsky, 'Muslim fundamentalism as such has never and nowhere presented any danger. How it is used in politics is quite a different matter.'<sup>13</sup>

The role of political Islam in the region, if soberly assessed, might be described as follows: although it does not enjoy widespread support and does not have charismatic

leaders, it does exist, but in the CIS this movement, with rare exceptions, is not radical or extremist.

There are, moreover, no grounds for believing that new attempts at Islamizing Central Asia can be ruled out once and for all. Political Islam is essentially a social movement. It arises in societies experiencing an accelerated process of marginalization, where the gap between the rich and the poor is growing and the formation of the middle class is slow, and where the destruction of traditional values is taking place. In this sense Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and to a lesser degree Kyrgyzstan (Islam did not play a decisive role among the nomads) are threatened with an oncoming Islamic tide. Such fears are a major factor in the gravitation of the present regime towards Moscow, since their retention of power is possible only within the context of the secular development of society. Meanwhile the Russian leaders are compelled to keep somewhat aloof from Central Asia by the likely political unscrupulousness of these regimes. In the opinion of a number of observers, should power in Russia be taken by the Communists, Liberal Democrats or other supporters of the nationalist idea, the authoritarian regimes could quite possibly find a common language with them. As the Orientalist and political scientist Alexei Malashenko has said: '... the talk sometimes going on [in Central Asia] about the revival of imperial thinking can quite well be replaced by toasts to the restored friendship of the peoples'.<sup>14</sup>

At present, Islamic revival in Central Asia may well be a much more serious threat to the power structures in the region itself than to Russia, and Russia appears to be seen in the region as the guarantor against any upheavals. No wonder that in October 1992 Islam Karimov, influenced by the war in Tajikistan, called upon Russia to return to the performance of its age-old function of the superpower in this region of the world.<sup>15</sup>

It must be admitted that the argument of the 'realists' is closer to the line of those Russian politicians who advocate Russia's superpower role in the 'near abroad'. Nevertheless, the recognition that antagonisms do not need to exist between Russia and the Islamic republics does not entail the assumption that Russia could use forcible methods to impose a new 'territorial formalization' of this coexistence.

### *3 Russians outside Russia*

The 'Russian question' in the 'near abroad' states as a whole and in Central Asia in particular has become a major element in the political debates in Russia. Their stance on this question determines the degree of popularity of political leaders, parties and movements. Moreover, the evolution of the Democrats' views concerning the condition of the Russians outside Russia marked their shift towards nationalist ideas. The turning-point was the publication of an article 'The Power in Quest of Itself' by Sergei

Stankevich, State Adviser of the Russian Federation, in March 1992.<sup>16</sup> Until then, public concern about the condition of the Russian minorities was used to gain political dividends by the opponents of Yeltsin's team, the Communists and National Patriots. They sensed the public mood in Russia, and Zhirinovskiy's success in the parliamentary election derived largely from his tapping of this mood.

The crux of the matter was not simply that a prominent Democrat took notice of the condition of the Russians, but the priority he attached to the issue. In the opinion of Stankevich, this problem should be central in determining the entire complex of relations with the 'near abroad' countries, and all other state interests should be subordinate to it: 'The attitude to the Russian population and the Russian heritage is Russia's most important criterion for including one state or another in the category of friendly. This, in turn, cannot but determine the entire complex of our bilateral relations from the question of the future of troops to economics and finances'.<sup>17</sup>

At practically the same time, Yeltsin expressed his opinion on the subject much more constructively, taking into consideration the former Soviet republics' possible reaction as well:

It should be frankly admitted that so far we have been defending our compatriots poorly. At the same time, to try to solve such problems with the help of force and ultimatums or, worse still, through armed confrontation with the republics, as some propose, is nothing but political adventurism. To resort to it means deliberately to put our citizens in a position of enemies, to provoke against them an avalanche of violence.<sup>18</sup>

The migration of Russians from the republics of Central Asia was to a considerable extent a natural event. The growing local nationalisms, used by both the ruling elite and its opponents to mobilize the population, combined with the quite justifiable desire for the revival of national languages and cultures, as well as the need to overcome the national inferiority complex – all these factors could not but lead to a downgrading of the population outside the titular nationality. Moreover, Russians in Central Asia remained, on the whole, an alien element; having been integrated in the communist system, they found themselves increasingly cut off from the local society. Their ignorance of local languages, traditions and behavioural models did not seem an important issue when Russians were mixed with the local Russian-speaking elite but became one when they found themselves in a new relationship with the same people – a people of whom, as it turned out, they had but a very vague idea despite having lived side by side with them for decades.

It is debatable whether the Russians enjoyed a special status in the USSR after the pattern of the French colonists in Algeria or the British in India, or whether they had

no social privileges. The revelation of the truth will now change nothing – after the declaration of independence of the republics the Russians felt, if not a direct threat, at least obvious uneasiness about their future. Accustomed to being under the patronage of the state, they showed a low degree of political organization and social solidarity and therefore felt defenceless in the new, unexpectedly foreign, countries. Their ethnic discomfort is clear to see; it is evidenced by the fact that Russians are leaving not only war-ridden Tajikistan but also stable Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan – in the latter Russians constitute up to 40 per cent of the population. Russian emigration damages the economies of the Central Asian countries (Russians were employed mostly in industry, and native specialists and trained workers are still in short supply). At the same time it is a heavy burden on Russia, which is incapable of providing for the economic and social needs of a mass influx of migrants, the more so because they are highly skilled urban professionals, for whom there is no work in Russia's rural areas. Lastly, Russians who have long lived in Asia have become a sort of a sub-ethnos. Without being fully integrated into the local society, they nevertheless adopted a number of characteristics (diligence, non-acceptance of hard drinking, a respectful attitude to their elders) which make them aliens in the Russian countryside.

Russia's long-term interest consists in having Russians stay in the states where they have been living many years, and for this it is necessary to obtain a situation in which their civil rights are protected. Meanwhile the political debates around this problem are far from being practical recommendations. More often they represent attempts at playing the 'Russian card'. And ever more frequently this card is being snatched from the nationalists by the democrats. Quite radical views are professed by the Chairman of the Russian State Duma Committee for Contacts with the Compatriots, Konstantin Zatulin; relatively pointed statements are made apropos of this by A. Migranyan, a member of the Presidential Council. Such a marked shift has not gone unnoticed. Vladimir Zhirinovskiy said in April 1994:

Two and a half years ago I joined the presidential elections with the slogan 'I shall defend the Russians and the small peoples'. I was then called a chauvinist. Today even Kozyrev defends (so far in words) Russians in the Baltic areas. Where are the Democratic Russia members with their general human values now? Where is Democratic Russia's appeal to the regions now? 'To take as much sovereignty as they can carry'? It is indecent even to recall it.<sup>19</sup>

Generally speaking, no one doubts that any Russian government would want to see that the interests of the Russians in the former Soviet republics are not infringed upon. At the same time the growing importance of this problem in Russian politics



reflects not so much the Russian population's deteriorating position as certain shifts in the approaches of the ruling circles of Russia itself. The Democrats have begun to exploit the national idea with enthusiasm, while the government seeks a rapprochement with the populist Duma (such a rapprochement was demonstrated, with regard not to Central Asia but to the Crimea, when the signing of the Russo-Ukrainian agreements was made dependent on the observance by Kiev of the rights of Russians on the peninsula). It can be expected that the aggravation of the problem of the Russian population in any of the Central Asian states will elicit a tough response from Russia.

