

The bulletin of the Program in Arms Control,
Disarmament, and International Security
University of Illinois at Urbana–Champaign
Volume XVII / No. 1 / Winter 2008-9

Swords and Ploughshares

US-EU-Russia: New Strategic Dynamics after Bush



- 1* **Introduction** *Matthew A. Rosenstein*
- 4* **Russia and Europe: An Imbalanced Relationship** *Roger E. Kanet*
- 10* **The Old Soviet Bloc: Whose New Europe?** *Carol Skalnik Leff*
- 14* **Hollow Swords: Russia's Military Today—
Implications for the US and Europe** *Robert B. Brannon*

© Program in Arms Control, Disarmament, and
International Security, 2009.

Published by
Program in Arms Control, Disarmament, and
International Security
University of Illinois at Urbana–Champaign
359 Armory Building, 505 East Armory Avenue
Champaign, IL 61820
Phone: 217-244-0218
Fax: 217-244-5157
Web: <http://www.acdis.illinois.edu>

ISSN 1046-7734

This publication is supported by funding from the
University of Illinois and the University's European Union Center
through its U.S. Department of Education Title VI grant.
The content does not reflect the position or policy of these
institutions, and no official endorsement should be inferred.

The original design for this publication was created by
the Office of the Associate Chancellor for Public Affairs/
Office of Publications.

The University of Illinois is an equal opportunity/
affirmative action institution.

Editor: Matthew A. Rosenstein
Design and layout: Studio 2D
Cover photo: Press and Information Office of the Federal
Government, Berlin, Germany

Introduction

by MATTHEW A. ROSENSTEIN

This issue of *Swords and Ploughshares* derives its content from a symposium held on the University of Illinois campus in October 2008, entitled “US-EU-Russia: New Strategic Dynamics after Bush.” The symposium was jointly sponsored by three centers at Illinois: the Program in Arms Control, Disarmament, and International Security (ACDIS), the European Union Center, and the Russian, East European, and Eurasian Center. This publication was funded primarily through the generous support of the EU Center, via its US Department of Education Title VI grant.

As the title indicates, this project sought to examine the complex relations among the United States, European Union, and Russia at a juncture when circumstances suggested such analysis was particularly warranted—with the conclusion of George W. Bush’s eight years as US president, following the ascension to the Russian presidency by Dmitry Medvedev after Vladimir Putin’s eight years in that office (albeit with Putin’s transition to prime minister portending a less seismic shift in Russian policy direction than the US case signals). These changes have implications for the immediate form and tone of US-EU-Russia relations.

In addition to offering a retrospective analysis of the post-cold war period and especially the past decade, this collection of articles seeks to understand and contextualize a series of recent developments that have brought the uneasy triangle of relations between the US, EU, and Russia into stark relief. Those developments include Kosovo’s declaration of independence in February 2008; the August 2008 Russia-Georgia conflict; US proposals to place missile defense systems in the Czech Republic and Poland; and ongoing disputes over natural gas that have disrupted flows from Russian energy suppliers to Ukraine and other countries of Europe.

The present publication aims to analyze such developments within the context of longer-term trends, in order to provide insight as to why recent events unfolded the way they did, and to offer prognoses about the likely course of US-EU-Russia

interactions in the near future. Individually and collectively, the articles contained here also present cautionary lessons regarding how the specific policy choices and general geopolitical strategies that leaders of the US, EU, and Russia pursue could serve to improve or exacerbate the recent discord.

In the first article, Professor Roger Kanet begins his assessment of current Russian-European relations by carefully outlining how the distinctive characteristics of the Russian Federation and the European Union translate into differing decision-making processes and policy implementation. Kanet asserts that Russia has found it expedient to “ignore the existence of the EU” and deal instead with individual member states in cases of both cooperation and competition. He also emphasizes the deteriorating relations with the United States since 2002 as significant in Russia’s interactions with EU and NATO members. Kanet suggests that improved EU-Russian relations will be difficult to achieve in the foreseeable future, given a combination of factors: Russia’s pursuit of a more assertive policy on the world stage and within its perceived geographic area of “privileged interest;” tensions in the transatlantic alliance forged in no small part by US unilateralism; deep-seated suspicion of Russia’s intentions among newer EU members in Central and Eastern Europe; and lack of a coherent EU policy with respect to Russia.

Professor Carol Leff focuses the second article on the manifestations and consequences of the struggle for influence in Eastern Europe between Russia and the United States. To illustrate the dynamics of this competition, she presents case studies of two ongoing geopolitical issues: US efforts to place components of a missile defense shield in Polish and Czech territory (ostensibly against the threat to Europe from Iranian strikes), and Kosovo’s path to independence from Serbia, largely through US, NATO, and EU intervention. Leff explains that the missile defense system, as a perceived new security threat to Russia, realizes Moscow’s worst nightmares about NATO expansion into former Soviet bloc countries. Moreover, it has had polarizing effects in the domestic political arenas of the Czech Republic and Poland, and has divided sentiment among America’s Western European allies. Leff also argues that—as evidenced by the friction surrounding Kosovo’s independence—the issues of nationalism, territoriality, and ethnic division in the former Yugoslavia were decidedly not put to rest with the end of the cold war. She concludes her analysis with a set of observations. The first is that a key aspect of the cold war mentality—ascribing hostile intentions to antagonists and fearing the worst from their capabilities—is alive and well. Meanwhile, connecting the dots from Kosovo to the Georgian breakaway regions of South Ossetia and Abkhazia leads her to observe that policymakers would do well

to understand that no specific international issue exists in isolation from others, and hence every action invites a counter-response.

The third and final contribution, from Dr. Robert Brannon, addresses the state of the contemporary Russian military and how it enters into the country's overall security calculus. In the conduct of Russia's August 2008 conflict with Georgia, Brannon detects the possibility that military opportunism was at play. Perceiving that the Russian military may have "shaped the political environment" in its preparations for invasion, he notes other instances since 1991 that, taken together, call into question the nature of Russia's civil-military relationship. Brannon also surveys the capabilities of Russia's military today. He views a series of obstacles that could hinder attainment of Russia's objective to "return to greatness," among them its creaky military hardware and infrastructure, understaffed and archaic defense industry, poorly trained soldiers, and fundamental doctrinal contradiction whereby Russia's military is designed to project global great power status but in the foreseeable future is much more likely to fight skirmishes in its own backyard. Even as Brannon acknowledges the implications of Russia's limitations as they pertain to US-EU-Russian relations, he notes that Russia's capacities to create problems with its neighbors and withhold oil and gas from western consumer countries are enough to warrant more careful consideration of how Russia fits into the transatlantic alliance system, and whether new cooperative security paradigms should be explored.

Policymakers would be wise to heed analyses such as the ones offered here. A Human Rights Watch report on the August 2008 conflict in Georgia, released just before this issue went to press, cites indiscriminate use of force by the involved state militaries and local militias alike, and details the casualties from the violent confrontation. Although the question of where blame lies for the conflict is likely to remain a matter of contention, it is fair to say that the accumulation of steps over time by a variety of international actors—including the US, EU, and Russia—led to a failure of security guarantees for the civilians most affected, and such failure came at the heaviest price. Meanwhile, as has been made clear by the latest round of disputes in early 2009 over natural gas supplies from Russia to Ukraine and EU countries, the lessons from episodes such as the Georgia conflict may be slow to gain traction, and the multiple issues and tensions described in this collection are therefore likely to frame US-EU-Russian relations for some time into the future.

Short Takes

Russia is a part of European culture. I simply cannot see my country isolated from Europe... That is why it is hard for me to regard NATO as an enemy.

—Vladimir Putin, Prime Minister (then-President) of Russia, March 13, 2000

You're thinking of Europe as Germany and France. I don't. I think that's old Europe. If you look at the entire NATO Europe today, the center of gravity is shifting to the east.

—US Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, January 22, 2003

As is the case of other countries, there are regions in which Russia has privileged interests.

—Dmitry Medvedev, President of Russia, August 31, 2008

We will not allow Russia to wield a veto over the future of our Euro-Atlantic community.

—US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, September 2008

An anti-missile shield won't be to the benefit of Europe, Russia or anyone else.

—Nicolas Sarkozy, President of France, November 14, 2008

Russia is not an enemy.

—US President George W. Bush, June 6, 2007

I think that it is important that we understand they're not the old Soviet Union, but they still have nationalist impulses that I think are very dangerous.

—US President (then-presidential candidate) Barack Obama, October 7, 2008

▶ Despite commitments to develop a common foreign and defense policy, in no way does the European Union pursue a common policy on issues of central importance to individual member states.

▶ Russian leaders control a top-down decision-making process and view the world largely through the *realpolitik* lens of nineteenth century European political elites.