The current emphasis on this issue is also related to election campaign considerations (the defence of Russians is a sure slogan) but, unlike other issues, many of which are of a temporary nature, the use of the Russian factor will long be one of the instruments of political action for Russian leaders.

## Models of coexistence

For all the diversity of models offered by different political forces, one shared characteristic is the recognition of a special role for Kazakhstan, the approach to the other Central Asian states being practically undifferentiated. Turkmenistan was recently called a 'strategic ally', but the term does not refer to a special role assigned to it by the Russian politicians; it reflects, rather, a search for a counterbalance to the positions of Kazakhstan and Azerbaijan on the Caspian Sea issue.

Some researchers believe that such a situation is to be explained, above all, by geopolitics, which itself dictates different levels of relations. Significantly, such a point of view is maintained by a Kazakh scholar whom his colleagues have not forgiven for such free thinking. In the opinion of N. Masanov,

Central Asia, geopolitically, is a province of the Moscow/St Petersburg nuclear space, and by mere force of circumstances, owing to its geographical situation, it was and will be compelled to revolve around [this space]. In relation to the Moscow/St Petersburg nuclear space, Kazakhstan represents a periphery of the third and fourth level, while the other Central Asian countries, Uzbekistan etc., represent a periphery of the fifth and sixth level. And, naturally, they find themselves in a dependent position.<sup>20</sup>

Of the entire complex of causes determining Russia's heightened interest in Kazakhstan – geopolitical interests, the vast territory, the presence of resources, and, until recently, the siting of nuclear weapons on its territory – the main one is, without doubt, the issue of the Russian-speaking population. In all the schemes of Russian politicians concerning the future configuration of the CIS, its centre and periphery,

Kazakhstan is included in the nucleus of the main states (Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, and Kazakhstan). A. Migranyan, for instance, pointed out:

... in order not to allow the emergence of a serious counterbalance to itself within the framework of the CIS, Russia is trying gradually to increase the nucleus of the Commonwealth. No wonder therefore that the first to be discussed was the problem of an economic union between Russia and Belarus. Ukraine was compelled to join it, and only then did the inclusion of Kazakhstan and other CIS members take place.<sup>21</sup>

Migranyan pays special attention to the specificity of the ethno-cultural situation in Kazakhstan. In his opinion, the attempt to prevent an explosion of ethnic conflict in Kazakhstan is the main driving force behind Nazarbayev's desire for integration within the framework of the CIS and promotion of close contacts with Russia. Another factor is the vulnerability of Kazakhstan to pressure from Russia.

Today the Russian government, which formerly preferred to exert such pressure on Kazakhstan (for example, through the demand for the introduction of dual citizenship – a demand quite unacceptable to Kazakhstan, which is ethnically almost split in two), has made concessions to Nazarbayev on a number of issues related to the creation of an economic union and the development of closer contacts. This is due to the awareness that the retention in power of Nazarbayev, who resists radical nationalists of every stripe, is a kind of guarantee for the maintenance of stability in the republic. Moreover, following Russia's entanglement in Chechnia, the search for reliable partners inside the CIS has acquired special importance, the more so since the Kazakhs are Muslims. The agreements signed with Kazakhstan in January 1995<sup>22</sup> and the subsequent summit held in Almaty were important factors that have made it possible for the Kazakh president to take steps to strengthen his power and to extend his room for manoeuvre.

In March 1995, the Constitutional Court of the republic declared the previous year's parliamentary elections invalid and, consequently, the parliament itself illegitimate.<sup>23</sup> President Nazarbayev dissolved the parliament and ordered a referendum on extending his own term of office.

The fact that the president has assumed the whole of the state power and has obtained a national mandate to extend the term of his presidency reflects complicated processes taking place in Kazakhstan not only at the level of relations between the executive and legislative branches of power but also in a wider national context.

After the parliamentary election, Nazarbayev was subjected to strong pressure from various political groups whose representatives had obtained seats in parliament. On the one hand, the conservatives, who are against reforms, became more active; on the

other, members of the nationalist opposition continued their demands. The latter group was heterogeneous, including representatives of the several national minorities – including Russians and Koreans – who felt less and less confident about the progress of establishing a new Kazakh state. The implementation of the law concerning the Kazakh language, which is spoken only by a part of the Kazakhs themselves; the policy of gradual settlement by Kazakhs of the northern areas of the country, with their compact Russian population, the changing of the Russian place names for Kazakh alternatives; discrimination against the Russians in everyday life, in providing employment, etc. – all these measures arouse dissatisfaction in the Russian and other non-Kazakh peoples. These genuine frictions and apprehensions were used by a part of the opposition to exploit the national minorities issue to undermine Nazarbayev's position.

There was also the even stronger and more effective pressure of the Kazakh nationalists, represented mostly by the southern clans, who accused the president of paying too little attention to the interests of the titular nationality, and who capitalized on slogans of national revival, while remaining utterly out of touch with the realities and specificities of the ethnic structure in Kazakhstan, where half of the population comprises non-Kazakhs. Moreover, the southern clans, deprived, in their opinion, of a sufficient share in the political establishment, were ready to regard as enemies not only members of other nationalities but also the Russianized educated part of the Kazakhs. They were called 'mankurts', i.e. people who had lost the memory of national traditions, etc. It was the pressure of this Kazakh nationalist group, whose demands Nazarbayev, for understandable political reasons, could not ignore, that served to weaken his position among the Russian-speaking population, who had pinned on him great hopes at the initial stage of the independence since he was known for his tolerance. On a larger scale, the Kazakh nationalists' activities served to complicate relations with Russia as well. They provoked Russian nationalists, who demanded that unrelenting pressure be brought to bear on the Kazakh leadership. Some deputies of the State Duma announced their intention that the position of the Russians in Kazakhstan should be coordinated with the signing of any bilateral agreements.

Finally, some of the deputies accused Nazarbayev of authoritarianism. While the steps taken by the Kazakh president are, of course, hardly democratic, the strengthening of executive power in the current conditions in Kazakhstan may provide more reliable guarantees for the continuation of the policy of reforms. The president was able to cut off the radicals, who had a destabilizing influence on the process of political decision-making.