Russia and Europe: An Imbalanced Relationship

by ROGER E. KANET

For the past decade and a half the relationship between Russia and the European Union has been one between two quite different types of political entities. On the one hand, Russia was a new political actor—though a traditional state and one that had inherited a complex set of historical relationships and commitments—in the middle stages of economic and political freefall. Although Moscow still commanded massive nuclear military capabilities, its economic and financial situation throughout the 1990s was dire. However, since former President Boris Yeltsin's selection of Vladimir Putin as his successor, Russia's fortunes have improved dramatically. In part, this resulted from good luck and the escalating demand for and price of petroleum and natural gas on the world market; in part, it stems from President Putin's successful reimposition of central control over the political and economic structures across the vast area of the Russian Federation, regardless of the cost in terms of human rights and democracy. Russia's resurgence as a major power during the past decade has brought with it a reaffirmation of assertiveness in its relations with other states—both those within its stated sphere of influence and those further from Russian territory. The revival of Russia's economy has made such resurgence possible. Russia remains very much a traditional power whose leadership views the world from a power political perspective, much as does US leadership in Washington.

The European Union differs from the Russian Federation on virtually all counts. First, and possibly most important, is the fact that the EU is not a state and does not, therefore, have the integrated decision-making organs and processes of a state. Despite commitments to develop a common foreign

and defense policy, in no way does the European Union pursue a common policy on issues of central importance to individual member states, such as the nature of relations with the Russian Federation or, for that matter, with the United States. The hesitant and halting response to the August 2008 Russian military intervention in Georgia is but the most recent example of the difficulty for the members of the EU to agree on a policy when major issues are concerned. Is Russia, first and foremost, a looming threat to European security, as most of the new members and some of the older ones argue, or rather, is Russia to be viewed primarily as the solution to Europe's future energy problems, as other member states maintain? Moreover, while Russian leaders control a top-down decision-making process and view the world largely through the *realpolitik* lens of nineteenth century European political elites, many of the members of the European Union take a post-modern perspective that emphasizes cooperation, negotiation and the peaceful resolution of differences, rather than the resort to traditional power political approaches to dealing with differences.

We will focus here on those factors that have influenced the evolving relationship between the Russian Federation and the European Union. It is important at the outset to note that this relationship is complicated by the fact that Russia has attempted to ignore the existence of the EU and has dealt as much as possible with individual EU states—as in negotiations with Germany, Bulgaria and Italy for the construction of gas pipelines under the Baltic and Black Seas. In fact, even before the August 2008 Russian invasion of Georgia, the nature of relations with the Russian Federation was a divisive issue within the European Union, as new members such as Poland and Estonia criticized their EU partners for downplaying the importance of a coercive Russian policy toward its neighbors in Eastern Europe. Russia's invasion of Georgia in August 2008 and ensuing diplomatic recognition of the breakaway regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia reinforced the fears of the new EU members. So, in examining Russian-EU relations it is important to recall that in foreign and security policy the European Union remains a collection of sovereign states each of which, especially the larger ones, pursues its own relations with Russia.

Added to the complexity that arises from the divisions within the EU on the issue of relations with Russia, relations between Russia and the United States, a formal ally through NATO of most EU members, have soured since 2002. On some issues, such as the US decision to invade Iraq, Russia joined with key US NATO allies to oppose American policy. The new, postcommunist, members of the European Union have generally been much more supportive of US policy and critical of Russia than other EU/

NATO members have been. In other words, the relationships between Russia and the European Union have been influenced and further complicated by Russian-US and EU-US relations. The current analysis deals with five distinct, but overlapping, issues: first, the reemergence of a self-confident and assertive Russia under former President Vladimir Putin, a Russia committed to resuming its role as a major world actor; then, the status of the Western alliance system and the prospects for the reestablishment of an effective and meaningful transatlantic alliance system; third, the prospects for a common approach to foreign and security policy in the EU, as well as the absorption problems that the EU has faced since the expansions of 2004 and 2007 into Central Europe; fourth, Russian relations with the European Union and its members; and, finally, the deterioration of relations between the Russian Federation and the United States since the short-lived “honeymoon” following 9/11, the relevance of which cuts across all four of the other issues.

Before proceeding it is important to note the context in which Russian-EU relations have evolved for the past decade or so. When President Yeltsin appointed Putin as his successor the position of the Russian Federation—both domestically and internationally—was extremely weak. Russia was on the verge of becoming a failed state, one whose government was unable to control or administer its territory, whose views and interests were ignored by other major actors. The Russian economy had witnessed serious decline since before the collapse of the USSR; the once vaunted Russian military proved incapable of winning a conflict with a band of secessionists in Chechnya; Moscow was unable to collect taxes across much of its huge territory and, thus, unable to provide stable incomes to the tens of millions of people still on the state payroll; political and economic corruption and organized criminal activity were widespread. Although the West included Russia in some of its important “clubs” (e.g., the G-7), they generally ignored Russian objections to their policy initiatives—such as NATO expansion, NATO military operations against Serbia, etc. This was the context in which Vladimir Putin assumed the presidency of Russia and laid out a policy aimed at recreating Russia’s position as a major international power.

The Reemergence of Russia as a Great Power

After assuming the presidency Putin announced his commitment to reestablishing Russia’s position as the preeminent regional power and as an important international actor. To fulfill these objectives he had to produce internal political stability and economic viability in Russia. Putin moved forcefully, and in most cases effectively, in reasserting central

governmental control in Russia. The economy, while still not flourishing, showed strong signs of turning around with growth rates of 4.5, 10.0, and 5.0 percent in the years 1999-2001. The signs of growth continued, and even expanded in the following years—not merely in the oil and gas sector, but across much of the economy. These political and economic gains occurred with growing disregard for the civil liberties and democratic processes to which Putin’s government was nominally committed. His anti-corruption campaign soon became a catch-all that targeted those who in any way challenged his position or were concerned about the authoritarian turn in Russian politics—such as the independent national media, which were largely silenced by the end of Putin’s first term as President.

In the foreign policy arena Putin sought allies who shared Russia’s commitment to preventing the global dominance of the United States that Moscow viewed as a threat to international security and to Russia’s goal of serving as a major center of influence in a multipolar world. Most of the issues on which Russia and the United States disagreed in the mid-1990s continued to plague that relationship. Until the terrorist attacks on the United States in September 2001 there was little evidence that the seemingly enduring disagreements dividing Russia and the United States would disappear soon. In fact, after a brief hiatus immediately after 9/11, those issues reemerged and continue to plague Russian-US relations.

However, Putin’s success in dealing with the major problems challenging the Russian state at the beginning of the century meant that Russia now could deal with Europe and the United States from a position of increased strength. That position was enhanced by growing European dependence on Russia for energy. Besides rebuilding the foundations of the Russian state, Putin and his associates benefited from the exponential rise in global demand for energy and the ensuing revival of the Russian economy. This, in turn, contributed to Russia’s ability to pursue a much more active and assertive foreign policy. The voices calling for Russia to resume its role as a great power in the 1990s were strident, but not realistic. However, similar voices—led by Vladimir Putin—have assumed the dominant position in Russia and are based upon expectations of achieving many of their goals. In a statement to the Russian parliament and people Putin noted, “The collapse of the Soviet Union was the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the century.” Early in 2007 he delivered a broad attack on virtually all aspects of US policy at a security conference in Munich that made clear Russia’s new assertive approach to foreign policy, beginning with its relations with the United States. The rhetoric emanating from Moscow at the time of the recent military incursion into Georgia confirmed the image

▶ **Russia has attempted to ignore the existence of the EU and has dealt as much as possible with individual EU states.**

▶ **The relationships between Russia and the European Union have been influenced and further complicated by Russian-US and EU-US relations.**

▶ **Russia has reemerged as a major player in European economic and political affairs and as the dominant actor in most of post-Soviet space.**

of a revisionist state intent upon reestablishing its dominant role, at least along its periphery.

By spring 2008, when Putin turned over the presidency to his successor Dmitry Medvedev, Russia had reemerged as a major player in European economic and political affairs and as the dominant actor in most of post-Soviet space. The foundation of this new role is Russia's semi-monopoly over the extraction and distribution of natural gas and oil across much of Eurasia, and the growing direct influence that this semi-monopoly provides over the economies of neighboring states.