At the same time the Russian authorities were disappointed by the reluctance of the Kazakh leadership to grant Russian the status of second state language and to take a more moderate stance over the Caspian Sea.

Despite existing frictions between the two countries, the possibility of a military-political alliance with Kazakhstan is recognized even by politicians who consider integration within the framework of the CIS unrealistic and unnecessary.<sup>24</sup>

Kazakhstan's special role as a component part of a certain new type of state is also recognized by followers of a nationalist orientation. But while the officials speak of a form of association that will not mean member countries abandoning their own statehood, the nationalists express themselves much more plainly. In his interview with *Forbes Magazine* Alexander Solzhenitsyn said: 'Already in 1990 I wrote that Russia could desire the unification of only the three Slavic republics and Kazakhstan (leaving out all the other republics). But unification in a single state and not in a fragile far-fetched confederation with an enormous supranational bureaucratic machinery...'.<sup>24</sup>

Such an attitude stems not only from the author's non-recognition of the sovereignty of the separate republics of the former USSR but, above all, from his conviction that the northern territories of Kazakhstan are, in fact, Russian. 'The whole of northern and northeastern Kazakhstan is in actual fact Southern Siberia, it is populated primarily by Russians, who are repressed in Kazakhstan today in their national, cultural, business and everyday activities (just as are the other non-Kazakhs, who make up together with the Russians 60 per cent of the population of Kazakhstan)'.<sup>26</sup>

Such an approach does not currently find a direct reflection in political practice but it is invariably present in the background. The government prefers, as has already been mentioned, to preserve the status quo for as long as possible with a minimum of Russian expense. The more populist Duma, where nationalists like Zhirinovskiy have an impressive number of seats, is inclined to exploit the Russian population factor and to exert heavier pressure on the Central Asian states. It is at this and lower levels that the approaches which can be called neo-imperialist are taking shape.

Thus, in any form of association with Russia, Kazakhstan will always find a definite place for itself. But what about the other republics of Central Asia? A much greater diversity of views is to be found here, but it is significant that all the arguments both of the zealots, who demand that Russia should retain its influence and presence in the region, and of those who insist on an immediate withdrawal, are based exclusively on negative factors, on the threats coming from the region. In other words, both continuing presence and withdrawal are regarded by their respective advocates (particularly at the political level of discussion) as merely the lesser of two evils.

Precisely the same arguments are often used to support essentially opposing and mutually exclusive schemes. These arguments and the ensuing conclusions can be summarized as follows:

- **Conflictual situations in Central Asia are a threat to Russia's stability. Therefore:**
  - (a) **Russia is the only country whose military presence, political influence and economic aid can help to stabilize the situation.**
  - (b) **Russia should withdraw from the region in order not to be involved in conflicts, which will only exhaust it.**
  
- **There is a real danger of destabilizing influence from extremist forces from the 'far abroad'. Therefore:**
  - (a) **Russia should defend the former Soviet borders, which are simultaneously the borders of the CIS.**
  - (b) **Russia should fix and fortify its own frontiers in order not to suffer unnecessary losses.**
  
- **The Russian-speaking population in Central Asia has the right to count on Russia's protection. Therefore:**
  - (a) **Russia should continue its presence or close contacts with the states of the region as a guarantee of normal existence for the Russian-speaking population.**
  - (b) **Since the Russian-speaking population will in any case be ousted to Russia, it is enough to provide opportunities for their settlement in Russia.**
  
- **The Central Asian states are actively developing relations with the Muslim states of the 'far abroad'. It is possible that the emerging vacuum may be filled by forces unfriendly or even hostile to Russia. Therefore:**
  - (a) **Russia should stay on in order to prevent the appearance of such a vacuum.**
  - (b) **Since the Central Asian states belong to a different culture and civilization, and their joining the Muslim world is inevitable, it is useless to squander resources to keep them in the sphere of Russia's influence.**

Since the adherents of different approaches use the same arguments, their ideas are not infrequently of a speculative nature and only indirectly influence the formulation of Russia's political line with regard to Central Asia. The endless debates about 'Atlanticism' and Eurasia, about the special mission of Russia as the bridge or buffer between the West and the East, whose importance is growing with the escalating confrontation between the North and the South, can be classed rather as intellectual exer-

cises than as practical recommendations. Sergei Stankevich, speaking of the need to revive the Eastern aspect of Russia's foreign policy, complained of the absence of political thinkers capable of formulating the Eastern question in its contemporary context and of practical officials capable of offering effective responses.<sup>27</sup>

Meanwhile repeated attempts have been made to define the place of the Central Asian states in the Russian strategic system and within the bounds of the CIS. The extreme solutions (complete withdrawal or preservation of practically the former level of presence) have already been mentioned. Much more productive, from the practical point of view, are intermediate solutions. For instance, Vladimir Lukin, former Ambassador of the Russian Federation to the USA, and Chairman of the State Duma Committee for International Affairs, rejected the possibility of Russia's withdrawal from Central Asia, and suggested building up a multilevel system of relations with the states of the region depending on their importance for Russia. His idea consisted in creating 'a clear-cut system of reciprocal commitments between the big state and its smaller neighbours, which will receive security guarantees in exchange for the recognition of the special interests and influence of the "big neighbour", in proportion to their geographical proximity and strategic and economic weight'. The system will be realized within the bounds of close allied relations with some states and partnership with others. 'The level of our relations with friends, as a rule, is to be qualitatively higher than our relations with partners, and the level of relations between our partners and our friends is to be qualitatively lower than between us and our friends'.<sup>28</sup>

Although he did not precisely specify what place the Central Asian states will occupy in the proposed scheme, most of them are unlikely to have the status of 'friends'. Quite modest tasks are assigned to Russia in this region by A. Migranyan: the development of economic relations, the training of national armies and arms delivery. He prefers not to discuss why these countries will inevitably remain in the sphere of Russia's economic and military political influence.<sup>29</sup> What is suggested here is less even than partners, but rather some sort of dominions.

Intermediate schemes thus accord to Central Asia (minus Kazakhstan) the status of a mere periphery of Russia. While in Lukin's formulation Russia is still recognized as having certain obligations and responsibility for what is taking place at the southern borders of the CIS, in Migranyan's they are practically denied. However dubious the term 'neo-imperialism' may be as applied to the present policy of Russia in Central Asia, it should be admitted that the trend towards reducing commitments while preserving influence corresponds much more closely to it than the attempts to construct some differentiated scheme of relationships.

The evolution of the approaches of the government and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to the Central Asian region in particular after 1992 was due to a variety of

reasons. On the one hand, it was helped by internal political developments in Russia itself. The crystallization of ideas about national interest was taking place in the context of growing influence of nationalist trends and the strengthening of authoritarian tendencies. On the other hand, the shock of the civil war in Tajikistan and the consequent continuing tensions sharply reduced the possibilities of maintaining a neo-isolationist policy and keeping aloof from the events in Central Asia.