The Weakening of the Transatlantic Relationship

Since the turn of the century Russia has successfully rebuilt much of its status as a major power and has strengthened its overall position in its relationships with its near neighbors, a number of emerging states in Asia, and much of Europe. For its part, however, and despite its overwhelming global military superiority, the political position of the United States in Europe—and throughout the world—is significantly weaker than it had been a decade ago. An important part of its weakened position in world affairs relates to the split that has occurred in transatlantic relations since the end of the cold war—greatly exacerbated since 2001 during the administration of George W. Bush by what many Europeans view as a hegemonic and unilateralist approach to policy making, most clearly visible in the run-up to the US invasion of Iraq in 2003. The current divisions in the transatlantic relationship are far more consequential than disagreements in the past and will not likely be resolved to the point where they can be completely healed. Serious disagreements will characterize future relations in which institutional linkages will be loosened. Although the tone of relations between the major European states and Washington improved during the second Bush Administration, important policy differences—from those concerning the ongoing wars in Iraq and Afghanistan to how to deal with global warming—continue to plague the relationship. The question of how to respond to Russia and to Russia's often confrontational policy initiatives has been added to the list of other important differences on issues ranging from growing European dependence on Russian energy exports to Russia's bullying tactics and pressure against Estonia, Ukraine and Georgia—even after the August 2008 Russian invasion of Georgia.

The EU in Search of a Policy

After more than a decade of deepening and broadening integration in Europe, recently the European Union has seemingly lost some of its *raison d'être*. The defeat of the proposed constitution in 2005 by voters in France and the Netherlands and the

rejection of the Lisbon Treaty by Irish voters in spring 2008 created a constitutional crisis in the EU. The political mechanisms established half a century ago for decision making by a community of half a dozen members no longer work effectively for a union of twenty-seven members. Yet, coming up with a solution to the problem has, to date, been beyond the capability of the leadership of the EU. Added to this is the fact that national governments across Europe simply have not been able to replace their conceptions of individual national interest with supranational, or EU, interests. The common foreign and security policy to which the EU committed itself a decade and a half ago appears no closer to realization on major issues in 2008 than it was a decade ago. The differential responses of the countries of Europe to the US decision to overthrow Saddam Hussein's regime in Iraq provide an excellent illustration of the lack of a common sense of EU interest and the absence of anything approximating a common policy. The nature of relations with Russia has become another source of division among the member countries of the European Union. While "older" members seem more interested in normalizing relations with the Russian Federation and in ensuring their long-term energy supplies, the new members are more troubled about the suppression of dissent in post-Soviet states and about Russian domination over neighboring states, in part by using the "energy weapon" to blackmail those countries dependent on Russian supplies of gas and oil. For political elites in Central Europe and the Baltics, Russia's military intervention in Georgia in August 2008 and its ensuing recognition of breakaway regions in Abkhazia and South Ossetia provide evidence of its continuing threat to national security throughout the region. For purposes of the present analysis the most important issue concerning the EU and its general foreign and security policy is the fact that no common EU foreign policy exists, rhetoric about a common foreign and security policy notwithstanding. All of this means that Russia—and the United States, for that matter—does not deal with a large and integrated Europe, but rather is able to pursue policies targeted at individual European states.

Russia and the European Union

Throughout the history of the European Community and European Union, the Soviet Union and the Russian Federation have, in effect, attempted to ignore the emergence of the multinational institution as a collective decision-making organization in favor of dealing individually and bilaterally with member states. Given the absence of a full commitment on the part of the EU's members to collective decision making in the areas of foreign and security policy—and, at times, even in trade and economic

▶ Although the tone of relations between the major European states and Washington improved during the second Bush Administration, important policy differences continue to plague the relationship.

▶ The political mechanisms established half a century ago for decision making by a European Economic Community of half a dozen members no longer work effectively for a European Union of twenty-seven members.

policy—the approach has generally been rather successful for the Russians. Yet, over the past decade the EU has also pursued a broad range of agreements and relations with the Russian Federation. At times, the EU and other West European political institutions have been extremely critical of Russian domestic and foreign policy behavior on issues as wide-ranging as Russia's brutal treatment of Chechen separatists, the suppression of domestic dissent, support for secessionist movements in neighboring states, the use of gas and oil deliveries as a blackmail tool, and related matters. Prior to the June 2008 EU-Russian summit two clear camps had emerged within the European Union on the issue of relations with Russia—the military incursion into Georgia in August reinforced those positions. On the one side were, especially, the new member states—led by Poland and Estonia. Allied with them at times and on some issues were Sweden and the United Kingdom. For the Central European states recent Russian treatment of Georgia and Estonia, even before the August 2008 invasion of the former, as well as continuing support for secessionist groups in post-Soviet countries, was reminiscent of almost half a century of Soviet domination throughout the region. Sweden reacted especially to Russia's treatment of Georgia even prior to the military incursion, while the UK has raised all these issues, besides Russia's reported involvement in the 2006 murder of an ex-Russian security officer in London. On the other hand, important EU members are committed to normalizing relations with Russia, in particular concerning the import of energy.

Russian Energy and EU Political Divisions • The divisions in Europe's responses to Russian policy have emerged and widened since 2000—at the very time that European states have sought long-term solutions to dependence on imports of energy. Just as important, however, as the turn to Russia by some of the EU states for energy supplies has been the expansion of EU membership since 2004, with nine of the 12 new members having experienced almost half a century of Soviet domination after the Second World War. Perhaps the most important disagreement concerns the growing dependence of Europe on energy supplied by the Russian Federation. Moreover, the United States has been an active player in attempts to contain Russia's growing control over the development and distribution of oil and gas from Eurasia destined for Central and Western Europe. Washington has led efforts to develop pipelines for the distribution to Europe of gas and oil from Central Asia that will avoid Russian territory and, perhaps, Russian influence or control. This policy has been driven by the justified concern in Washington that Russia's influence in Europe would be enhanced were Moscow to control the distribution of Central Asian gas and oil, as well as its own. The Russians,

understandably, have viewed this US approach—especially in conjunction with the eastward expansion of NATO—as a continuation of the cold war policy of containment. US efforts to restrict Russian influence over the delivery of energy to Europe have failed to accomplish their objectives; Russia has effectively outmaneuvered the United States in its relations with the oil and gas producing countries of Central Asia, even though several pipelines have been completed that skirt Russian territory. In recent years Moscow has reestablished solid political and economic relations with the authoritarian regimes of Central Asia. It has signed new agreements with these energy producers that will expand the supplies of gas and oil destined for European consumers through the existing and planned pipeline network across Russian territory, as part of an apparent Russian effort to increase control over the oil and gas that flow from Eurasia to Europe.

Especially important for the current argument is Russia's agreement with important Western partners for the future distribution of oil and gas to Europe, which will eliminate the possible interference of current transit states such as Ukraine, Belarus and Poland, by avoiding their territory altogether. The planned Nord Stream and South Stream pipelines under the Baltic Sea and Black Sea directly to Germany and Bulgaria will expand Russia's domination over the gas markets of Europe, while reducing possible disruption of those flows. Overall, Russia has positioned itself effectively to control the production and distribution of energy across almost all former Soviet space as part of former President Putin's commitment to establish Russia as a major global actor. The dependence on external sources for virtually all gas and oil needs of some countries in the European Union and their willingness to cut bilateral deals with Russia outside the context of a common EU policy (notably Germany, Bulgaria and Italy), has aided Russia in its attempt to employ energy as a foreign policy tool. Poland has been especially critical of the Russian-German pipeline agreement as part of its overall criticism of Russian policy, as has Washington. The Poles were especially angered by what they viewed as Germany's willingness to capitulate to Russia, while the latter exerted unacceptably hostile pressures on EU member states. The accession to the EU of the postcommunist states of Central Europe and the Baltics has added a new dimension to Russian-EU relations, a dimension that was hardly considered in the run-up to their admission in 2004 and 2007.

War in Georgia, "Frozen Conflicts," the "Color Revolutions" and Human Rights • EU members also disagree among themselves on the importance of a series of issues regarding Russia's relations with its new neighbors, as well as human rights abuses in

► Prior to the June 2008 EU-Russian summit two clear camps had emerged within the European Union on the issue of relations with Russia—the military incursion into Georgia in August reinforced those positions.

► US efforts to restrict Russian influence over the delivery of oil and gas from Central Asia to Europe have failed to accomplish their objectives.

► The willingness of some countries to cut bilateral deals with Russia outside the context of a common EU policy has aided Russia in its attempt to employ energy as a foreign policy tool.

► Russia's willingness to coerce and bully small neighbors has revived serious fears among new EU members—most former dependents of the Soviet Union—about the prospects for their longer-term security.