## 4 ECONOMIC ISSUES

The political debate concerning Russia's policy in Central Asia is interwoven with discussions about the resumption and development of economic relations with the states of the region. Russia no longer wants to be the donor for Central Asia and, being in the words of Russian economist L. Fridman 'a second-rate great power',<sup>30</sup> it cannot afford to pump money into the economies of the more backward states of the region, for which the severance of economic contacts has proved very painful.

Among the main characteristics of the Central Asian countries, International Monetary Fund experts considered the high degree of specialization and integration of their production into the economy of the USSR as of primary importance. The result of specialization was a very high level of foreign trade in each republic: in Kazakhstan at the end of the 1980s it made up some 34 per cent of the gross national product, in Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan 39.5 per cent each, in Tajikistan 41.6 per cent, and in Kyrgyzstan 45.2 per cent. In all these republics the proportion of trade that took place within the USSR exceeded 80 per cent, sometimes rising to 90–95 per cent. Exporting raw produce and minerals, all the republics were compelled to import a considerable proportion, and sometimes almost all, of their foodstuffs and consumer goods requirements.<sup>31</sup>

The specificity of connections within the USSR helped to preserve an orientation towards Russia. In 1992 Russia accounted for 68 per cent of the total imports of Kazakhstan, 58 per cent for Uzbekistan, 51 per cent for Kyrgyzstan, and 48 per cent each for Tajikistan and Turkmenistan. Russia imported 61 per cent of the exports of Uzbekistan, 54 per cent for Turkmenistan, 53 per cent for Kazakhstan, 51 per cent for Tajikistan, and 39 per cent for Kyrgyzstan.<sup>32</sup>

The dependence of Central Asia on Russia in conditions of a growing crisis in Russia's own economy was, in the opinion of most of the Russian economists gravitating towards the democratic camp, an unacceptable burden which should be shed as soon as possible in order to make the Russian economy healthier.

The attempts to stop subsidizing the Central Asian states produced the argument that they were not ready to institute reforms after the Russian pattern. This unreadiness



(which was quite natural, since they could not and did not wish to follow in Russia's footsteps) formed the basis of the theory of variable-speed development, from which both economic and political conclusions were drawn in 1992–3. As G. Kunadze, Deputy Foreign Minister of the Russian Federation, pointed out, 'those of the needy states that remain in the rouble zone are beginning to be a drag on us, because the emission of money to meet their needs is a heavy burden on the Russian economy'.<sup>33</sup>

As the well-known Russian economist N. Shmelev said: 'I am reassured by the compromise that was finally found between the Finance Minister Fyodorov and Gerashchenko at least on such a problem as: "No more financing the near abroad". For this is such a drain on our economy. Last year, according to our estimates, 15 per cent of the gross national product went to the near abroad.'<sup>34</sup>

Although in his article Shmelev does not specially single out Central Asia as a region absorbing a large part of Russia's gross national product, it is nevertheless clear that the Central Asian countries must feature in his estimates.

An even more alarming forecast of the results of integration of Russia and the Central Asian states was produced by specialists from the International Research Centre of the Institute of Foreign Relations: 'The potential incompatibility of the economic policy of the states forming the nucleus of the Commonwealth of Independent States is fraught with delay if not frustration of the market reforms in Russia.'<sup>35</sup>

It should be noted that such a hypothetical course of events would finally depend to a decisive extent on the alignment of political forces in Russia itself and not on the pace of reforms in Central Asia, which is in any case not uniform among the various states of the region.

Nevertheless, variable-speed development began to bother Russia financially. In 1992, the supply of roubles received by the Central Asian republics was used by them to provide credit for enterprises which, in the opinion of the finance minister of the Russian Federation, reduced to zero the results of the tough financial policy. The Central Asian states regarded the more rigid terms of Russian financial policy towards them as a deliberate ousting from the rouble zone. Whether deliberately or not, they were forced out, and this was to the benefit of the Russian economy. In the end all the states of Central Asia were obliged to introduce their own currencies.

Russia's abandonment of its donor functions and acceptance of world prices in trade had an immediate impact on the macroeconomic indices of the Central Asian republics. 'Apparently Turkmenistan alone will be able to remain in the group of medium-income states. Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan have less chance of it, whereas Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan have already practically slid into the group of less developed countries'.<sup>36</sup>

The conception of variable-speed development gradually began to be replaced by the conception of a levelling of the republics, which did not mean a cardinal change in

Russia's course. It rather indicated the ruling elite's attempts to reconcile the objective contradictions in the Russian approach. On the one hand, Russia, no longer possessing the power of the USSR, will hardly be able to 'rescue' the Central Asian states single-handedly. Despite all the talk of the benefits of mutually advantageous cooperation, it is obviously possible only in some areas and not with all the states of the region. On the other hand, by leaving most of the Central Asian states to fend for themselves in conditions of growing crisis and increasing population, Russia is faced with the danger of the creation of a giant zone of instability close to its borders. Attempts to approach this issue using a market-oriented yardstick (i.e. what economic dividends will Russia receive from the promotion of contacts with Central Asia?) are surely doomed to failure.

S. Polyakov, an ethnographer and specialist on Central Asia, wrote of the absence in Moscow of clear ideas concerning Russia's economic role in the region:

The question 'to feed or not to feed' Central Asia has not been answered to this day. Without the solution of this question in principle, the injections into these states of many millions of dollars and roubles (without their being given back) are senseless. This is also important to the Central Asian states themselves, for their aggregate national income within the USSR barely covered 30 per cent of consumption. What are the governments of these states doing to feed the incessantly growing population? This question is important not only to the peoples of Central Asia but also to their neighbours.<sup>37</sup>

The structure of personal consumption is being increasingly reduced to the satisfaction of essential needs. Between 1991 and 1993, the share of household expenditure on foodstuffs increased to 70 per cent in Tajikistan and to almost 60 per cent in Kyrgyzstan.<sup>38</sup>

In the immediate future the Central Asian states will be forced to maintain the closest possible contacts with Russia. This does not mean that they will not continue seeking to achieve economic independence by joining the system of international and regional economic organizations, obtaining investments, and so on, to ensure a structural reorientation of their unevenly developed economies. However, the reorientation of the economy and the search for new markets and new suppliers require a long transitional period, whereas the deepening economic crisis does not leave the ruling elites much time to achieve results.

The real state of affairs dispelled the euphoria the republics felt during the initial stage of independence. The Kazakh premier Akezhan Kazhegeldin stressed: 'Today we have all awakened and understood: the world to which we were rushing one by one in the firm belief that we were awaited with open arms – we are not much wanted

there.' In the opinion of Kazhegeldin, the creation of a single market space presupposes that the CIS countries must 'share their sovereignty with others'.<sup>39</sup>

The sudden political activity of Kazakhstan's business circles, who supported the solution of a number of problems complicating the relations of the republic with Russia, can be regarded in the same light. They proposed holding a referendum on a number of issues, including making Russian the official language, changing the article of the constitution which defines the republic as the form of statehood of the self-determined Kazakh nation, and introducing private ownership of land.<sup>40</sup>

Equally unproductive were the attempts of the Central Asian states to find regional alternatives to the slowly emerging CIS structures and their failure to carry out their agreements on the formation of a region 'common market'. Ever since 1992, the states of the region have repeatedly tried to find some form of association. In January 1994, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, and later Kyrgyzstan, signed an agreement on the abolition of customs frontiers, the lifting of travel restrictions, and related matters. This was followed by the creation of an Intergovernmental Council and approval of a statute establishing a Central Asian Bank.

The initiatives for intraregional integration reflect processes taking place throughout the world. At the same time the chances that the Central Asian states will be able to relieve their economic crisis in this way appear slim. Reciprocal contacts between them are not developed, and there is a lack of interdependence and too great a discrepancy in their levels of economic development. The creation of a Central Asian alliance should be regarded rather as a lever for exerting pressure on Russia in order to spur it on to more active integration than as a means for independent survival.

In fact Russia is concerned not so much about intraregional integration as about the possibility of the post-Soviet republics uniting around power centres. Such apprehensions were reflected in a report by the Foreign Intelligence Service in September 1994:

One of the CIS states (other than Russia) takes upon itself the 'unifying' functions. Several republics of the former USSR (without Russia) draw closer together... The first course of events could be such as would give a certain impulse to integration processes throughout the territory of the Commonwealth of Independent States, with the initial group becoming part of a broader integrated space. Another possibility is that the group goes into its shell, which inevitably drives it towards external 'centres of influence'.<sup>41</sup>

In actual fact integration in Central Asia did not lead to the realization of either the first or the second scenario. It did not give an impulse to integration inside the CIS as a whole, for, as was repeatedly pointed out, neither political nor economic considerations impel the Russian authorities to promote an equal level of relations with all republics of

Central Asia. The second possibility has no chance of success owing to the strengthening Russian-Kazakh contacts and the ongoing formation of a nucleus within the CIS.

On the whole, economic factors dictate a line of Russian behaviour which will relegate most of the Central Asian states to the periphery of the CIS for a long time to come.

Russia's actual economic policy in Central Asia, like its political approaches, is not strictly consistent and is adjusted to circumstances. Thus, on the one hand, it is interested in having access to the transport routes through Central Asia and to the markets. It wants to retain control over the supply of metals and strategic and raw materials from the region. On the other hand, its limited economic capabilities made Russia press the Central Asian republics to introduce their own currency – which is hardly in line with a proclaimed course towards reintegration.

## Interests of the oil and gas complex

Quite complicated problems for the CIS may arise from the appearance of new energy producers. Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan all have good prospects in this respect. The production and export of oil and gas will help these states to solve their economic problems but will simultaneously widen the gap in the level of economic development between the various Central Asian republics, which may lead to a deterioration of relations between them. Thus, more rigid terms for the delivery of Turkmen gas have already evoked the dissatisfaction of Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan.

The destination of fuel from the region also makes a difference to Russia. The inclusion of the territory of Russia and the other CIS countries in an effective transport and communications system would help integration and the settlement of any disputes that may arise. If gas and oil pipelines pass outside the CIS, the exporting countries will inevitably weaken their contacts with their Commonwealth partners.

A number of factors lend special importance to the interests of Russia's oil and gas complex in Central Asia. First, this complex is developing vigorously compared with other industries and is successfully overcoming its previous 'enclave' character by integration into the world energy economy. Secondly, it possesses enormous resources. Thirdly, it has successfully formed a joint-stock system, which furthers the creation of a powerful lobby. Fourthly, while pursuing economic advantage, it is simultaneously fulfilling the strategic role of ensuring Russian control in the sphere of oil and gas production and transportation in the 'near abroad' and preventing Russia from being isolated, by building new pipelines across its territory.

The activity of the Russian oil- and gas-producing companies and associations in Central Asia is growing above all in Kazakhstan, where a struggle for control of oil

exports has already started; the same is true to a lesser degree of Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan.

Early in March 1995, the government of Kazakhstan, the Kazakh gaz state holding company, the Russian Gazprom joint-stock company and the British-Italian 'British Gas-Agip' alliance signed an interim agreement for the development of one of the world's biggest oil and gas condensate fields at Karachaganak in the southwest of Kazakhstan. The agreement covers the initial period of development of the field and envisages an investment in the project of some \$320 million. According to preliminary estimates, the parties' profit from the exploitation of the deposit will be \$40,000 million, of which Kazakhstan will receive 85 per cent and the contractors 15 per cent. Gazprom will get \$900 million. Negotiations with both the British Gas-Agip alliance and the Kazakhstan government had been conducted by the Russian joint-stock company, which had already invested in the development of the deposit, in 1993–4. In December 1994 it was able to achieve its goal: an agreement with the Ministry of Oil and Gas Industry of Kazakhstan providing Gazprom with equal rights to those of British Gas-Agip in the development of the field and stipulating the delivery of crude gas and unstable condensate from the field to Russia for processing and the return of cleaned gas to the central and northwestern areas of Kazakhstan.<sup>42</sup>

The interests of Gazprom should be viewed in a wider perspective than the desire of the joint-stock company to receive dividends. The company's slogan 'What is good for Gazprom is good for Russia' is not merely an imitation of Western corporations. The close connections of the joint-stock company with government structures (Viktor Chernomyrdin is a former minister of the oil- and gas-producing industry) facilitate a very favourable climate for Gazprom's activities at the official level. They certainly exerted some influence on the extension of the customs union between Russia and Belarus to include Kazakhstan in January 1995.