Russia itself. The “frozen conflicts” about which new EU members have been most agitated relate to the Transnistria region of Moldova, Nagorno-Karabakh, and especially the two breakaway regions of Georgia—South Ossetia and Abkhazia. The issue of Russian support for secessionist forces in several post-communist states, not to speak of the direct military intervention in Georgia in support of such forces, resonates strongly among new EU members, as does Russian economic pressure against neighboring states on numerous occasions since the collapse of the former USSR, but especially during the presidency of Vladimir Putin. Moscow has shown its willingness to impose severe economic pressures—especially by shutting off the supply of natural gas and oil—to strengthen its bargaining position in economic and political disputes with countries such as Ukraine, Georgia, Belarus, and Estonia. It has been this willingness to coerce and bully small neighbors that has revived serious fears among new EU members—most former dependents of the Soviet Union—about the prospects for their longer-term security in the face of an increasingly assertive Russia. Poland and Lithuania used their “veto” power to prevent the negotiation of a new partnership agreement between the EU and Russia for more than a year and a half. At a joint meeting between the EU and Russia in May 2007, these and other issues split the two sides and precluded any meaningful agreement even on other less controversial issues deemed important by either side. Meanwhile, the unwillingness of the major states of Western Europe to support their new EU partners fully and effectively continues to provide an opening for the United States, whose views of Russia and Russian policy are much closer to those of countries such as Poland and the Baltic states.

Related to the issue of “frozen conflicts” is that of the so-called color revolutions (the 2003 Orange Revolution in Georgia and the 2004 Rose Revolution in Ukraine) that brought to power Western-oriented and proto-democratic political regimes. In both of these cases, as also in Kyrgyzstan’s Tulip Revolution (2005), Moscow opposed the change in political forces that reduced its ability to reestablish its political dominance in a “Greater Russia.” In both Georgia and Ukraine the relationship with Russia has been conflictual ever since the shift in domestic political power. As already noted, one result was Russia’s attempt to use its economic leverage, especially its control over energy, to influence the policies of both countries. For the new members of the European Union, these and related matters are of great security concern, while for the countries of Western Europe they are of secondary importance to the immediate and longer-term needs to normalize relations with the Russian Federation and to ensure energy supplies for the future.

NATO Expansion, US Missile Defense, and Ex-Yugoslavia • Besides the issues of energy dependence, “frozen conflicts,” and Russia’s assertive role towards neighboring states, other important matters cloud Russian relations with the West and divide EU member states concerning the appropriate response to be taken in any given situation. Since the mid-1990s NATO expansion eastward has elicited strong opposition from Russia, which views it as a breach of agreements reached between the USSR and the West at the time of German reunification and as a direct challenge to Russian security in what Moscow perceives as its legitimate sphere of influence. Although the United States was the driving force for expansion in 1997 and 2004 and remains the primary advocate for the admission of Ukraine and Georgia into NATO, long-term European members have been lukewarm or even opposed to further expansion eastward. Yet, on this issue as well, the position of the new members of the European Union and NATO differs from that of their western EU partners. Virtually all of them joined NATO as a means not only to be accepted into one of the core Western “clubs,” but also in the expectation of enhancing their security. They view the inclusion of countries such as Ukraine and Georgia into NATO as a strengthening of their own long-term security situation vis-à-vis Russia. Russia, for its part, continues to make clear that further movement of NATO eastward would elicit a very negative response. In his new role as Russian prime minister, Vladimir Putin has threatened to terminate Russia’s “military and other contracts with Ukrainian weapons and space facilities that depend on Moscow, if Ukraine joins the Western defense alliance.” Yet, as has become clear on a broad range of issues, the divisions within NATO and the EU permit Moscow to exploit divisions within the Western community in order to accomplish its own objectives.

If anything, the US decision to place elements of its planned missile defense system in the Czech Republic and Poland has generated even more fierce opposition in Moscow than have plans for further expansion of NATO membership. At every stage in the emerging agreements between Washington and its Polish and Czech allies the Russians have threatened to respond—most recently with “military resources.” President Medvedev has emphasized that the Russian position on this issue has not shifted with the change in presidents by stating to a group of high-level Russian diplomats: “The deployment of elements of the US global missile defense system in Eastern Europe is only aggravating the situation. We will have to respond appropriately and our American and European partners have already been warned.” Western policy toward ex-Yugoslavia, in particular the widespread support for and recognition of the

new state of Kosovo, has also elicited serious Russian opposition and has, in effect, provided Russia with the justification for recognition of the independence of the secessionist regions that they have supported throughout the post-Soviet period—i.e., especially Abkhazia, South Ossetia and Transnistria. On the issue of Kosovo's independence the members of the EU and NATO have been far less divided than they have been on growing European energy dependence on Russia, NATO expansion, or US missile defense. Yet, even here important countries such as Spain, which faces domestic demands for independence, have taken a separate approach.

► The US decision to place elements of its planned missile defense system in the Czech Republic and Poland has generated even more fierce opposition in Moscow than have plans for further expansion of NATO membership.

► The “charm offensive” of President Medvedev has hardly resolved the outstanding issues between Russia and members of the EU.

Prospects for Future Relations

As should be clear at this point in the argument presented here, the European Union lacks a coherent policy in its relations with Russia. Moreover, because US policy toward the Russian Federation since the end of the cold war has been based, in part at least, on containing Moscow's influence, US policy impacts directly on the divisions within the European Union between those who recommend patience and caution in dealing with Russia, such as Germany, and those who focus on what they view as aggressive behavior toward neighboring states.

The EU-Russian summit held near Samara, Russia, in May 2007 proved to be a total failure, as both sides exchanged charges against one another. From then to mid-2008, however, the EU as an organization seemed to back off from its rather stronger approach to Russia. The mood of key European leaders at the June 2008 summit was much more upbeat, as they seemed willing to give new Russian President Medvedev the benefit of the doubt. Yet, the “charm offensive” of President Medvedev hardly resolved the outstanding issues between Russia and members of the EU—in particular the new members who view the Russian Federation through the lens of almost half a century of Soviet domination. Moreover, Russia and the EU have quite different conceptions of the nature of a new agreement to frame their relations. The European Union prefers an Agreement on Partnership and Cooperation that spells out in detail the terms of agreement across economic, energy, and political matters, while Russia proposes a much narrower framework agreement that relegates specifics to later follow-on agreements. Although the meeting in late June 2008 was much more cordial than that a year earlier, the central issues that divide the two persisted, such as the demands placed on Russia by the EU as a precondition for visa-free travel between Russia and the EU. When one adds these differences plus the continuing concerns of new EU member states, often supported by the United States, to the fact that any new agreement between the EU

and Russia requires the approval of all twenty-seven members, one can come to the conclusion that the road to a new Partnership and Cooperation Agreement will not be smooth and will depend on shifts in perception about longer-term Russian intentions among the new members of the European Union. Furthermore, the development of the Russian-EU relationship was interrupted by Moscow's invasion of Georgia. As a group, the EU members' reaction was moderate and measured, although the United States and the newer members of the organization pushed for more forceful retaliatory action. The EU called upon Russia to withdraw from Georgian territory and President Nicolas Sarkozy of France, in his role as head of the EU's rotating presidency, played a key role in negotiating that withdrawal and the agreements to replace Russian “peacekeepers” in Georgia proper with EU observers. The only “sanctions” imposed on Russia were an indefinite delay in discussing the nature of any future formal Russian-EU relationship. However, after months of domestic debate both Poland and the Czech Republic finalized agreements with the United States for the construction of radar and missile installations as part of the US anti-missile program and were among those calling for a forceful EU response to Russian actions.

The prospects for a rapid improvement in EU-Russian relations are not positive, given Russia's occupation of parts of Georgian territory, President Medvedev's claim that former Soviet space is an area of “privileged interest,” and, on the other side, the renewed insistence of the EU's newer members, supported by the United States, that Russia represents more a security threat than a solution to Europe's problems. Even in Europe the “new world order” touted in the early 1990s appears to have had a brief existence.

Roger E. Kanet is Professor of International Studies at the University of Miami, Emeritus Professor of Political Science at the University of Illinois, and an ACDIS Faculty Affiliate. He has edited or co-edited twenty-four books on Soviet and Russian foreign and security policy, American foreign policy, and global politics; contributed more than 200 articles and chapters to scholarly journals and books; and lectured widely in the United States, Europe, and Asia.

The Old Soviet Bloc: Whose New Europe?

by CAROL SKALNIK LEFF

With the collapse of communism, the “return to Europe”—a Europe of transnational institutions—was a clear priority for the former communist bloc states, anxious to exchange the security and political system of the East for the democratic capitalist security system of the West. In this objective, most of Eastern Europe had succeeded by 2008, joining the NATO and EU structures that embedded them in the network of Western institutions. Negotiations continued on the status of the Western Balkans. However, the geometry of power in the region was of course more complex than a simple change of alignment. Although the states of Eastern Europe arguably faced the most favorable security environment in their modern independent histories, the geopolitical position was still that of a border zone, marking the outer boundaries of both NATO and the European Union. Negotiating the new order continued to place the region between east and west, between Russia and the amalgam of western states with a far from coherent and uniform foreign policy orientation.

In this analysis, I will explore two ongoing episodes that epitomize the cross-regional tensions of the new order as it plays out in Eastern and Central Europe: the emergence of the independent state of Kosovo and the American pursuit of a missile shield program based in the Czech Republic and Poland. These cases differ in essential respects—Kosovo is first of all a problem internal to the region, and the missile shield is an external project—but what they have in common is that both are exercises in international problem solving on the part of the West from which Russia has felt largely excluded. Both therefore represent a culmination of a post-communist history in which Russia has felt systematically disregarded or rebuffed in its bid to play a central role in managing the post-cold war order. Each issue also reflects differences in the postures and priorities of Western actors. But the interlocking puzzle pieces nonetheless create a clearer picture of Russian security thinking and the ways in which Western actions have shaped Russian responses across a range of issues that at first sight do not appear directly related.

Before examining the two cases, it is useful to contextualize them as part of a pattern of accumulating Russian grievances, the most resonant of which deal with EU/NATO activities in Russia’s backyard, or its sphere of influence. From the Russian vantage point, Russia was being asked to countenance NATO expansion, even into former Soviet territory, the withdrawal of the United States from the ABM treaty,

the dismantling of the former Yugoslavia without reference to Serbian wishes and security concerns (and the lopsided attribution of blame for war crimes to the Serbian state), the bombing campaigns of 1995 and 1999 in Bosnia and Serbia respectively, and United States-led operations in Afghanistan and Iraq. Russian leaders have expressed increasing resentment at a unipolar world in which US unilateral action and its selective application of international law was either supported by EU states or fruitlessly opposed by them, and in which legitimate Russian security concerns, as well as its status as a serious global power, were consistently disregarded.

This perception of the Western posture has profoundly influenced post-communist foreign relations. Most recently, President Dmitry Medvedev’s presentation of Russia’s foreign policy objectives (the so-called Medvedev doctrine of September 2008) puts multipolarity in pride of place second only to observance of international law as a fundamental principle of Russian international relations. The fifth and final point claimed “regions in which Russia has privileged interests”—a territory defined in terms of “special historical relations” and clearly referring to the former Soviet Union in particular, but broadly enough defined to extend to Eastern Europe as well. As we will see, both these affirmative objectives, and the underlying reservations about Western projects that can be inferred from them, are interwoven in the Russian response to most key issues that have emerged in framing the post-cold war architecture.

The Missile Defense Shield: Whose Backyard?

As part of the broader program to provide a global missile defense shield against rogue states, the Bush administration courted the Czech and Polish governments to gain their agreement to host components of the shield project. The proposal was for a missile interceptor base in northern Poland and a missile-tracking radar base in the Brdy military district southwest of Prague in the Czech Republic (in Europe at large, upgraded radar bases in UK and Greenland are also in progress). Positioning the anti-missile defense project on Czech and Polish territory, it was argued, would help to block any missile threat from Iran. Pending full approval by the two countries and continued support by the Obama administration, the shield is scheduled for deployment in 2012.

Attempting to further one global objective, however, can jeopardize others, as the political fall-out from the missile shield controversy clearly shows. In the first place, the initiative was wildly unpopular with the Czech and Polish publics, who feared a range of consequences from damage to health to Russian over-reaction to the attraction of terrorist attention. Depending on the wording of the survey question, between 55 and 70 percent of the

► The states of Eastern Europe arguably face the most favorable security environment in their modern independent histories, but their geopolitical position is still that of a border zone marking the outer boundaries of NATO and the EU.

► The Medvedev doctrine puts multipolarity in pride of place second only to observance of international law as a fundamental principle of Russian international relations.

populations responded negatively to the proposal. The Czechs were particularly unhappy with the siting of a base in a military district formerly used by Soviet troops, and therefore emblematic of foreign occupation of Czech territory.

The Czech mobilization to challenge the radar base was particularly sustained; it involved widespread local referendums against the plan and an active “No to Bases” movement that repeatedly protested at the Brdy site and in major Czech cities. The condescending government stance—characterizing the radar base as a “technical matter” for parliament and not a cause offering the young something to rebel against—has trivialized the widely felt resistance. Interestingly, Poles and Czechs responded quite differently to the Russia-Georgia crisis in August 2008. Whereas Czech opposition to the radar base remained largely unchanged, Polish public opinion turned defiant, and 60 percent opposition to the missile shield emplacement turned to 60 percent support virtually overnight.

The early popular antagonism to the plan created a political dilemma for both governments, neither of which had strong parliamentary majorities. In the Czech case, indeed, the microscopic majority was attained only six months after an election that split the chamber down the middle and necessitated the wooing of opposition deputies to win an initial vote of confidence (it is now a minority government). In short, the American move traded off the missile shield plan against the political headaches of their NATO allies, without much attention to those consequences. Both governments have approved their respective projects, but each awaits the decision of the incoming Obama administration before submitting the agreements to what will certainly be nasty parliamentary ratification debates, especially in the Czech case, where it isn't clear that parliament will even approve. The Polish government now holds a commanding majority on the issue, in part thanks to Russian threats, but can expect resistance and demands for a referendum from the left opposition.

The West in general is divided on the issue as well, with the EU failing to take a supportive stand at the July 2008 summit; French President Nicolas Sarkozy, whose country held the EU presidency at the time, spoke after an EU-Russian meeting in November 2008 to argue that the missile shield does not advance security and only makes things more complicated.

A dead cat? • For Russia, the missile defense system has been exactly the nightmare evoked by the expansion of NATO into the former Soviet bloc: a buffer zone turned into a security threat. Russian protests greeted the first American overtures to Poland and the Czech Republic (and the US suggestion that Russian monitors might be present at the installation

sites in turn drew horrified responses from Poles and Czechs). As the negotiations reached fruition, Russia has responded on both military and diplomatic fronts, refusing to accept the American position that the East European components of the shield are only directed at Iran. Energy deliveries to Prague were mysteriously though briefly suspended immediately after the Czech signing of the radar agreement in July 2008. Russian NATO envoy Dmitry Rogovin was even more vehement following the Polish government's signature in August 2008: “Such action cannot go unpunished... The fact that this was signed in a period of very difficult crisis in the relations between Russia and the United States over the situation in Georgia shows that, of course, the missile defense system will be deployed not against Iran but against the strategic potential of Russia.” He added, “The Europeans have received a ‘dead cat’ from the Americans.”

More dramatically, Gen. Anatoly Nogovitsyn, deputy chief of staff of Russia's armed forces warned: “Poland, by deploying (the system) is exposing itself to a strike—100 percent.” The commander of the Russian strategic forces noted that both Polish and Czech facilities could be designated as ICBM targets. In November 2008, Russia specifically threatened to position missiles in Kaliningrad, directly adjoining the Polish missile shield. On November 26, 2008, Russia conducted another round of its test firing of the new RS-24 intercontinental ballistic missile, slated for deployment in late 2009 and engineered to “counter air defense systems like the controversial US missile shield.” Russian officials have described both of these moves as a response to the Bush administration program; they may also serve as bargaining chips, since Vladimir Putin has been explicit that the Kaliningrad plan in particular could be scrapped if Barack Obama drops the initiative in Central Europe.

Thus the extension of the controversial missile shield project, whether or not it could enhance security against hypothetical Iranian missiles, has raised new security issues in the European context, divided populations and alliances and provoked an aggressive Russian response.

Kosovo connection 1999–2008

If the missile shield controversy can be understood as the culmination of Russian concerns about the meaning of NATO expansion, then Kosovo can be seen as the touchstone of Russian objections to Western map-making through intervention. The Albanian enclave of Kosovo within Serbia was first to be projected as a flashpoint and virtually last to explode in the sequence of Yugoslav wars of succession of the 1990s. Embedded as autonomous territory within Serbia that Slobodan Milosevic summarily dissolved, Kosovo Albanian elites listened for

▶ Attempting to further one global objective can jeopardize others, as the political fall-out from the missile shield controversy clearly shows.

▶ Czech mobilization to challenge the radar base was particularly sustained, involving widespread local referendums against the plan and an active “No to Bases” movement.

▶ After the Russia-Georgia crisis, Polish public opinion turned from 60 percent opposition to the missile shield emplacement to 60 percent support virtually overnight.

years as Western leaders counseled patience. Tensions only accelerated after the 1995 Dayton agreement failed to address the Kosovo question, exploding in 1998 into massive Albanian refugee flows and a territorial crisis that international mediation efforts failed to resolve.