In the same month Kazakhstan, Russia and the Sultanate of Oman signed a protocol on the beginning of construction of the Caspian pipeline system. The three parties formed the Caspian Pipeline Consortium (CPC) for the realization of the pipeline project, which will cost up to \$1.2 billion. Priority in the distribution of shares will be given to the main oil suppliers – Russia and the Tenghiz Chevron oil joint enterprise, 50 per cent of whose capital belongs to the American Chevron corporation.<sup>43</sup>

In 1993 the Chevron company, which was already working in the Tenghiz field in the area to the north of the Caspian Sea, believed that Almaty would be unable to solve the problem of oil transportation for export in the near future, and that there was therefore no need to hurry the development of Tenghiz. Through reinvestments from small batches of six to nine million tons a year, Chevron could in 20 years cover its costs and avoid paying Kazakhstan a bonus of \$420 million stipulated in the agree-

ment as a guarantee that the company would use any new pipeline that was built. It now appears that such a pipeline will be built by the CPC. The first section will run from Novorossiisk (the Russian terminal on the Black Sea) to Tikhoretsk – i.e. across Russian territory.<sup>44</sup>

A further example of the active efforts of the Russian oil and gas complex is the agreement of the Siberian Far Eastern Oil Company to incorporate one of Kazakhstan's oil refineries, the Pavlodarsky refinery.<sup>45</sup>

The Russian oil and gas complex is intensifying its efforts throughout the CIS, even though this may sometimes involve a clash of interests with other powerful players, for example with the Foreign Ministry over the issue of the division of the Caspian Sea into sectors. Simultaneously Russia's oil and gas complex is being gradually integrated into global structures.

Russian oil corporations are increasingly active in Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan, trying to establish control of (or at least to ensure their participation in) oil and gas production and transportation projects. Thus a joint Uzbek–Russian enterprise, LUKoil Uzbekneftegaz, was registered in February 1994; it intends to develop gas condensate deposits, undertake geological prospecting, invite investments, provide the transportation of fuels, and supply provisions. In 1994, negotiations were held between the Oil and Gas Ministry of Turkmenistan and LUKoil concerning cooperation in the development of the oil and gas complex of Turkmenistan.<sup>46</sup>

Oil interests are, naturally, confined only to relations with those states of Central Asia which are energy-producers. The countries that have no attraction for Russian business circles will inevitably be pushed back to the periphery, as long as political considerations do not gain the upper hand.

## 5 THE DEBATE ON MILITARY PROBLEMS

Discussions about the prospects for rapprochement or even reintegration of the post-Soviet states in the military-political sphere have undergone a significant evolution since the creation of the CIS. There has been a radical change in the appraisal of the possibilities for contraction of the defence area and real steps have been outlined in this direction; concepts have been formulated for regional approaches, for the building of a multilevel defence system and for cooperation among the separate branches of the military.

After the break-up of the USSR, the division of the Soviet legacy had a very negative effect on the defence capabilities of the independent states. They did not receive what they needed for the accomplishment of any given task but acquired those fragments of the Soviet military machine that happened to be on their territory. They did not have even the semblance of a complete system in the form of a grouping of troops, mobilization deployment schemes, command and control agencies, and munitions. Moreover, most of the post-Soviet republics were inexperienced in building up an army and organizing for defence; they did not have trained military specialists and officers, especially not among the titular nationalities.<sup>47</sup>

At the same time it was almost inevitable that the nationalization of military policy would, at least initially, become an end in itself, serving as a symbol of national independence. Under such circumstances attempts to create or, to be more precise, to preserve unified armed forces were doomed to failure.

The Collective Security Treaty concluded on 15 May 1992 in Tashkent was a compromise between real defence requirements and the desire of separate states to maintain independence in this matter. The declarations by the member states (the Treaty was signed by all Central Asian republics with the exception of Turkmenistan) of their readiness to realize the right to collective defence, and immediately to put into action the mechanism of joint consultation to coordinate their positions and take measures in the event of a threat to the security, territorial integrity and sovereignty of one or more signatories of the Treaty, were important from the point of view of the recognition of collective efforts. In practical terms, however, these declarations were not conducive

to military cooperation based on equality, since they presupposed that the main burden would, as previously, be borne by Russia. The Treaty did not remove the contradictions between the partners and, in the final analysis, did not promote real integration in the field of security.

Nevertheless, as compared with the neo-isolationist approach then prevalent in Russia, the position of the military, with their attention focused on the 'near abroad' was more realistic. From the very beginning they pressed for integration with the former Soviet republics, pointing out the necessity of keeping a reliable defence system, including defensible borders which could only be the borders of CIS. The Russian military actually outpaced the politicians, who began talking about Russia's vital interests in the post-Soviet space only much later.

The military in Russia do not, however, constitute a homogeneous interest group. There are divisions between various departments within the army and security establishment, personal frictions and rivalry. The existing differences had a certain impact upon the shaping of general security policy, but they were less important than the political debate on the issue. As the Western researcher John Lepingwell wrote:

While the military has played a significant role in developing a new security policy, it has not dominated this policy despite the military's substantial influence caused by the presence of Russian troops in the near abroad. Instead, the debate over foreign policy amongst the civilian elite in Russia has produced a shift towards the position previously held by the military, which has thus created a new accord between the civilian and military leaderships.<sup>48</sup>

The need to formulate a clear-cut conception of the Russian army's tasks, the required dimensions of its presence in the 'near abroad' and its commitments was also dictated by the uncertain status of the Russian troops deployed in the former Soviet republics. The ambiguity of their position began to be felt most clearly in the conflict zones. It was especially obvious in Tajikistan, where the 201st motorized rifle division remained after the disintegration of the USSR. On the one hand, the military command in Moscow did not want the interference of the Russian force in intra-Tajik affairs and demanded that the 201st division maintain neutrality. On the other, the servicemen who had been in Tajikistan for many years and had certain privileges could not fail to establish contacts with the local elite and to develop their own political likes and dislikes. Therefore the neutrality of the 201st division throughout 1992 remained purely formal. Its command obviously sympathized with the Leninabad Kulyab bloc and equally clearly disapproved of the democratic-Islamic opposition. At any rate, when the former speaker of the Supreme Soviet, Safarali Kendzhayev, tried



to wipe out the government, including opposition members, in September–October 1992, his armed grouping was permitted to enter Dushanbe unimpeded by the Russian troops. Later on, when Russian politicians made their choice in favour of the Leninabad-Kulyab bloc and the ‘old guard’ of Party executives, and practically sanctioned the Popular Front’s hammering of the opposition forces, the discrepancy between Moscow’s approach and the real actions of the 201st division was removed.

Practical experience in ‘near abroad’ conflicts accelerated the development of Russian national security strategy and, apparently, helped to conceptualize the principal tasks of the Russian army in post-Soviet space into a military doctrine. According to this doctrine, the main danger lies in the local wars and armed conflicts. Secondly, the security interests of the Russian Federation and the other CIS members may necessitate the deployment of Russia’s troops and military hardware outside Russian territory. Russian troops can form individual bases and installations or part of joint or Russian groupings. Thirdly, the Russian army, along with its traditional tasks, is to perform peacekeeping operations.<sup>49</sup> Since the new doctrine does not even approximately define the probable enemy, its orientation to the ‘near abroad’, which is actively producing conflicts and local wars, is all the more obvious.

At the same time the domino theory is not very popular with the military. They do not rule out a danger of spillover of certain conflicts in the ‘near abroad’ but, in Central Asia, they see more imminent threats coming from foreign countries than from within the region, though for political reasons this idea has not found a place in official documents.