Although Russia had repeatedly protested Western decision-making during the successive Yugoslav crises, Kosovo was to become the centerpiece of Russian disavowal of Western projects and a fundamental reference point for Russian resentment of unilateral Western decision-making that paid lip service to a Russian partner without seriously attending to Russian concerns. The Clinton administration's orchestration of the 1999 NATO bombing campaign created conditions that effectively transferred Kosovo from Serbian administration to a UN mandate that the Russian government had to tolerate as a fait accompli. The whole process nonetheless met with Moscow's vigorous protests and its own independent diplomatic efforts to resolve the Kosovo dilemma. Despite Russian engagement in the peacekeeping and mediation process, Russian spokesmen continued to challenge the way western forces had both defined the issues surrounding Kosovo's status and set the acceptable parameters for agreement.

The highest pitch of outrage, of course, occurred after the breakdown of negotiations over Kosovo's fate in 2007 and general western recognition of the subsequent unilateral declaration of Kosovo's independence in February 2008. Russian politicians termed this response a violation of international law that detached territory from Serbia without its consent. More pungently, the Russian government decried a precedent that would generate "a storm of separatism" globally. The Kosovar independence declaration had explicitly disavowed any broader relevance for its own claim to statehood: "Kosovo is a special case arising from Yugoslavia's non-consensual breakup and is not a precedent for any other situation." However, neither the Russians nor other nervous multi-ethnic states found that proviso reassuring.

In fact, support for Kosovo's independence was not unanimous in Europe. Countries withholding recognition were those that faced their own politically relevant minorities: Bulgaria, Romania, and Spain. Greece also balked at anything that might set a precedent for Cyprus. Nonetheless, unlike the missile shield controversy, the EU in this case was an active player and a direct target of Russian criticism because of its projected position as coordinating power under the so-called "EULex" rule of law mission that was slated to operate under UN mandate in post-independence Kosovo. Insisting on a continuation of the UN-mandated UNMIK mission led by NATO, Russia blocked the EULex initiative, leaving the project in legal limbo for most of 2008. Some verbal

and organizational acrobatics have now generated a "reconfigured" program that includes US participation and a partial revision of the program itself.

The most consequential outgrowth of this dispute, however, did not relate to Kosovo itself, but rather in the Georgian-Russian confrontation over the status of the breakaway Georgian regions of South Ossetia and Abkhazia. Russian analysts had described acceptance of Kosovo's independence as a Western betrayal that freed Russia from constraints on its own policies within the former Soviet Union. Interviewed by the *Christian Science Monitor* on February 20, 2008, nationalist intellectual Alexander Dugin reflected widespread Russian opinion in saying: "The Kosovo situation shows us with complete clarity that the geopolitical interests of Russia and the West are in fundamental conflict...geopolitical interests now prevail. Any talk of morality is just a disguise." He prophetically argued, "Russia should regard this as an opportunity to enlarge its own zone of influence," by recognizing statelets like Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Indeed, the Russian Foreign Ministry had already issued a statement saying, "Proclamation and recognition of Kosovo's independence will certainly have to be considered in connection with the situation in Abkhazia and South Ossetia."

Hence Georgia's attempts to reassert control in South Ossetia in August 2008 triggered a Russian response that included vigorous military action and official recognition of both South Ossetian and Abkhazian independence, as was prefigured months earlier. Indeed, President Medvedev made the link very explicit in his announcement of Russian recognition in late August, saying that he felt "obliged to recognize South Ossetia and Abkhazia as other countries had done with Kosovo."

The Kosovo situation undoubtedly lacked a solution that could satisfy all parties. What is evident in this case, however, as in the case of the missile shield, is that the attempt to solve this problem had ricochet effects internationally that went well beyond the immediate geopolitical context and created tensions within and across alliance boundaries.

Lessons unlearned?

Let me now address the question that became a central part of the American debates surrounding both the missile shield project and the Kosovo precedent, particularly as it applies to Russian recognition of the Georgian secessionist regions. That is the question of whether Russian objections and actions have been based on security concerns sincerely harbored by the key Russian policy-makers, or are rather merely rhetorical devices to justify actions that suit Russian policy objectives of the moment. How artificial, in short, are the Russian responses to western actions in

► **The American move traded off the missile shield plan against the political headaches of their NATO allies, without much attention to those consequences.**


► **Kosovo can be seen as the touchstone of Russian objections to Western map-making through intervention.**

these cases? This is not a resolvable issue, but some points can be made.

First, the official US posture has generally been to discount the underlying concerns expressed by the Russian leadership as a misunderstanding of American policy motives. In fact, it might be well to recognize that although the classic cold war is over, we have not left behind a central feature of that period. That feature is the kind of elite mirror-imaging that focuses on the antagonists' actions in the context of their capabilities and fears the worst, while viewing one's own actions in the context of one's motivations and expecting those motivations to be accepted at face value. Hence in the case of the missile shield, and NATO expansion as a whole, the United States and some of its allies see a peace and stability project based on intentions, and Russia sees the capability of that project to turn against the Russian state. While individual responses may indeed be disingenuous, there is little doubt of the broader sense in which Russians have felt their security and significance erode over the past decade, and the resonance that Putin and now Medvedev find in taking stances that redress the balance. Western policy-makers have to take that context into account in actions that affect Russian perceptions of their strategic position.

The debate over the Kosovo precedent raises a second issue. Many pundits and public intellectuals in the United States scorned Russia's use of the Kosovo case to validate its own recognition of South Ossetia and Abkhazia. At the same time, one has to bear in mind that this kind of response—if not the specific instance—was both predictable and predicted in the aftermath of Western recognition of Kosovo. Many international voices depicted it as opening a “Pandora's box,” setting a “terrible” and “dangerous” precedent that was sure to backfire. In fact, what is at issue here is not Russian behavior or Western intentions, but a basic underlying contradiction that has been with us at least since World War I—the tension between the norms of state sovereignty and territorial integrity on the one hand, and national self-determination on the other. In a broader historical context, then, the collapse of communism ended a kind of international moratorium on new state creation since the end of decolonization. The three communist federations—Soviet, Yugoslav, and Czechoslovak—dissolved and it still isn't clear how far the ramifications of those dissolutions will extend.

Finally, if these case studies tell us anything, it is that individual policy decisions cannot be narrowly framed in terms of specific objectives and cordoned off from other international issues. That simply isn't possible. To make a single policy choice is to play a multi-dimensional game in which security choices designed to resolve one issue resonate through the entire web of international relationships.

 Carol Skalnik Leff is Associate Professor of Political Science at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. She received her PhD in Government from Harvard University and taught at Washington University before coming to the University of Illinois. Her primary research interests are in ethnic conflict in the former communist countries and Central European domestic and security politics. She has published two books and many articles on these topics. Her current research focuses on post-communist elite transformation and the politics of incorporating ethnic minorities into post-communist governance.

► We have not left behind the classic cold war elite mirror-imaging that focuses on the antagonists' capabilities and fears the worst, while expecting one's own motivations to be accepted at face value.

► At issue here is not Russian behavior or Western intentions, but the tension between the norms of state sovereignty and territorial integrity on the one hand, and national self-determination on the other.

Hollow Swords: Russia's Military Today—Implications for the US and Europe

by ROBERT B. BRANNON

There is a lot of talk these days about what the US and Europe should do about Russia—as if Russia were something we should actually do something about. There is too much hype on both sides of the argument—too much empty rhetoric on Russia's part and too much hand-wringing on the part of Europe and the United States about the possibilities that there could be a new “cold war.” The truth is there is no such thing—neither side wants a new confrontation of that kind—but we seem to have returned to a condition where each side refers to the other as if it were something with which to be coped.

America is embarking upon a new era in international relations and Russia will almost certainly play a significant role. Relations with Russia are currently set on a difficult course, one might even say the two sides are worlds apart. Well-known author and scholar at the Carnegie Moscow Center Dmitri Trenin recently described his country as a paradox, claiming that Russia feels itself to be in a state of profound geo-political solitude. Despite all of its efforts to be European—to be in the club—Russia still finds itself to be outside the mainstream. Most security organizations today are legacies of the cold war—Russia is by default either excluded or marginalized. If we fail to find common ground in the area of international security Russia will likely continue to take risks in ever greater efforts to achieve credibility—risks the West can ill afford to tolerate.

European security is oriented toward maximizing strengths and minimizing weaknesses—collective arrangements work best. Russian security is essentially security of the state and its markets. It is difficult to explain to Russia why so many European countries need collective security when there is no apparent contemporary state-centric threat. Although recent indications point toward a much more broad-based approach to Russia's national security strategy and foreign policy, nothing concrete has yet changed that perception. Europe and the United States are seemingly happy with their old alliances, arrangements that have served them well and have stood the test of time. Russia has no stake in this approach. Other than its permanent membership on the UN Security Council, the Soviet legacy does not grant Russia any advantages that might be seen as strong or influential. Surely there must be a new arrangement that would allow Russia to have a more equal role in international security affairs, without giving it a veto over the security interests of other states.

While it may be accurate to say, as is currently popular, that “Russia is back,” it is also useful, and probably more accurate, to consider Russia's new and aggressive foreign and security policies in light of what it has and what it can really do. This article is about Russia's military instrument of power. It examines civil-military relations from the standpoint of capabilities and intent—how it is used in support of foreign policy and security.

Civil-Military Relations and Military Opportunism in Russia

Shortly before the Soviet Union collapsed, in August 1991, the Russian military was complicit in an attempt to seize power while then President Mikhail Gorbachev was away. The attempt failed. While I do not contend that the army in Russia has an inclination to take power in a coup, I am suggesting that there is a pattern of evidence that civilians may not be able to exercise full authority over the military; and that bad things in Russia often happen in August.

Last summer, in August 2008, the Russian Army deployed troops and equipment, mostly tanks and armored personnel carriers, to its southern flank on the border with Georgia, immediately adjacent to the region known as South Ossetia (North Ossetia is actually inside the Russian Federation). At the conclusion of the exercises, most of the force did not redeploy to its home base, as is usually the case in such maneuvers. Instead, troops and supplies remained stationed—provocatively—on the border. Weeks later, when Georgia acted (perhaps rashly) to defend its sovereignty against increasingly aggressive Russian peacekeepers inside South Ossetia (part of Georgia), these troops moved into positions inside Georgian territory via the two and one half mile long Roki Tunnel. There is also additional evidence that the Russian military acted on its own to set the stage for war.

In the weeks that followed the world watched in horror as Russian tanks and armored personnel carriers brought troops and various other heavily armed forces deep inside Georgian territory in a well orchestrated military operation. Casualties on both sides mounted quickly. Shortly after the initial actions in South Ossetia Russia intervened further, into Abkhazia, another of Georgia's regions with a majority population of ethnic Russians. Claiming its actions were entirely supportable in defense of its own citizens, Russia quickly consolidated its positions and recognized the two breakaway regions as independent states.

It is tempting to conclude that, once again, Russia's military may have acted on its own, perhaps in support of perceived foreign policy objectives. Although it is certainly too soon to form any conclusions about this case, there is little doubt that

► Most security organizations today are legacies of the cold war—Russia is by default either excluded or marginalized.

► It is difficult to explain to Russia why so many European countries need collective security when there is no apparent contemporary state-centric threat.

civilians in authority over the military were eventually in control of the major events associated with the campaign. It is not clear, however, whether the pre-invasion moves represented military initiative, adventurism, or perhaps opportunism.

The question of military opportunism, especially in the context of pre-invasion provocations, looms large. There is mounting evidence that Russia had a military presence inside Georgia before the early morning invasion took place on August 7. It would have been difficult if not impossible to mount such a complex force in such a short period of time without considerable effort and a good deal of luck.

This kind of opportunism is not without precedent. In the summer of 1999 two incidents demonstrate the same point. In June Russian military forces entered and occupied the airport at Pristina in Kosovo, almost setting off armed conflict with NATO forces also deployed in the region. Later that summer, in August, in the Northern Caucasus, the Russian military acted on its own to prepare the battle space for the events that followed, making it easy for politicians to choose war for the second time in Chechnya. The following year, also in August, the submarine *Kursk* sank in the Barents Sea taking the lives of all 118 men on board. Throughout this tragedy the navy consistently lied to the president about conditions at the scene and the prospects for recovery. The navy had been trying to stage a successful torpedo shot to demonstrate its preparedness and expertise. What happened was a classic case of doing more with less—use of inferior and obsolete equipment under dangerous conditions doomed the effort and proved to the new president that his military had serious problems.

As was the case when General Viktor Zavarzin took the initiative to enter and occupy the airport at Pristina in Kosovo ahead of NATO troops in June 1999, while Boris Yeltsin's authority waned in favor of his heir apparent Vladimir Putin, the military may have perceived gaps in civilian authority as the transition of presidential power shifted from Putin to Dmitri Medvedev in 2008. Circumstances of Medvedev's election to the presidency by way of uncontested presidential nomination—essentially unopposed candidacy—and Putin's subsequent announcement that he would remain in government as the prime minister, gave rise to questions in military circles about who was really in charge. Although the balance of presidential power in these two cases seems to be in opposite directions, weak to strong in 1999, strong to weak in 2008, perceived uncertainty of the political transition remains plausible.

Civilian authorities might have found it hard to resist the chance to take advantage of the situation created by the military acting on its own. As the military shaped the political environment on its own

initiative, the Kremlin may have simply acquiesced, following through with policy after the fact. If true, then the case of Georgia could be for Medvedev what the *Kursk* submarine tragedy was for Putin in 2000, a sea change that ultimately helped him to see what the military was really doing—lying, cheating, and stealing. Putin's conception of military reform differed sharply from that of Yeltsin, whose half-hearted reform attempts were aimed at slimming down the military without transforming it. Putin always regarded the armed forces as not only vital guarantors of state security, but also symbols of the revival of a strong Russia.

Russia's Contemporary Military Capabilities

The raw capabilities of Russia's military instrument of power have degraded so severely that there is little real force to support the new security policies aimed at balancing Europe and countering the United States. On May 9 last year, Russia's brand new president, Dmitri Medvedev, said, "The Russian military is rising in strength, like all of Russia." I take him seriously, but I believe it will be a very long time before we see anything substantively new paraded on Victory Day in Moscow. Soaring rhetoric notwithstanding, Russia's military plans are a long way from sounding credible to anyone who has ever seen them up close. In a recent (2008) Center for Naval Analyses publication, Dmitry Gorenburg, Henry Gaffney, and Ken Gause have expertly documented the appalling state of the Russian Navy's current order of battle. As a former US Naval Attaché in Russia, I can attest personally to the credibility of their findings.

The last time I saw Russia's only aircraft carrier, *Kuznetsov*, the ship was in port near Murmansk with her boilers pier-side for extensive repairs (visibly rusting in the snow and ice). There were weeds growing in her flight deck. The fact that she was recently underway, something Russia has been bragging about, is a marvelous feat of naval engineering—and probably a nightmare for her crew. If recent announcements are to be believed, Russia aspires to a fleet of 5-6 (deployable) aircraft carrier battle groups in a complete "modernization" of the Russian navy by the year 2016. This is an outrageous thing to say. The shipyards that build and maintain these ships have long since fallen into utter disrepair—in many cases so badly that they could not, in my opinion, be reconstituted without considerable expense and expertise. In my view, Russia is a generation away from building enough ships to create even one of these battle groups.

As for long range bombers deploying to the western hemisphere—the numbers are small—two to be exact. Russia has only managed to build a few new Blackjack bombers, TU-160s, in the last several years. Most of the planes in Russia's air force are Soviet era.

► There is mounting evidence that Russia had a military presence inside Georgia before the early morning invasion took place on August 7.

► The case of Georgia could be for Medvedev what the *Kursk* submarine tragedy was for Putin in 2000, a sea change that ultimately helped him to see what the military was really doing—lying, cheating, and stealing.

▶ **Putin always regarded the armed forces as not only vital guarantors of state security, but also symbols of the revival of a strong Russia.**

▶ **Russia's security sector is so riddled with problems related to its failure to implement reforms that its ability to secure the country's defense is actually questionable.**

They have not been properly maintained since the fall of the Soviet Union and they are in poor condition now. Spare parts are difficult to find and new equipment is simply not available. More than half of the aircraft in Russia's air force are simply not operational—at all. The other half are probably risky to fly. I would certainly not want to fly one to Venezuela.

The submarine fleet is still credible, as the strategic elements of military power were maintained in good condition even as the rest of the military was allowed to decay. For years the only military personnel who were paid any salary at all were the submarine fleet sailors—beginning with the ballistic missile subs, but including those assigned to attack units as well. Still, as the *Kursk* tragedy in August 2000 highlighted, Russia's submarines eventually met the same fate as everything else in the military.¹ Despite building one new submarine, the Borey class *Yuri Dolgoruki*, there has been almost no new technology, no new research and development, for a very long time. The keel for this single new construction submarine was laid in 1996. Twelve years in the making, there is still no ballistic missile ready to go that fits this submarine's design. The new tests of the Bulava-M missile are credible, however, but it was not designed for the new class of SSBN. The new boat would have to be redesigned—cut in half and put back together—to accommodate Russia's only new long-range strategic missile.