Publication of separate sections of the doctrine caused a wave of criticism both from the left and from the right. Whereas the champions of continuing Russian domination objected to the withdrawal of troops deployed outside Russia to its territory before 1996, the democrats feared that the new doctrine gave the military-political leadership too much freedom in choosing the enemy, both external and internal. Despite all the diversity of views, however, there can be no doubt that the military doctrine, being a sort of compromise document, marked an obvious rapprochement between the military and political leaders. The absence of an enemy was a concession to the politicians who ‘hope to be good in the international arena to all in general’,<sup>50</sup> and the theses on the methods of deterring threats coming from conflicts in the ‘near abroad’ were a concession to the military.

Yet the mutual adaptation proceeded mostly through adjustments made by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in foreign policy. The observer of the newspaper *Krasnaya zvezda*, which is a semi-official military organ, quite naturally quoted with pleasure the report of the Russian Foreign Minister at a conference on Russian foreign policy early in 1994:

No doubt, much effort will still have to be made to make the process of Russia's adaptation in the post-Soviet space civilized, safe and worthy of a great power. But the i's seem to have been dotted, the priorities of the Russian foreign policy have been named. Speaking of them, the Russian Foreign Minister pointed out that 'Russia must continue its military presence in the regions where the sphere of its military interests has existed for ages'.<sup>51</sup>

In the general discussion of the army's role in defending Russian interests in the 'near abroad' a special place belongs to its peacekeeping function. Conceptually this was formalized only after 1993, although Moscow's actions in the conflict zones even after that were not infrequently of a reactive nature and lacked a strategic perspective. As the logic of armed conflicts increasingly involved Russian troops, the understanding grew that no one but Russia wanted to assume the role of peacekeeper. This applied, above all, to Central Asia, which was for the Western world the periphery, and where conflicts in no way endangered Western interests (in contrast, for example, to the situation around Nagorny Karabakh).

Peacekeeping forces in the conflicts in the 'near abroad' cannot accomplish multiple tasks. As we know, the basic idea of peacekeeping operations consists in 'compelling to peace', in ensuring conditions for a political dialogue and settlement. At the same time, Tajikistan had its own peculiarities, since it did not require the separation of the warring sides. The peacekeeping contingent was primarily repulsing the attempts of the armed opposition to cross the frontier. This meant the peacekeepers had to take on the untypical functions of auxiliary units guarding the state frontier. Later on this incongruity was removed: the peacekeeping forces ceased to take part in frontier clashes and served mostly to stabilize the situation inside the country.

Peacekeeping forces are formed in the main from Russian troops. Despite repeated agreements, the Central Asian states' participation in the peacekeeping operations in Tajikistan is merely symbolic. The CIS states which do not belong to this region refused altogether to take part in such operations.

Useful cooperation is beginning with international organizations – the UN and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) – which helps, in Tajikistan at least, to refute the frequently repeated allegation of Russian imperial intentions.

Russia has no alternative but to act as a conflict manager in Central Asia. At the same time the absence of any prospect of a political settlement in Tajikistan, where the conflict depends to a decisive degree on the course of events in neighbouring Afghanistan, will always be used by politicians demanding Russia's withdrawal from Central Asia.

The major trend in Russian military policy, which is now in the process of formalization, is for the creation of a CIS system of collective security. Although the idea of constructing such a system has been a part of the military's propaganda ever since the disintegration of the USSR, different opinions exist to this day as to how it can be realized and what place the Central Asian states will have in it. As already indicated, in 1992 four Central Asian republics (Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan) were the first to sign the Collective Security Treaty. The awareness of their vulnerability and the desire to retain support from Russia in the military sphere made them active supporters of collective efforts. At that time Russian politicians did not show much interest in preserving the defence space through the development of contacts with Central Asia; all they did was not resist the process taking place. The 1992 Treaty had not so much military-strategical as tactical importance; it was to influence Ukraine's rejection of the very CIS concept of collective security.

In 1993–5 the situation appeared to be different. Both the politicians and the military in Russia came to the conclusion that it was necessary to define models of military-political integration in order to ensure the solution of common defence problems according to Russia's interests: the problems included military legislation, technical equipment, training the national armies and, lastly, legal and social protection for servicemen. The most suitable form of military integration is a military-political alliance requiring a system of permanently functioning military and political organs, joint military structures and groupings of forces and weapons, and the coordination of strategic plans, headquarters and plans for training troops. In the short term the idea which would probably have been the best response to defence needs does not seem realistic. The opinion of military experts, defence ministers of the signatory states of the Treaty, and the Foreign Intelligence Service regarding this question still meets with the resistance of politicians in a number of states that fear a revival of the Cold War bloc confrontation and of Russian dominance in this most sensitive sphere.

The stumbling-block in the creation of a military-political alliance is, along with political considerations and the present scarcity of resources, the varied character and direction of threats to the states of different regions. One option proposes the formation of several regional subsystems. Thus, the Central Asian region is to be divided into two security zones: western (Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and part of Kyrgyzstan) and eastern (Kazakhstan and parts of Russia and Kyrgyzstan). The main danger to the states of the western zone comes from Afghanistan. As to the eastern zone, the Chinese factor needs to be taken into account. According to the estimates of Leonid Ivashov, Secretary of the Council of Defence Ministers of the CIS member states, the Xinjiang grouping of forces today surpasses Kazakhstan's armed forces for its combat potential and mobilization capabilities. The Chinese factor is also present in the East Asian region

(the territories of the eastern area of the Russian Federation and of the eastern region of the Republic of Kazakhstan), where Russia and Kazakhstan should join their efforts. A politico-economic organ (the Defence Council) and a coalition command of the grouping of forces are to be created in each of the above-mentioned regions.<sup>52</sup>

The need for a regional system of collective security was also recognized by the participants at high-level military discussions in July 1995.<sup>53</sup>

One factor that makes not only the military, but Russian politicians as well, search for an adequate military response is eventual NATO enlargement. From both a political and a psychological point of view this process is detrimental to the interests of Russia. 'The greatest danger lies in the emerging perception of the military-political isolation of Russia, in the revival of anti-Western and militarist sentiments in public thinking', runs the document 'Russia and NATO' drafted by a group of prominent Russian researchers and practitioners of the Council on Foreign and Military Policy.<sup>54</sup> The main idea of the paper is to avoid any linkage between NATO enlargement and the development of Russia's partnership with the West and with NATO.

The debate on NATO in Russia reveals the fact that many politicians and military staff tend to see NATO enlargement as a greater threat than any other coming from the south or east. In this context Russia's efforts to set up a collective defence and security system within CIS might be intensified by the perceived vulnerability of the country.