As a human footnote to this tragic state of affairs, many, indeed if not most, of the scientists and technicians who developed what was once a mighty force have long since died, left, or grown poor and moved on to other fields of work. There is not much incentive today for young people to pursue careers in the defense industry. The truth is that Russia's security sector is so riddled with problems related to its failure to implement reforms that its ability to secure the country's defense is actually questionable. Worse, the

¹ In November 2008, an Akula II class attack submarine (K-152 Nerpa) experienced a severe casualty during Pacific Fleet sea trials, resulting in more than 20 dead and an equal number injured. The Russian press reported the incident widely, calling the submarine a new design equipped with the most modern technology, attributing the accident to human error involving a fire extinguisher system. In fact, this sub was initially built in 1991 at a shipyard on the Amur River in the Russian Far East. Construction was eventually halted, as was the case for almost every other military project at that time. There is no new technology in the design, and sea trials were more likely wishful thinking aimed at proving the submarine's utility and future marketability. Reportedly, the unit was earmarked for lease to India, a notion that has subsequently been scrapped. Since then, the Russian Navy has announced the sub will be commissioned and placed into fleet service. This decision is probably hazardous business for a fleet already severely at risk.

military's most senior leaders have a demonstrated track record of blocking reform and stifling civilian control.

While it is certainly possible that this could change, especially with potentially tremendous revenues from oil and gas, in an atmosphere almost literally fueled by political rhetoric designed to motivate a nation in its desire to return to "greatness," it will still be quite difficult to do and it will take a very long time. Although the current and ongoing global economic crisis has had and will continue to have a significant negative impact on Russia's economy, this condition is not permanent and petroleum based income will almost certainly return to record levels at some point.

Medvedev represents a policy of continuity with the Putin regime, a conclusion that is perhaps most evident by Putin's installation as prime minister on the day after the new president's inauguration. Of course it is too soon to know if his policies will be very new or different with regard to military reforms. There have, however, been several indications of change. Last summer Medvedev fired General Yuri Baluyevskiy, Chief of the General Staff. This is certainly not the first example of a defense minister sacking a chief of the general staff, nor is it even particularly unusual, but in this case the move was based on military reform—or rather by its very poor progress.

With the appointment of a little-known civilian, Anatoly Serdyukov, as minister of defense last year, emphasis shifted away from simply acquiring greater budgets and spending the money on big headline-grabbing projects toward more effective management of the process itself. A tough financial manager whose background was in the tax police, Serdyukov has sought to minimize the wastage, embezzlement and inefficiency which were holding back reform. Serdyukov is bitterly disliked by senior military leaders. Speaking to journalists in a Moscow press conference, retired General Leonid Ivashov, a hard-line conservative who remains influential as a defense intellectual and advisor to the government, commented on Serdyukov's appointment: "until recently the army was in shock, now it is in mourning."

Serdyukov has proved surprisingly effective, but at the same time has not yet sought to address the basic doctrinal dilemma, that Russia's armed forces remain first and foremost built around the needs of projecting great power status worldwide and fighting wars unlikely ever to happen. Serdyukov and Baluyevskiy fought over several specific areas—all directly related to reform initiatives:

- Civilians assigned to implement reforms from inside the general staff—a move seen as a direct challenge to the authority of senior military leaders

- Shifting military infrastructure—in particular an unpopular proposal to relocate the navy’s headquarters command from Moscow to St. Petersburg
- Replacing a number of military positions with civilians in professional jobs such as doctors, lawyers, judges, and journalists

But in the end, in each of these recent cases, the civilian minister of defense came out on top, and that is one significant measure of success in the field of defense reform. Respected independent military affairs journalist and author Alexander Golts gets it exactly right in his remarks carried by Moscow newspaper *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* last year: “absent real change in the mentality of Russia’s general officers we can expect little change in the way of meaningful military reform. Money is not the problem. However, Russia is spending it like it was 20 years ago. We need to change the mentality of Russia’s top brass. Otherwise, the Russian Army will remain the Red Army.”

The Transatlantic Alliance and Russia’s New Strategic Vision

Strategy of course rides on the back of resources. Europe’s willingness to use its military instrument of power may be perceived as less than robust but no one questions the strength of the transatlantic alliance, it is solid and Russia knows this. Of course both sides have challenges. Europe is dealing with a new American presidential administration, one with many of the same security goals as has been the case, thus forcing Europe to make tough choices about security priorities. Russia’s military force is still in a general state of decay, but the state is apparently not reluctant to demonstrate the utility of its military instrument in support of foreign policy. Demographic factors pose a significant challenge to Russian planners. Whether or not there will be sufficient manpower to back up the new strategic vision is a real question and there is considerable reason to doubt.

Now Russia is hailing the potential advantages of a new international security alliance—one that would stretch from “Vancouver to Vladivostok.” Sweeping in its prose, but severely lacking in credibility, the proposal calls for a new organization that would eventually replace the old order. What Russia wants is a new transatlantic-Eurasian alliance in which it has the same rights and benefits as every other member. Russia believes the old order is dying out, that Europe and the United States are becoming increasingly overwhelmed with problems and less capable of finding ways to cope inside the context of the current international security architecture.

Many security experts in Russia believe the transatlantic alliance is splitting apart and becoming ever thinner and less coherent, especially in the case of NATO as a security entity. This sour perception is

not the least of the problems in Russia’s relations with the “old” West. Impediments to Russia’s relationship with Europe and America are almost too numerous to list, but none is more visceral than missile defense. Russia’s response to US plans to deploy missile defense sites in Europe, in countries that used to be Russia’s allies but are now seen as enemies, has been consistently negative. According to recent statements by numerous general officers, presumably speaking with the authority of the Ministry of Defense, Russia is developing new missiles to “eliminate the threat of missile defense.” Arguments that European and American interests require defense against potential threats from rogue states such as Iran have not managed to influence Russia’s point of view that these missile defense sites really are defensive.

The military in Russia is old and ill equipped—soldiers are poorly trained and leadership is incompetent. One of Russia’s most well known and highly regarded security experts, Alexei Arbatov, currently at the Moscow Carnegie Center and formerly a Deputy on the Defense Committee of the State Duma, speaking recently about the performance of the Russian Army in the August war with Georgia, said: “there is no political leadership over military organization, nor is there any democratic control.” It takes a long time and considerable planning to stage a military operation of the scope and scale Russia deployed through the Roki Tunnel into Georgia on August 7th, not a matter of hours in response to Georgia’s rash attacks on Russian peacekeepers as the government claims. Regardless of whether evidence that the war was planned well in advance of any provocation is credible or not, it is difficult to rule out the compelling possibility that the military acted on its own. Perceiving political uncertainty—Putin was in Beijing at the Olympics while Medvedev was on a Volga River cruise—the military responded to what it called a self-defense situation. This has happened before and, until something changes in the way Russia practices civilian control over the military, it will happen again.

Thomas Gomart of the French Institute for International Relations (IFRI) sums up the situation with three conclusions published recently (July 2008) by the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS): first, Russia is returning to global politics and to the global economy; second, Atlanticism is over and Russia intends to equal the US and EU as a global player; and third, Russia wants to establish new international consortiums, especially in the field of energy.

By some measures Russia is a serious contender in the realm of international security, by others it is merely a faded memory of its former state. Russia is not a super-power, quite the contrary. Russia is by no measure the equal of the United States or of Europe. It will be a generation before Russia’s

▶ Defense minister Anatoly Serdyukov has sought to minimize the wastage, embezzlement and inefficiency which were holding back reform.

▶ Russia’s armed forces remain first and foremost built around the needs of projecting great power status worldwide and fighting wars unlikely ever to happen.

▶ What Russia wants is a new transatlantic-Eurasian alliance in which it has the same rights and benefits as every other member.

military instrument of power is capable of backing up its foreign and security policy aspirations. Russia is not a world power with “global interests and global reach,” as is the case with the United States. It is, however, entirely capable, and apparently willing, to exercise considerable military pressure in the region it has begun calling its privileged sphere of interest, formerly known as the near abroad. There will be more trouble in Russia’s back yard—and it is a really big back yard. But Russia has one valid point that the West must consider carefully: current international security organizations fall short of providing an adequate forum for debate and cooperation. Russia intends to balance American and European power in every way it can—and energy may be the new cold war.

▶ Although not a world power with “global interests and global reach,” Russia is entirely capable, and apparently willing, to exercise considerable military pressure in the region it has begun calling its privileged sphere of interest.

■

Robert B. Brannon, PhD is Professor of International Security and former Director of the Program in Advanced Security Studies at the George C. Marshall European Center for International and Security Studies in Garmisch-Partenkirchen, Germany. He is the author of a new book, Russian Civil-Military Relations, published by Ashgate, London, scheduled for release in March 2009. The views expressed in this work are his own and do not represent those of the Marshall Center, the US Department of Defense, nor any other agency of the US government.

University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign
Program in Arms Control, Disarmament, and
International Security
359 Armory Building
505 East Armory Avenue
Champaign, IL 61820