The practical realization of collective security efforts leaves much to be desired. Much more time is spent on discussions than on the implementation of agreements already reached. The summit meeting in Almaty in February 1995 showed that only three countries unreservedly supported the Russian conception of guarding the frontiers of Kazakhstan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, i.e., the states encountering the greatest external danger. The others are inclined to regard the Russian approach to the joint guarding of external frontiers as a possible source of tension.

Contradictions within the CIS outweigh the tendencies towards integration, in the military sphere as well. In this respect the Central Asian states, as compared with other post-Soviet regions, are relatively undemanding partners for Russia. Even so politicians (but not the military) still approach these states with the greatest of reservations.

## 6 CONCLUSION

The debate on Russian policy towards Central Asia reflects the fact that Russia has not yet fully defined for itself the significance of the Central Asian region as a whole. Hence the inconsistency of practical steps. Talk about the prospects of economic integration is accompanied by the establishment of a customs office in the airport in Moscow where airliners from Central Asia arrive. Searches for collective security models coexist with the non-fulfilment of bilateral agreements that have been concluded (for instance, with Kazakhstan).

In principle, the discussion of the question of Russian policy in Central Asia and the attempts of politicians, economists, and the military to optimize approaches to the region testify to the processes of democratization of Russian society. At the same time the debate shows general uncertainty in Russia as to how far its commitments in the post-Soviet territory should go, lack of strategic vision, and rivalry among various institutions and public figures.

One can identify two opposite approaches to Central Asia. The first proceeds from the assumption that Central Asia is an economic, political and military burden to Russia. Being culturally alien to it, the region should, moreover, become a part of an 'expanded Middle East' rather than stay with Russia. The only optimal solution would be total withdrawal from Central Asia accompanied by the emigration of the Russians from the area.

The second approach runs as follows. Russia must keep its control of the region by all possible means. The newly independent countries are doomed to foreign domination. If Russia leaves the region or even if its presence is significantly weakened, the Central Asian countries will become involved in alliances hostile to Russia.

These mutually exclusive ideas do not shape practical policy, although their existence cannot be totally ignored by the politicians. They are accompanied by more extreme approaches ranging from the communist idea of the restoration of the USSR to the nationalist schemes of a new unitarian state based upon the Slavic republics of the CIS plus those areas of Kazakhstan that are populated by the Russians.

The adherents of more moderate points of view take into consideration the existing interdependence between Russia and the Central Asian republics. Their assump-

tions of models of coexistence with Central Asia are based upon a differentiated approach to the countries of the region. Kazakhstan is singled out and perceived as an indispensable member of any future federation or confederation. Other republics may be associated with the new federation but the forms of such association are as yet not clear.

The Russian political debate on Central Asia has its own peculiarities, which can be summarized as follows:

1. Not infrequently the debates are of a speculative or purely time-serving nature. The specific mechanism of decision-making in Russia is such that political parties with their different programmes play a less important role than backstage lobbying and personal connections.
2. Almost any issue is used in the domestic political struggle by forces of different political orientations. Often they even use the same arguments to support diametrically opposed conclusions.
3. The emergence of the Russian national idea could not avoid having an impact on the approaches to the issue of all political forces engaged in the debate, including the democrats.
4. The positions of institutions and individuals are in flux. For example, at the beginning of the 1990s the Foreign Ministry was perceived as a proponent of a pro-Western orientation at the expense of Central Asia and other southern republics. In 1995, according to the Foreign Ministry, relations with CIS countries are Russia's top foreign policy priority. In fact only the positions of the communists and nationalists have shown much consistency.

Not all issues that might be important in practical policy have become a subject for debate. For example, the need to keep access to the markets of the region or to have supplies of certain raw materials has not been widely discussed.

The strengthening of presidential rule in the Central Asian republics did not provoke much comment. Russian officials, while claiming the necessity of a free press and observance of human rights, believe that, in traditionalistic societies, authoritarian regimes can better ensure stability. The majority of political forces do not seriously consider the possibility that Central Asia might set Russia an example in this respect. They would rather think that the eventual development of authoritarianism in Russia might be welcomed in Central Asia.

The debate illustrates all the peculiarities of the period of transition the post-Soviet republics are living through. A search for new models of coexistence is going on, and Russia's officially proclaimed readiness for reintegration will not make this search

any easier. Lack of resources and limited economic capabilities are preventing Russia from becoming an indispensable partner for all.

An analysis of the numerous points of view regarding the problem of Russia's relationships with Central Asia suggests the following possible scenarios:

1. *Russia's integration with the majority of Central Asian states.* This possibility is unrealistic and corresponds least to the interests of the present regime. The ideal scenario for Russian politicians would be one that enabled Russia to develop contacts with Central Asia and maintain stability in the region at very little cost. The Central Asian states would, in principle, grapple themselves with their problems, relying on the assistance of external forces, whose activity, however, should not lead to the domination of one foreign state or another or to the complete ousting of Russia.
2. *Russia's progressive departure from Central Asia.* This possibility likewise seems unrealistic in the immediate future. Not only do the Central Asian states need Russia but the latter, given its present level of engagement, will in any case not be able to withdraw quickly. Neo-isolationism is gradually petering out, and politically it is less fashionable to harp on the Asian burden and the special role of the West in the revival of Russia.
3. *Asymmetric mutual links.* This scenario actually covers a transitional period, during which the sides do not set themselves any ambitious tasks, such as ensuring a new form of confederation or Eurasian union, or establishing conditions for a final divorce.

The main factor promoting Russia's continuing 'cohesion' with Central Asia remains national security. This comprises not only the conflicts erupting in the region itself but also its rising strategic importance in the event of difficulties in Russia's relations with the West. Thus, the enlargement of NATO could most probably be interpreted as an attempt at isolating Russia, which will contribute to an intensified search for counterbalancing defence arrangements within the CIS, including Central Asia.

In the immediate future any integration processes are likely to be based on asymmetric relations with individual Central Asian states. To a certain extent the levels of mutual links may well repeat the configuration of the regional subsystems in the military defence union proposed by the military. Contacts between Russia and Kazakhstan are included in one independent subsystem and Russian relations with the rest of

Central Asia in another. Depending on the intensity and character of the threats, each subsystem contains its own complex of links. For Kazakhstan these are inter-ethnic problems requiring a joint approach to their solution; the Chinese threat is also a factor. The second group includes the containment of the threat from Afghanistan. National security requirements will probably also lead to asymmetry within each of the subsystems. For example, Tajikistan, which is of no value to Russia either politically or economically, owing to its geopolitical position will be absorbing most of Russia's resources and demanding from it greater commitments than those states which could develop more balanced and mutually advantageous relations.

Generally speaking, only the transition period, during which relations between the republics are neither artificially impeded nor forced, can lay the foundations for a form of integration that is dictated by real needs and not by propaganda considerations.



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## Former Soviet South Project

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